

# Cactus Comments

New York Cactus and Succulent Society

est 1962

October  
2013

## Next Meeting

Thursday, October 17th, 2013  
6-7:45 pm  
331 Madison Ave (near 43rd St)  
7th Floor New York, NY  
www.nycss.org

Meeting topic:  
Cactus and succulent care for  
beginners.

We will discuss the basics of  
cactus and succulent care and  
review some basic terms and  
genera to get you familiar with  
various plants.

Small presentation on crests and  
caudiciforms.

Guests are always welcomed!

## Membership

Joining NYCSS gives you information  
packed monthly meetings, talks from  
experts and amateur enthusiasts, dem-  
onstrations, slide shows, trips, and our  
monthly newsletter, Cactus Comments.  
The 10\$ annual dues covers everyone  
in your household, from September  
to June.

Mail membership checks payable to

Richard Stone  
3777 Independence Ave. Apt 12C  
Bronx, NY 10463

## Looking for topics and submissions!

We need your help to keep meetings  
and the newsletter fresh. Let us know  
what you're interested in and help  
contribute where you can. =)

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## IT'S GETTING COLD OUT!

Please remember to bring your plants in! We have been able to keep plants outdoors longer this year with the lack of rain and mild temperatures but it's easy to forget that it's already October!

Set your cactus outdoors in the spring and bring it back inside just before the first frost in your area. Many cacti and succulents are considered to be cold hardy in this climate. While they can tolerate the cold temperatures, many of them cannot tolerate our winter moisture. It is important to keep your plants dry if you are leaving them outside for any extended periods, or if you keep them in drafty windows where temperatures can fluctuate to 40°F.

### PREPARATION

Check the plant for any pests or diseases before bringing it indoors for the winter. Rinse off the outside of the pot to remove any loose dirt. Wait until spring to repot your plants.

### LIGHT AND LOCATION

Set your plant on a windowsill for the winter. It should get a good amount of sunlight daily. If you live somewhere that doesn't have adequate sunlight throughout the day, hang a fluorescent light bulb a foot or so above the cactus and shine the light on the plant for 6 hours a day. If you have drafty windows or worry that the temperature on the windowsill will dip below 40°F, put your plant somewhere else and use the fluorescent lights to provide adequate light. You can also use a sheet of plastic to further insulate your windows.

### FOOD AND WATER

You don't need to fertilize your cacti and succulents once they're indoors for the winter, as they should be fairly dormant for the season. Any excess food will just increase legginess. You will still need to water it, but it should require a lot less water than it would outside in the summer. Water the soil once you bring the plant indoors. The water should drain through the soil easily. If there's a tray underneath the container, discard any extra water collected in the tray to prevent rot. Let the soil dry completely before watering again. It may take several weeks for the soil to dry out.

Fertilize your plant just before moving it outside again for the summer and continue to fertilize about once a month during the warmer season. Don't use a regular potting soil for succulents. Choose soil designed for cactus or add sand and other quick draining material.



# GENUS SPOTLIGHT: SCHLUMBERGERA

While the poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) remains the most popular of the holiday plants, a healthy Christmas cactus in full bloom is a great gift idea for any plant enthusiast. They are easy to care for and can be grown indoors throughout the year. The flowers range in color from yellow, salmon, pink, fuchsia and white or combinations of those colors.

## LIGHT

While the Christmas cactus can adapt to low light, more abundant blooms are produced on plants that have been exposed to high light intensity. Keep your plants in a sunny location indoors. Plants can be moved outdoors in summer, but keep them in a shady or semi-shady location. Too much direct sunlight can burn the leaves. When it's time to bring the plants back inside in the fall, slowly adjust the plants to life indoors by gradually increasing the number of hours they spend indoors each day. If you want to grow it indoors in a south or west window, you should shade the plant with glass curtains. No diffusion of light is needed on the north east. Many growers move the plants to the broken shade of a porch or patio or plunge the pot in a shady spot in the garden during the summer months. *Schlumbergera* needs shading from the sun between May and September.

## SOIL

Well-drained soil is a must for Christmas cactus. Use a commercially packaged potting mix for succulent plants or mix your own. The ideal soil for *Schlumbergera* is composed of equal parts of garden loam, leaf mold and clean coarse sand. Add a quart of wood ashes per bushel of mixture to raise the pH.

## WATER

Water thoroughly when the top half of the soil in the pot feels dry to the touch. The length of time between watering will vary with the air temperature, amount of light, rate of growth and relative humidity. During the summer, water so that the soil is continually moist. When fall arrives, water the plant only well enough to prevent wilting.

