

# JUNE'S GARDEN

## Jungle Cactus

Schlumbergera, Zygocactus, Rhipsalidopsis -- their common names are Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter Cactus. The common names for these plants indicate the blooming period of the different varieties. Unlike desert cacti that live in areas deficient in moisture, these plants grow on trees like certain orchids. Their native habitat is in the jungles of Brazil. In colder climates, these plants are sold as house plants. They are easy to grow, they have no thorns, and best placed in filtered sunlight at room temperature not dropping lower than 45 degrees. They do require rich porous soil and being frequently watered with liquid fertilizer. They can be moved outside to a sheltered area during the summer. The color choice of these flowering plants ranges from white, fuschia, bright red, lavender and pink. The plants offered for sale at garden centers are a selection of many hybrids.

S. bridgesii (often sold as Zygocactus truncatus), Christmas cactus, can grow to three feet across with arching, drooping branches. The branches are flattened, scalloped, smooth, bright green, spineless, 1 1/2-inch joints. The flowers are many-petaled, tubular, up to three inches long, flowering at Christmas time.

S. truncata (Zygocactus truncatus), Thanksgiving cactus, is also called Crab cactus. It has joints 1/2 inch long, sharply toothed, with two large teeth at the end of the last joint. Flowers are short-tubed, with spreading, pointed petals. It blooms in November and March.

S. gaertneri (Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri), Easter cactus, has flowers that are many-petaled, and star-like shaped. This plant blooms in April and May, and often again in September.

(adapted from Sunset Western Garden Book)

Also according to Sunset Western Garden Book, these plants are often confused in the nursery trade as to their names, flowering times, and structure of branches, as there is a large selection of hybrids now available.

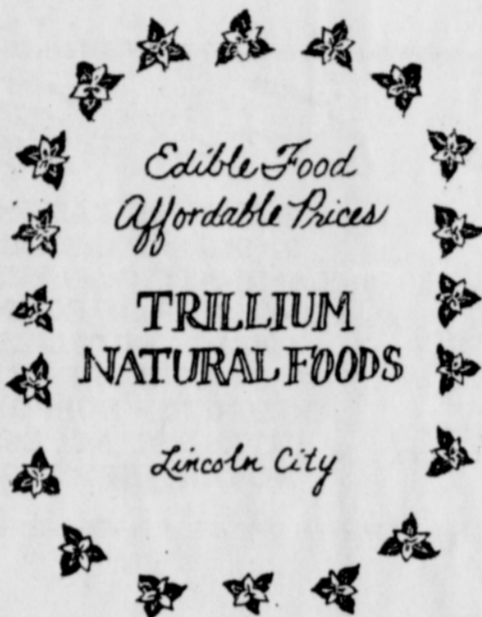
The jungle cacti I have raised are all over fifteen years old. Depending on conditions, they bloom several times throughout the year. I use time-released fertilizer and water them once a week using Safer Oxygen Plus liquid plant food. Oxygen Plus helps prevent damage from over-watering while it fertilizes. During the summer I place the plants in my garden shed which has filtered light from the corrugated clear plastic roof. This year the two largest Christmas and Thanksgiving Cacti had formed buds in October. They both have continued to bloom throughout November. The bright red one is now three feet across with more upright branches. The fuschia blooming plant is not as large and its branches droop down to a length of 1 1/2 feet. My Easter Cactus is a miniature and blooms in the spring with tiny lavender star-like flowers.

Celebrating the holidays with flowering plants extends a gardener's wish to have a continuous garden.



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