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Christmas cactus is thanksgiving species

PENN STATE — Most varieties of the so-called Christmas cactus available today are really examples of the Thanksgiving cactus.

While there is one type named the Christmas cactus, the Thanksgiving species has by far the most hybrids and thus is prominent during the Yuletide season, says Dennis J. Wolnick of the Depart-

ment of Horticulture at The Pennsylvania State University

"The kind you see most often at Christmas has 3 to 4 pairs of saw-toothed projections resembling crab claws on the leaves, and that's the Thanksgiving or crab cactus," Dr. Wolnick stated

"The leaves of the true Christmas cactus, in con-

trast, are rounded with no saw-toothed edges," he added. Dr. Wolnick is a floriculturist with the Agricultural Experiment Station at Penn State.

Despite their differences in leaf shape, the two types have quite similar flowers. The Thanksgiving cactus flower comes in many colors from white, to magenta, to red-while Christmas cactus blossoms are mainly cherry red.

There's even a third species, the Easter cactus. This species is much different from the other two, Dr. Wolnick observed. The leaf is thickened or even triangular with hairy projections at the tips of the leaves. The Easter cactus has many branches. Flowers come in many colors, ranging from pink, to red, to violet.

The Thanksgiving cactus initiates flower buds sooner and produces flowers earlier than the Christmas species. In some tests of the two species at the same age, flower buds on the Thanksgiving type were

visible September 20 while buds on the Christmas cactus were not visible until October 24.

After the normal Christmas blooming season, both species can flower again at or near Easter. To succeed with this, night temperatures should be no higher than 60°F. Research with the two common species shows they respond best to eight-hour days and 60°F for flowering, Dr. Wolnick claimed.

If flower buds start to drop, the temperature may be too high or the light intensity too low, he said. Christmas cacti seldom flower well at temperatures above 75°F.

New leaves will develop in the spring. At that time Christmas cacti can be replanted. Use a rich, acid-

type soil of 1 part of leaf mold, 1 part sharp sand, and a handful of bonemeal in an 8-inch pot. The plants are rarely bothered by insects or disease and enjoy summers outdoors under a tree where they can get light shade.

Leave them outdoors as long as possible in the fall, Dr. Wolnick advises. If you bring the plants inside before October 1, place them in a cool, light area of the basement. Bring them to a sunny window as soon as buds start to show.

Easter cacti are not as dependent upon day length for flowering as the Thanksgiving and Christmas species. Although they will set buds naturally from January to March, they will bear flowers under cool temperatures at other times of the year.

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Farm Organization Council to meet in January

CAMP HILL — The Pennsylvania State Council of Farm Organizations Annual Meeting and Legislative Dinner is scheduled for Monday, January 26, 1981, at the Penn Harris Motor Inn in Camp Hill. The morning program, beginning at 10:30, will be a special presentation by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture regarding promotion of Pennsylvania agricultural commodities.

The luncheon speaker will be James Beattie, Dean of the College of agriculture at Penn State.

The afternoon session will include adoption of policies on key agricultural issues and reports from Dr. Robert Marshak, dean of the Veterinary School.

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University of Pennsylvania; Joshua Feldstein, President of Delaware Valley College of Science and Agriculture; the Chairman of the Pennsylvania Senate Agricultural Committee; and the Chairman of the Pennsylvania House Agricultural Committee.

The evening Legislative Banquet, to which the entire Pennsylvania General Assembly is invited, will begin with a social hour. The cost of the dinner is \$15. Invited speaker for the evening banquet (not confirmed) is Joe Paterno, Athletic Director and Head Football Coach at Penn State. We also take a few brief minutes in the evening to tell our legislators what is important to Pennsylvania agriculture.

Come out for any part of the day or evening. Your support is needed! The entire agricultural community of Pennsylvania is the host so we need numbers to impress important people in Pennsylvania.

For luncheon and dinner tickets, contact Carl Deibert, Pennsylvania State Grange 717/234-5001 or John Hoffman at The Poultry Federation Headquarters, 717/652-7530.



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