

Town Gardener

Christmas cactus a late flowering plant

By TOM CAVAN
Herald Special
Christmas Cactus

The first thing that comes to mind when I hear the name Christmas cactus is that this plant is improperly named. It always flowers during the months of October and November, and occasionally comes forth with a second set of flower buds. Therefore I think it should be called late fall flowering cactus. This easy going cactus is ex-

tremely long-lived. Over the years I have heard of huge heirlooms handed down from grandmothers back porch. That cool back porch is the reason for success.

After those colorful blooms fall off, you should reduce watering and temperature but still keep it in full sun during the winter months. The cooler the better. In fact, some claim their cactus approach freezing, well, that's too extreme. I would recommend

4-10 C (40-50 F).

Cactus have shallow roots that work very efficiently. Those succulent stems are storage compartments of food and water which they utilize during the rest period. This rest period will take place from January to April in sunlight.

Once April arrives, move your cactus from cool sun to a warmer spot with filtered sun (not direct sun). After all in their own natural habitat in Brazil they

share the same bed as orchids, ferns, and bromeliads.

These tough epiphytes prefer partially acidic soil. Fertilizing with acidic base water soluble food at half strength during active growth will encourage to fill the pot. Christmas cactus prefer to be pot bound so transplanting is only necessary every 3-5 years or simply if the plant becomes too large for its container which ever comes first.

For good bud set be sure to reduce temperatures in the fall but increase sunlight as the sun intensity lessens in the fall. Placing it in a cool place in the evening and bringing it out to a warm sunny spot will encourage better flowering. I have been asked if flowering can be delayed for Christmas and the answer comes in manipulation of fall conditions. You would have to extend summer conditions to accomplish this, but my recommendation is if your cactus is doing well, pat yourself on the back and leave well enough alone.

These plants are best propagated from 3"-4" cuttings in a rooting medium of 50 per cent sharp sand and 50 per cent vermiculite. After cutting pieces with at least two segments, air dry the cuttings out on a piece of newspaper for two to three days before placing them in rooting medium.

Avoid overwatering, especially during blossom time when they require evenly moist conditions to prolong flowering.

Also, when the plant is in bloom bud do not turn the plant when watering like you do with other plants because this will cause bud drop as the blooms face the light source.

If you have any questions call the Grapevine hot line, 833-2117 or write the Town Gardener, R.R.2, Erin, Ont. NOBITO.

Santa coming to hamlet

By BETTY SOJKA
Herald Special

Great news. Santa is coming to the village on Sunday, November 24th. Despite his busy schedule, Santa will be at the Community Centre, for the Annual Craft Sale, between 2 and 4. Santa's helper Elf will also be there to take pictures of you and Santa. Treats are in store for children of all sizes. Come see Santa, and get your picture taken with him. The Craft Sale opens at 10:00 p.m., and will be overflowing with exhibitors having a wide variety of crafts for sale. The kitchen will be serving a delicious hot luncheon, plus freshly baked goodies, and coffee, tea and pop. If you can't make it for lunch, then how about dropping in for a

Ballinafad News

coffee. There will be so much to see. Your Christmas list will be a handy thing to bring along as well. Donations of baked desserts/snacks, are to be dropped off at the bake table on the day of the Craft Sale. Proceeds from the bake table go to the Community Centre.

The Hall Board met at the home of Betty Andrews to finalize the last minute details of the craft sale, and to make plans for the New Year's Eve Dance. Tickets for the dance are \$15.00 per per-

son, and are now on sale at the Ballinafad General Store. It is important to note that tickets are being sold on an advance basis only. No tickets will be available at the door. S and S Sound featuring Shame, and George Adams, will be there to get the party rolling. A hot and cold buffet will be served. The Hall Board will meet again for a general meeting at the Community Centre, on Tuesday, November 26th.

After this past week's municipal elections, Ballinafad has Doris Topolek representing the village on the Erin Township side, and Kathy Gastle coming in as a newly elected councillor on the Halton Hills side. Congratulations go out to both of these ladies.



Proud to be chickens

So many students belong to the CHICKEN Club, their float overflowed onto the streets of Acton during the 1991 Santa Claus Parade Saturday. Students made up a large part of the parade, not

only in the CHICKEN float, but in floats put in by Robert Little School and McKenzie-Smith Middle School which won an award for best school float. (Herald photo)

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