

Another Plant to Look Out for This Season: The Christmas Cactus



Last week I talked a bit about poinsettias and why they're a great plant to grab around the holiday season. This week, I thought of another easy-to-source plant that pops up around this time of year. The Christmas Cactus is a lovely tropical plant with succulent leaves and pretty flower buds that bloom right about now. Why do I recommend it? First, it's appearance. It's beautiful and exotic-looking. Next up? It's budget price tag! And for us frugal gardeners, that's the best part. During the holidays, you'll find these plants for cheap at your local nursery or supermarket. Be careful when shopping, though. Here are a few things to be on the lookout for when picking out a new plant-friend to bring home. These rules apply anytime you're buying plants, especially if

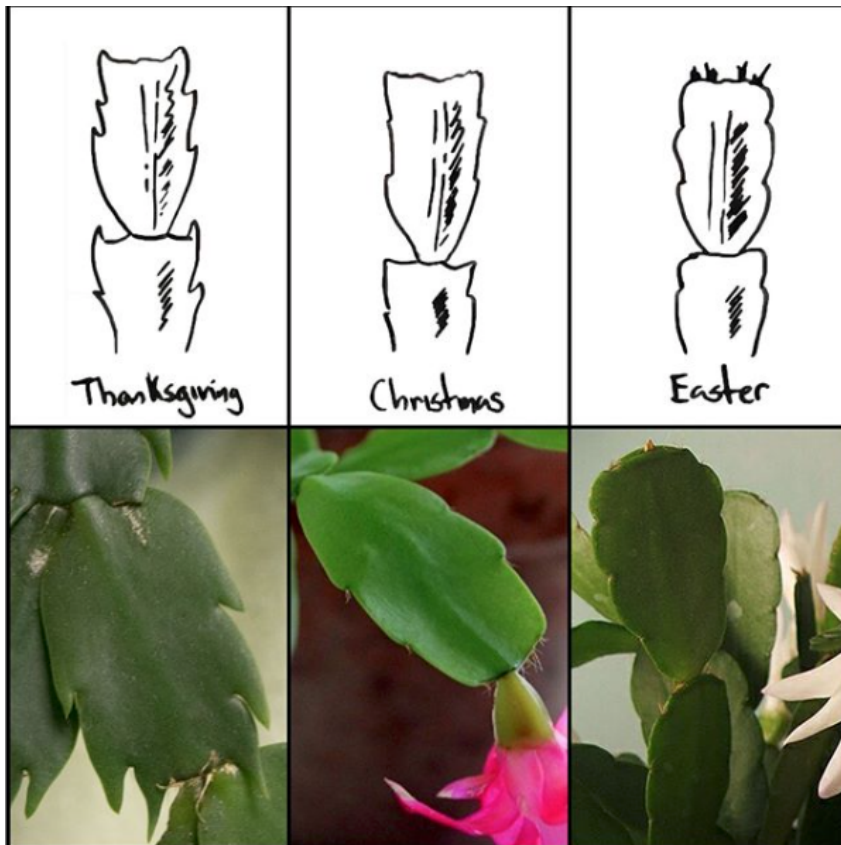
they're discounted or not coming from a reputable nursery.

- **Scrutinize the leaves.** Don't purchase a plant that has browning leaves or foliage that looks unhealthy.
- **Look out for insects.** Little flies might hitch a ride to your home and infect other plants. If they're flying around the area, it might be wise to skip the purchase and seek your Christmas Cactus elsewhere.
- **Price.** Don't pay extra for fancy pots and don't let anyone rip you off. You should be able to find these for well under \$10.

Christmas Cactuses are easy to keep alive well past Christmas. A little humidity is helpful, which is why I house mine in my well-lit bathroom.

Don't Be Fooled

Did you know that Christmas Cactuses are sometimes mislabelled? It's no surprise since different holiday cactuses look very similar. The Epic Gardener recently posted a handy guide to identifying your plant.



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structure of the different types of holiday cacti. Keep in mind you will still see different looking ones, because all holiday cacti are cultivars and hybrids from the relatively few species of *Schlumbergera* and *Rhipsalidopsis* found in nature.

- Thanksgiving Cactus (*Schlumbergera truncata*): Hooked, claw-looking edges. The most common one sold at nurseries and often mislabeled as Christmas Cactus.

- Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*): Smaller, smoother appearance and counter-intuitively one of the harder ones to find.

- Easter Cactus (*Rhipsalidopsis gaertnerii*): Smooth leaves with a bristly appearance to them.



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I love buying plants. I bring them home regularly, and I often find myself sticking them in my cart when I'm at the supermarket doing groceries. If you're like me, though, and don't want your plant obsession to hurt your wallet, consider picking up plants during peak holiday moments. Around Christmas, Easter and even Valentine's Day you might be able to find plants heavily discounted or for a steal. That's not always the case, of course. Around Valentine's Day, bouquet prices skyrocket. For Mother's Day, flowers fetch high prices. But if you're not in a hurry and have a good eye, it's not hard to spot plant finds in the most unexpected of places.