Cactus

Source: www.lifeisagarden.co.za/indoor-plant-month-september-schlumbergera

Classification

Kingdom: Plantae

Family: Cactaceae

Genus: *Schlumbergera (*formerly *Zygocactus)*

Species: *truncatus*

Common name: Christmas cactus, Thanksgiving cactus, Crab claw cactus, Holiday cactus, Linkleaf

1. Background

1.1 Origin

Zygocactus truncatus (presently called *Schlumbergera truncata* but is still well-known under the name *Zygocactus*) is an epiphytic cactus (it grows on the surfaces of other plants such as trees) native to the coastal mountains of south-eastern Brazil.

1.2 Description

Schlumbergera truncatus is a pendulous branching epiphyte with a height of around 30 to 60 cm and width of 22 to 30 cm. Approximately 4,5 cm long, 2,5 cm broad, flattened leaf-like dark and glossy green pads of this cactus join together like a chain, and there are 2 to 3 teeth along the edges of each segment.

1.2.1 Stem

The stem is flattened, spineless, pendulous branches with protruding notches at the margins, with long and narrow segments connected by the midrib.

1.2.2 Flowers

The flowers are bilaterally symmetrical and advance at the stem tips. Flower colours range from red (predominant), pink, purple, orange, white or multi-colored.

1.3. Climate requirements

Schlumbergera truncatus do well indoors, never put it in direct sunlight for prolonged period; they need to be partially shaded from the sun. They always grow under a canopy of trees and are never exposed to the full sun. The cactus prefers a day temperature of 14 and 21˚C for successful growth. The cactus requires cold temperature for bud formation. Higher humidity is not a problem for these succulents. The cactus mostly starts to blooms in October or November.

1.4 Soil requirements

Cactus requires a well-drained soil with a high amount of organic matter, and has pH ranges from 5.7 to 6.5. A combination of planting medium such as sand, moss, perlite and vermiculite can be used.

2. Cultural practices

2.1 Propagation method and planting

The cactus can be propagated through stem cuttings, mature terminal and sub terminal section. After obtaining the cactus cuttings or vegetative parts they must be disinfected and left to dry for at least 24 hours before planting or laying on top of a sterile potting

medium for rooting. Cuttings are propagated between December and March in pots. The cuttings are transplanted into the finishing container during April, May or June.

The cactus is planted on field or hanging basket with a well-drained potting mix containing a high level of organic matter. *Schlumbergera truncatus* requires frequent repotting (every 3 years) after flowering has ceased, for better growth management. Never move the flower during the bud stage.

2.2 Fertilisation

Schlumbergera truncatus is applied with fertiliser in every two weeks or monthly. The cactus fertiliser are applied during the active growth stages. Fertiliser with soluble NPK formula ratio of 20:20:20 or 20:10:20 is ideal for growth of cactus. Little magnesium added between the NPK applications will benefit the plant well.

2.3 Irrigation

Cactus plant tolerates underwatering than overwatering. Overwatering and poor drainage soils will eventually cause root rot. The frequency of irrigation vary depending on the environmental conditions, type of growing medium and plant establishment. Cactus plant should be irrigated when the soil is almost dry. Irrigation can be scheduled at 2 to 3 days per week, especially during sunny and warm weather. Irrigation can be scheduled every 5 to 8 days during cool cloudy weather conditions. The cactus plant should not deprived with water during bud formation. In general, well-established cacti receive less irrigation than immature cacti.

2.4 Weed control

Since the cacti are planted in pots, removal of weeds is not a major challenge. Problematic weeds in planting pots can easily be removed by small hand tools (e.g. hand fork or spade).

2.5 Pest and disease control

The major insect pests that infest *Schlumbergera truncatus* include thrips (feed on immature segments and flower buds), and root mealybugs (larvae feed on roots and stem

tissue, leading to secondary infections) and aphids. Application of registered pesticides to control pest can help in controlling the pest infestation.

Saturation of the growing medium for prolonged periods will predispose root systems to attack by soil-borne disease organisms. A growing medium that is pathogen-free and well-drained should be used in order to reduce the incidence of disease.

Stems and roots are prone to stem and root rots which caused by *Pythium* and *Phytophthora* species especially when they are over-crowded and planted in un-sterilised potting mix. Poorly drained soil can promote the spread of soil-borne diseases. *Botrytis cinerea* (fungus) causes gray mold on flower stem with their main target on flowers. Other important diseases of *Schlumbergera truncatus* are Fusarium basal stem rot, Bipolaris blight and bacterial soft rot. High humidity promotes the spread of the disease. Affected parts can be removed and the application of registered fungicide labelled for pathogen may help in controlling the disease with the use of sterile well potting mixture.

3. Uses

Schlumbergera trancatus is used mainly for decorative purposes throughout the holiday season.

4. Reference

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