

Tips on Feeding Your Christmas Cactus

Sheri Bethard – Certified Texas Master Gardener, Orange County Master Gardeners

If you are like me, then you may have a Thanksgiving, Christmas or Easter Cactus that bloomed beautifully in the past, but you are having a hard time getting the plant to bloom again. I love the way this plant looks when it blooms, and it is an amazing centerpiece that will brighten up your table for guests to see during the holidays.

Getting your cactus to bloom during Thanksgiving, Christmas or Easter can be tricky, but if you feed it just right, you will be glad that you took the extra time to figure out the idiosyncrasies of this unique plant.

How to Feed a Christmas Cactus

To start, the plants thrive in indirect sunlight and well-drained soil, so make sure that you have a good spot for the plant to grow. The feeding season of the cactus is the same as the growing season. For your Christmas Cactus, this means that it will need to be fed right before it blooms, which should be about from April to October of the year. With the right fertilizer and a proper feeding schedule, you should have bright blooms just in time for Christmas. For the other two, start feeding Thanksgiving Cactus March to September and Easter Cactus in the July/August time frame depending on when Easter falls.

These plants will bud during the cooler days of fall when the light is shorter because it needs 12 hours of light and 12 hours of darkness. When you are fertilizing this plant, you will either want a bloom formula or a water-soluble formula for the best results. During mid to late summer, you can use a fertilizer that is high in phosphorus once a month to help enhance the flowers when they bloom.

When the plant stops growing, which will be late in the summer months, it is important to make sure that you stop feeding it as well. If you continue feeding the plant when it is not actively growing, the salt can build up in the bud, which will keep it from blooming. Never fertilize a Thanksgiving, Christmas or Easter cactus when the plant begins to flower because it can cause the buds to fall.

Fertilizers to Use for Christmas Cactus

Throughout the season, the best type of fertilizer to use when you are feeding your cactus is a blend with equal nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus. You want a well-balanced fertilizer that can be dissolved in water so that feeding the plant becomes simple. Using an all-purpose fertilizer that has a 10-10-10 or 20-20-20 mix. It helps strengthen the roots and the leaves of the plant and gets it ready to bloom when the holidays roll around.

When you are not fertilizing the plant, you can use a mixture of a gallon of water and a teaspoon of Epsom salt. This will help the plant get all of the magnesium that it needs to grow and bloom properly without stunting its growth. The plant will not need to be fertilized past October because it will go dormant. In addition to stopping the feeding of this plant, you will also need to reduce the water that it receives during this time.

For any of your horticultural questions contact our Hot-Line Tuesday and Thursdays 10-2 at 409 882-7070 or thru our website <https://txmg.org/orange> Contact and we will get back with you. Orange County Master Gardeners meet the second Thursday of each month at the Orange County EXPO Center, 11475 FM 1442, Orange (Exit 869 off IH10) from 6 – 8PM. Upcoming events – Bloomin' Crazy Plant Fair March 14, 2020 and the next Master Gardener Certification class will start in April 2020. If you are interested in attending our class, please use the Contact on our website above.

Adapted from Garden Lover's Club website. www.gardenloversclub.com