

**Christmas Cacti: What Should We Do With Them?**  
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I remember many years ago my grandmother telling me about a Christmas cactus that she had since before my father was born. It had only bloomed the year he was born after that it would not bloom. If only I knew then what I know now, her cactus might have bloomed again if I had. Luckily you have the chance to keep your holiday cactuses blooming year after year.

Holiday cacti (Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter) are not that difficult to care for. While blooming keep them in bright, indirect light. 70 degree F daytime and 60 - 65 degrees at night will keep them very happy. Water them thoroughly letting the plant dry slightly between waterings. Holiday cacti are not really a cactus at all and therefore are not as drought tolerant as the name implies. Do not let the plant dry out too much during flowering, as buds will be lost.

Use a well-drained soil and fertilize monthly between April and October using a complete household fertilizer. These plants can be pruned in July to encourage branching and flower quantity. Pruning can be done by pinching off sections of stems, which can be stuck into moist vermiculite to propagate additional plants to share with friends and relatives.

Making these plants flower year after year requires a little more special care. Christmas cacti are short day plants. This term suggests that the day should be short however; the length of the night is the critical factor. Holiday cacti require a night (of complete darkness) that lasts 15 hours long. In addition to hours of darkness the night temperature is very important. Night temperature should not exceed 70 degrees F, with 50 – 55 degrees being optimal. Some plants may bloom with only one of these factors but giving both of them will ensure plenty of flowers by Christmas or Thanksgiving.

Placing your plant outside during the summer in a shady spot works well for general care and may even give the light requirement for blooming. However, these plants will bloom around Thanksgiving time and be finished by Christmas. They can be left outside as long as the night temperature does not fall below 45 degrees.

Holiday cacti will drop unopened flower buds if too many buds are present, the soil dries out too much, or a sudden change in temperature or light is experienced. Even a short interruption of the night length or temperature can cause flowers to abort. Streetlights, car lights, or indoor lighting can disrupt the darkness sufficiently to stop flower formation.

If you have additional questions about holiday cacti or other horticultural plants you can call me at 605-394-2188 or email to [ricky.abrahamson@sdsu.edu](mailto:ricky.abrahamson@sdsu.edu). Be sure to check out our website at <http://www.co.pennington.sd.us/extension/extsvc.html> for other extension information.