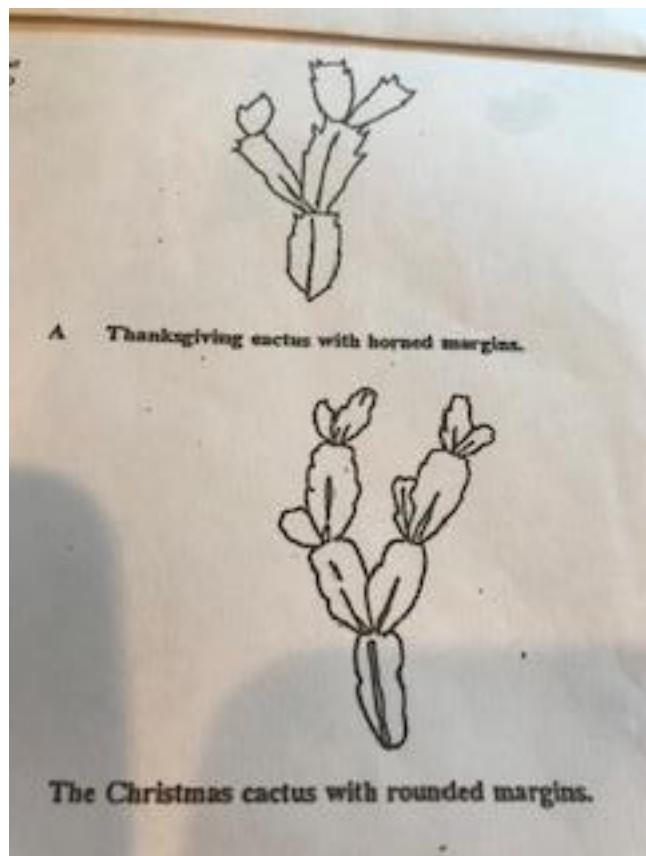


How can I make my Christmas Cactus that I received last year bloom again?

There are actually two kinds of “Christmas Cactus” on the market today. The most common one is *Schlumbergera truncata*, the Thanksgiving or Crab Cactus. It flowers over an extended period from late October through December. The leaf segments end with a crab-like appearance or similar to two horns. Many colors are available ranging from white, pink, red, and orange red. With the hybridization, this variety is easier to bring into bloom.

However, the true Christmas cactus, *Schlumbergera bridgesii*, is an old-fashioned plant which many a grandmother has been growing on the front porch for years. It has rounded leaf segments and nearly regularly flowers each season and they are mostly red or pink. It does bloom around Christmas but is not nearly as reliable a bloomer as the Thanksgiving Cactus. Most growers prefer the latter one for that reason.



The key to getting these cacti to bloom during the holiday season is proper light exposure, correct temperatures and limited watering. They need temperatures to drop to 50-60 degrees F, and they need a dark period of at least 12 hours per day. Watering also needs to be reduced! Given these requirements, it is difficult to achieve the above conditions inside of the home. The easiest way to achieve these conditions in Oklahoma is to have the plant outside in September or October in a protected area that receives no artificial light for at least 8-10 days. Judge the outside temperature since it needs to be in the 50 to 60-degree range. Be sure to protect it from a severe temperature drop - nothing lower than 50 degrees F.

Watch for bud formation and, once you see it, you may bring it indoors and place it in a well-lit area. Once inside, provide humidity by misting or saucers filled with pebbles and water. After this move, leave it be! Once the bloom period is over, let the cactus rest for several months and reduce the watering until spring. At that time, treat it as a house plant - fertilize it and increase the watering. These cacti prefer to be root-bound but, if they get too large, you can transplant them to a slightly larger pot. In the late spring after the danger of frost is past, you can move them outside to a protected shady area and start the process all over again in the Fall to encourage bloom.

Remember that these plants are epiphytes and considered forest cacti, so they need conditions that correspond to that environment. They are not desert cacti and are better treated like your typical indoor houseplants.

Additional Resources:

[Michigan State Extension fact sheet – Christmas Cactus](#)

[OSU HLA 6411: Houseplants](#)