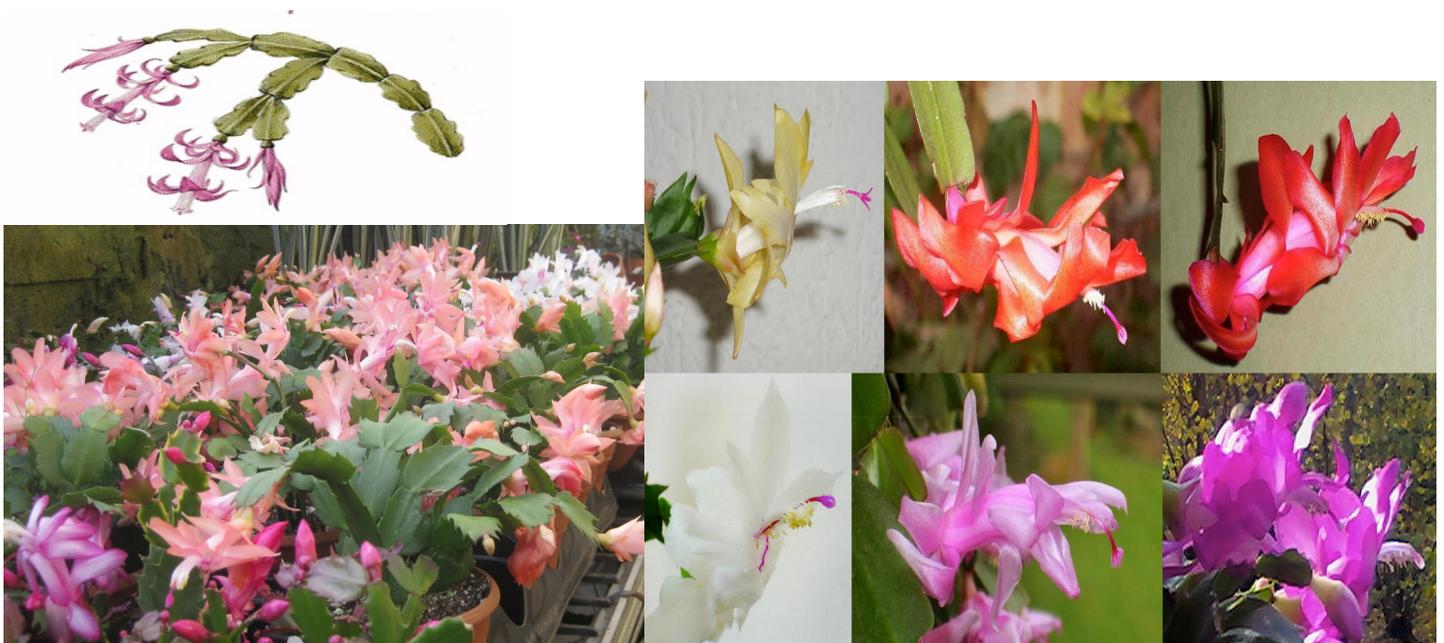
During the month of October, give the plant no water. Cautiously resume watering in November, but don't let stems get flabby from over watering. If the atmosphere is dry, place pot on a tray of pebbles. Keep pebbles moist with water in the tray. After plant completes blooming, let it rest by withholding water for six weeks. When new growth appears, re-pot and top-dress with fresh soil. Resume watering to keep soil fairly moist.

## FERTILIZING

As tender growth appears in the spring; apply a weak solution of liquid houseplant fertilizer at 2 to 3 weeks.

## TEMPERATURE

*Schlumbergera* prefers warm temperatures, although evening temperatures of 50 to 55 degrees F can be used to initiate flower bud formation (which normally is responsive to day length). From October on, keep the plant where it is cool at night (60 to 65 F). Keep away from drafts from heat vents, fireplaces or other sources of hot air to keep buds from dropping.



#### PROPAGATION

Shady conditions or filtered light are necessary for Schlumbergera to thrive. You can force bloom by setting the plant in a cool (60 to 65 degrees F) location, where the light is low but not absent during the day. Do this soon for Christmas bloom. Do not let the soil dry completely, but water infrequently to keep the soil just moist. Watch for signs of buds at the ends of the leaves, and increase humidity and light when they appear. If buds appear too soon, hold them back by reducing the temperature. The Christmas Cactus is easily propagated by taking short Y-shaped cuttings of the stem tips. A well-tended cactus will reach unmanageable size in time. To root cuttings for new plants, cutback shoots from the tips, cut at the second joint of each tip. Place cuttings in a moist peat and perlite, or peat and sand mixture. Water sparingly at first to prevent rotting of cuttings. After two or three weeks, water as you would any other cutting. When cuttings are rooted, pot them in a very loose mixture of good potting soil.

#### RE-POTTING

Plants should be re-potted every two or three years, or whenever pot is filled with roots and the soil appears to be depleted of nutrients. Christmas cactus usually is re-potted in the spring, but a plant which is unhealthy because of the root system can be re-potted at any time of the year.

#### BUD DROPPING

Common causes of bud dropping are over watering, exposure to cold drafts, a position too close to a hot radiator or vent and lack of sufficient potash in the soil. Water plant sparingly and feed a little liquid manure weekly.

#### HOW TO GET YOUR SCHLUMBERGERA TO FLOWER

These plants are easy to grow but are sometimes difficult to get to bloom. A medium light intensity and a soil high in organic matter are recommended. Do not allow the plant to dry out, water when the soil surface begins to feel dry. The plant may be kept drier in fall. Any fertilizer may be used according to label directions. Cool temperatures or long nights are required to induce blooming. The plants bloom when given night temperatures near 55 degrees and day temperatures below 65 degrees. Flowering is related to day length and night time temperatures. The temperature range for flower bud development is between 55 and 60 degrees for a period of six weeks. As long as the temperatures remain in this range they will develop buds regardless of day length. If the temperatures in your home get above that required range, the plant will need 13 hours of uninterrupted darkness each night. One can do this by placing them in a completely dark room, or by covering them for the recommended time, or longer, each night with a dark piece of cloth. Or just keep the plants in total darkness like a closet till buds develop. For holiday blooms this usually means in late September to mid October.

**SUBMISSION OF COMMENTS  
FOR THE NEWSLETTER OR  
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE  
MEETINGS, ETC.**

Comments, stories or information for our newsletter can be submitted to [webmaster@nycss.org](mailto:webmaster@nycss.org)

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