

CHRISTMAS CACTUS

Schlumbergera

Zones: 11 and above, not hardy

Every holiday season we see the Thanksgiving and Christmas cactus being sold as gifts. These are in the cacti/succulent family, but are epiphyte, which means they grow on something else, like trees. Though two slightly different cultivars, *Schlumbergera Truncata* (Thanksgiving) and *Schlumbergera Bridgesii* (Christmas) are both popular and come in beautiful colors of red, rose, purple, peach, cream or white. They have long arching segments called Phylloclads (stem segments) on which the flowers bloom. Native to Brazil, these plants do not tolerate frost and need to be inside during cold weather. They are typically grown in light shade, but can tolerate full sun in the winter months. In the summer, full sun can bleach out or burn the leaves. Let plants almost dry out between watering; do not soak or let them become water logged. Fertilize in late winter/early spring when new growth starts, and apply half strength during the summer months. *Schlumbergera* like a potting soil with good drainage and 20% -40% perlite. They are easily propagated by stem cuttings. Put 5 cuttings to a 6" pot and cover with a plastic bag to make a mini greenhouse; do not overwater. I have had good luck with the Christmas cactus in the past as a house plant that summers on the shady part of my deck.