

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Camellia Yuletide



Christmas cacti



Poinsettia

## My Christmas cacti dates back to the 1950s... and still looks great

**I**T'S Christmas Eve! Are you ready for the festivities to begin? I've certainly been prepared for a few weeks now, both in the house and the garden.

With falling temperatures we may not see a white Christmas here on the coast, but it is certainly much colder of late. I've recently added some fleecing to a collection of oleanders outside, just to make sure they flower well next summer. A stunning Christmas flower is the Camellia Yuletide.

It is hardy, down to -10C, across most of the UK, though, may suffer foliage damage and stem dieback in harsh winters in very cold gardens. Its glossy dark green leaves provide a sumptuous backdrop for the profusion of yellow-eyed, red flowers, when they appear in late autumn and early winter.

Their colouring is very striking and is perfect for the build-up to the Christmas season.

If left to grow naturally, this is a relatively compact shrub with a pyramidal habit, but it can also be trained against a wall, or grown in a large pot.

To prevent damage to the emerging buds and flowers protect from cold, dry winds and early morning sun and remember to water established plants in dry weather to prevent bud drop. After flowering, you can lightly trim or prune any branches that spoil the appearance of the plant.

Christmas is not Christmas in my house without a poinsettia. For me, it is an ever-present reminder of the festive period and have been widely used in festive displays for many years.

The poinsettia flower, also known as the Mexican Flame Tree or Christmas Star is a vibrant houseplant which can be long-lasting, if well cared for.

I have three, all over three years old and the leaves on the one pictured have turned red again in time for Christmas.

With proper care, your poinsettia should continue to put out blooms, and remain attractive for weeks. The plants need proper light, water, and temperature conditions.

Over Christmas, while in full bloom, they typically enjoy semi-cool, humid locations in bright, indirect light with plenty of

moisture.

Poinsettia plants should be watered thoroughly, taking care not to drown them by ensuring adequate drainage is available.

Likewise, avoid letting them sit in water-filled saucers, which can lead to root rot. The key is to be careful choosing your plant in the first place, as many supermarkets and garden centres leave them for sale in draughty locations, which is a sure-fire recipe for disaster.

Another festive favourite is the Christmas cacti.

I own one that dates back to the 1950s, it having belonged to my paternal grandmother, then my aunt and with me since 2004.

The one pictured is a more recent plant. They have brightly coloured red flowers up to 8cm long, fading to white in the centre, from which a deep-magenta stigma arises surrounded by a tuft of golden-topped, white stamens.

Opening at the ends of the succulent, fleshy, leaf stems, the blooms can last from the festive period into January.

Make sure you choose a bright spot out of direct sunlight and maintain a humid atmosphere by daily misting or standing the Schlumbergera, its proper name, on a saucer of damp gravel.

In an ideal world, the plant needs two resting periods so after it has flowered in late January, reduce the watering and move to a cooler room with a temperature of approximately 12-15C. Water sparingly but don't let it dry out.

From April to September, increase watering and feed with a liquid houseplant fertiliser, moving the plant to a warmer room with a temperature of around 18-20C. To be honest, I can't say I'm that particular but my plants are doing well.

This year, I have opted to purchase a 4ft, pot-grown Norway spruce. It looks wonderful in the new patio area backed by the railway sleepers.

I've purchased some delicate fairy lights which are strung across the sleepers too and decorated it with some small coloured baubles.

It looks really pretty, looking out from the dining room in the evening as we sit and eat dinner.

Also growing out in the garden, I



Geoff with his miniature garden tree

have several standard holly shrubs which have produced a nice array of berries in time for Christmas.

The one pictured is Golden King. Standard holly trees are perfect for the garden, balcony or patio.

They can be planted either side of a doorway or arch to give an elegant entrance or positioned as a decorative focal piece in the garden and will bring pleasure for many years.

With evergreen, glossy foliage edged with a golden yellow, the holly bears white flowers in the spring and red berries in the winter, which are simply loved by the birds.

Read more of Geoff's Christmas at [www.geoffschristmas.co.uk](http://www.geoffschristmas.co.uk) and more of his garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk)



Standard holly