

How to Care for Holiday Plants

BARTOW -- October is a critical month for holiday plants such as the Christmas cactus, poinsettias and kalanchoes. Around mid-October the days become short enough to trigger the flowering process. At this point in the fall, these holiday plants should receive no nighttime light and they should not receive any pruning because developing flower buds may be removed.

Many gardeners have holiday cacti that have been in the family for many years. Some have been traded from friend to friend or have been passed down from generation to generation. They are called a Thanksgiving cactus if they bloom during Thanksgiving and a Christmas cactus when they flower in December.

Your Christmas cactus plants should be developing small, greenish swelling buds at the end of the stems. They are small and bead-like at first, but quickly enlarge and become pointed as they develop color. If you don't see buds by early November, your holiday cactus may be getting nighttime light.

Care for your holiday plants by watering when the soil surface is dry to the touch. Fertilize Christmas cacti monthly with a soluble fertilizer such as Miracle-Gro from March through September. Fertilize pot-grown poinsettias and kalanchoes every other week. Do not fertilize the plants during the fall and winter months. Keep poinsettias in the full sun. Kalanchoes and Christmas cacti should be kept in light shade. Keep the blooming plants away from heat sources and breezes, which will dry out the flowers. Pick off declining blooms as needed.

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