
Holiday Cactus-There are different ones

I've had a holiday cactus for over 10 years and always referred to it fondly as my Christmas Cactus that likes to bloom for Halloween. Well, turns out there is a reason that happens. Its really a Thanksgiving Cactus.



This year my cactus is amazing with lots of healthy blooms. After a couple of dismal years, I was almost thinking of getting rid of it late this summer. But instead I cut out dead stems and put some new succulent soil in the pot. I also started watering it more. And now I am reaping the benefits of a little loving care.

As I was admiring the blooms, I remembered there had been an article about Holiday Cactus in "The Gardener for Canadian Climates", a magazine that I subscribe to. The article is written by Evelyn Lundeen and is in the Winter 2021 issue. I am going to summarize some of the highlights of the article for you.



Holiday cactus are a hybridization of the Brazilian forest cactus, which grows in the coastal mountains of south-eastern Brazil. There are 3 varieties of Holiday Cactus that we enjoy: Thanksgiving cactus, Christmas Cactus and Easter cactus. You can tell the difference in 3 ways: bloom period, the shape of leaves (which are actually flattened stems and appearance of the flowers.

From the article, I learned that I was letting my Thanksgiving cactus get too dry. They are not desert plants and the soil should be kept fairly moist. But don't over water as they have a minimal root system and can rot. Keep them away from both heating vents and places where they will be in a draft. They can live outside in the summer but avoid direct sunlight.

Do not fertilize during the bloom period. In fact, for thanksgiving and Christmas cactus, stop fertilizing at the end of August. The author recommends fertilizing with a half strength 20-20-20 once a month. I've been using Schultz Cactus liquid plant food, which is 2-7-7, so I may consider changing that.

Repotting should only take place after the bloom period is over or better yet, in early spring. They should only need repotting every 3-5 years and choose a pot that is only slightly bigger.

Ms Lundeen states that holiday cacti are unfairly labeled as temperamental but if cared for properly will live for MANY MANY years. There is a picture of one in the article that is 45 years old. I haven't been the best caretaker of my plant but it is well over 10 years old. I plan to change a few things in hopes that I'll enjoy great blooms every year.

I highly suggest you consider subscribing to this magazine. Their website is www.gardnermagazine.ca The same issue has a great article about Bromeliads. I would love to collect some of them but have limited indoor plant space so I'll stick to holiday cactus. My mission is to get a true Christmas Cactus and an Easter cactus.

UPDATE as of December 2025

Good thing I reread my own article as I realize I never changed my fertilizer and I probably still let it get too dry sometimes. I have since collected an Easter cactus (picture included and note the rounded "leaves"). I obtained it in 2022 as a very tiny baby from someone who had started it from seed. Its grown very nicely and bloomed last spring.

I think I have a lead on getting a Christmas cactus next week. Fingers crossed.

Two years ago, we visited my husband's sister in Texas and she was insistent I take a piece of her pink Thanksgiving cactus. I brought it back home in a damp paper towel and it survived and has grown nicely. My sister-in-law passed away this Oct and when we returned home from Texas, that plant was blooming. What a nice reminder to have of her for now and in the future.

And on a final note, I still recommend you subscribe to "The Gardener for Canadian Climates" This winter issue has an article on The Joys of Growing Anthuriums. I may just have to buy a bigger house for more house plants.

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