



Forest cacti

BOTANICAL AND COMMON NAMES

Schlumbergera truncata (shlum-BER-ger-uh) (Thanksgiving cactus), *Schlumbergera x buckleyi* and *S. bridgesii* (Christmas cactus), *Hatiora gaertneri* (HAT-ee-or-ah), syn. *Rhipsalidopsis* (Easter cactus); all are also known as holiday cacti and are "forest-type" cacti rather than "desert type."

DESCRIPTION

Holiday cacti are popular for their profuse, colorful flowers. They have flattened, succulent stem joints that form arching branches. Their tubular, papery florets bloom at the end of the stem sections. Holiday cacti are "epiphytic," or air, plants; they grow on other plants or on elevated supports, obtaining water and nutrients from the air through a spongy covering on their roots.

COLORS

Originally, these plants produced cherry-red blossoms. Today, holiday cacti are available in hues of pink, red, white, orange and lavender.

CONSUMER LIFE

Holiday cacti remain in flower for three to five weeks depending on interior environment and care. Each floret will last several days and can be removed when it fades. These plants will survive lack of care in the home or workplace and still produce flowers yearly.

quality checklist

BLOOMS Choose and sell these plants when the buds are set and opening.

PLANTS Check for any signs of rot, bruising, wilt or breakage.



SCHLUMBERGERA X BUCKLEYI (CHRISTMAS CACTUS)

Photo courtesy of Bay City Flower Co., Inc.

fun facts

MEANING The genus "*Schlumbergera*" is named for Frédéric Schlumberger, a French cactus collector from the 19th century.

FAMILY Holiday cacti are members of the Cactaceae family. Other family members include prickly pear (*Opuntia*) and night-blooming *Cereus*.

ORIGINS These cacti are native to the rain forests of South America, mostly in Brazil.



varieties

The major types of holiday cacti are:

THANKSGIVING CACTI (*Schlumbergera truncata*) They have stem segments with toothed or jagged edges. The flowers appear earlier under natural light conditions than those on Christmas cacti. They usually have bright orange or red blossoms. They are night-blooming species, flowering when the days are short and nights are long.

CHRISTMAS CACTI (*Schlumbergera x buckleyi*, *S. bridgesii*) These plants have small, smooth-edged stem sections and are usually bright pink, white or red in color. Like Thanksgiving cacti, they are night blooming.

EASTER CACTI (*Hatiora gaertneri*, syn. *Rhipsalidopsis*) The flowers of these day-blooming plants appear at the stem joints and at the ends of the stems. They require the same conditions as other holiday cacti. They generally rest from December through late March and bloom from early April until late May. They are popular for the spring holidays. Their colors are usually light pink, white and lavender.

availability

Holiday cacti are brought into bloom and marketed mostly in the fall winter and spring during the appropriate holiday.

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RIGHT: HATORA GAERTNERI (EASTER CACTUS)

Photo courtesy of Bay City Flower Co., Inc.

challenges

ETHYLENE SENSITIVITY Holiday cacti are sensitive to ethylene. Check with your suppliers to make sure your plants have been treated with an ethylene inhibitor at the grower level or during transportation.

PESTS Mealy bugs and scales are the most common problems with these plants. They usually can be controlled by washing them off or by swabbing the plants with a cotton applicator dipped in alcohol.

BLOOMS Plants may drop buds if environmental conditions fluctuate rapidly, if it's too hot or if the humidity is too low.

DISEASES Root rot due to overwatering is the biggest disease problem.

Some information provided by:

San Diego Epiphyllum Society, www.epiphyllum.com
 The Chain of Life Network®, www.chainoflifenet.org
 Dave's Garden, www.davesgarden.com
 The Photographic Encyclopedia of Indoor Plants,
 by David Squire
 SAF's Flower & Plant Care manual

Reach "Blooming Plant of the Month" writer Steven W. Brown, AIFD, at sbfloral@aol.com or (415) 239-3140.



CHRISTMAS CACTUS

Photo courtesy of Bay City Flower Co., Inc.

in-store and consumer care tips

LIGHT These cacti need bright but filtered light. Sunburn may result if they are in direct sunlight.

WATER Check the pots frequently, and water to keep the soil moist at all times. Avoid standing water or overwatering.

TEMPERATURE Provide a cool location away from direct sunshine or heating ducts. Store and display holiday cacti at temperatures that do not fall below 55 F. Make sure the plants have a nighttime temperature no lower than 45 F to 50 F.

HUMIDITY Holiday cacti like moderate humidity best but will tolerate lower levels of humidity. Misting these cacti may be beneficial in the home. However, low humidity and too much water can stimulate root rot.

FERTILIZER Fertilize these cacti once a month during the growing season with a well-balanced liquid fertilizer. (There are cactus fertilizers available.) Stop fertilizing when buds set and are developing.

SOIL Use a soil mix that is light and drains easily. Plants like to be root bound before flowering.

REBLOOMING Holiday cacti can be reflowered by adjusting their nighttime temperatures and the amount

of light and water they receive. If the plants are grown under artificial light, make sure they are kept in darkness for at least 12 hours each day during the fall. Keep nighttime temperatures at 50 F to 55 F. Temperatures above this range may result in growth but no flowers.

Once the buds set, night temperatures of 60 F to 70 F are ideal. To encourage flowering, use an application of low-nitrogen fertilizer once at the end of the plants' resting period.

PROPAGATION Stem section cuttings are the best method of propagation. Take the ends of stem cuttings with one to four segments. Let the cuttings dry for 12 to 24 hours. Plant in soil. The temperature should be at least 65 F to 70

F. The rooting process takes two to three weeks. At that time, they can be trimmed to two segments to encourage branching. **sfr**