



Zygocactus

Schlumbergera truncata

A Brazilian rainforest epiphyte, not a desert cactus. The easiest of the holiday plants to bring back, and it will outlive most of your furniture.

Reblooming

Cool nights alone will set next year's buds

INDIRECT LIGHT

ROOM TEMP

REBLOOMS

LIVES FOR DECADES

EASY CARE

LONG LASTING

DAY TO DAY

Light

Bright but filtered — it is a jungle plant. Full sun from May to September in a south or west window bleaches the segments pale yellow, so shade it then. A north or east window needs no shading.

Water

Not a desert cactus — do not let it bake dry. In spring and summer water when the mix feels dry to the touch. Once buds have formed in autumn keep it evenly moist, because drying out at that stage makes the buds drop. Never leave water in the saucer.

Food

Monthly from late winter through summer with something like 20-10-20 at half strength. On a different week each month give it 1 tsp Epsom salts per gallon of water for magnesium. Stop feeding in late summer.

Temperature

21–27°C / 70–80°F in spring and summer. In autumn 16–20°C / 60–68°F is what sets flowers, with about 20°C / 68°F giving the most blooms. Once buds are set never let it go above 32°C / 90°F, and protect it below 10°C / 50°F.

Humidity

If your air is dry, stand the pot on a tray of pebbles with water below the pot base.

WHEN THE FLOWERS FINISH

The easiest holiday plant to rebloom, and it lives for decades. From mid-September give it either 14+ hours of continuous darkness every night for at least six weeks at 16–20°C, or simply keep it where nights fall to 10–13°C / 50–55°F — cool nights alone set buds regardless of daylength. Pinch a short segment or two off each stem tip in late September to encourage flower-bearing terminals. Buds appear within 3–4 weeks and flowers last 7–8 weeks at 20°C. After blooming withhold water for six weeks, then resume when new growth appears. Repot every 2–3 years in spring.

IF SOMETHING LOOKS WRONG

Buds form and then drop before opening

The most common complaint. The soil dried out once buds were set, or there was a sudden change in temperature or location — cold drafts, a nearby heat vent, or overwatering.

It never flowers at all

It is getting light during its dark period. A streetlight, headlights, or someone switching on the room light in the evening is enough.

Segments pale yellow and washed out

Too much direct summer sun. Move to filtered light.

Segments limp and dropping, base black and slimy

Root or stem rot from a waterlogged mix.

GROWER REFERENCE

Production and finishing figures. If you are keeping this plant on a windowsill, everything you need is on page one — this page is for the trade.

Media pH	5.7–6.5, and always above 5.5 — below that, iron and manganese toxicity develops.
Media EC	Not established numerically in the published production guidance.
Substrate	Pathogen-free substrate high in organic matter and well drained. These are epiphytes and will not tolerate a dense water-holding mix.
Fertilizer	150 ppm N constant feed from a balanced NPK with micronutrients. An alternative program runs 180 ppm N, 390 ppm K and 53 ppm Ca at every watering plus a monthly balanced NPK at 150 ppm N. Both nitrate and ammonium N work.
Light	1,500–3,000 f.c. year round.
Temperature	20–21°C day / 17–18°C night (68–70°F / 62–65°F) for growing on, ventilating above 23°C / 74°F. Initiation at 10–15°C / 50–59°F under any photoperiod, or 16–24°C / 60–75°F under short days. 18–21°C / 65–70°F optimal for scheduled flowering.
Relative humidity	Not established.
Irrigation	Not established in the production guide. Practice is to irrigate when the surface dries during vegetative growth and hold evenly moist once buds are visible, to prevent bud abscission.
Photoperiod	Photoperiodic AND thermoperiodic — a facultative short-day plant with a dual trigger. Critical daylength lies between 12.5 and 14 hours at 18–19°C night / 20–21°C day. Controlled short days of 8–9 hours for a minimum of 3 weeks. Critically, night temperatures of 10–15°C / 50–59°F initiate flowers under ANY photoperiod, so cool nights can substitute entirely for daylength control.

DISORDERS & PESTS

Root and stem rots from Fusarium, Phytophthora, Pythium and Bipolaris, presenting as segment abscission. Erwinia carotovora soft rot — blackened wet slimy lesions, against which fungicides are ineffective. Bud drop. Fungus gnats, flower thrips (a direct cause of bud drop), root mealybugs.

GROWN BY

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Three generations of family growing since 1962.

Holiday cacti are rainforest epiphytes that grow in tree forks, not soil, and have no true leaves at all — every bit of photosynthesis happens in the flattened green stem segments.

Sources

- UMass Extension, Commercial Production of Holiday Cacti
- Clemson HGIC; NC State Extension