

# GROWERTALKS

## GT in Brief

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## Holiday Alternative

*Chris Beytes*

*Photography by Chris Beytes*



Chet Peckett, owner of Peckett's Inc. in Apopka, Florida, gives a last-minute check to his Christmas cactus crop. Peckett's produces nearly a million schlumbergera each season.

Founded in 1978 with 10,000 sq. ft. of greenhouse, today Peckett's has 750,000 sq. ft. of greenhouse on 50 acres. They've long been known as a spathiphyllum specialist—they have their own breeding, a tissue culture lab and produce their own plugs. "But we need to be looking at other avenues, other

ways to use this facility," Chet says.

That's why about 10 years ago they decided to add Christmas cactus to their offerings. He liked the fall timing and the fact that they're a holiday crop. Spaths are a solid staple and they sell out, Chet says, but in the foliage world, "everyone is competing for dollars of a diminishing market."

When schlumbergera pioneer Barnell Larry Cobia sold his Florida nursery, Peckett's bought Cobia Christmas cactus patents and hired Larry as an advisor to help them get started in the crop. Today, Peckett's still grows a couple of Cobia varieties, but most of their nine varieties are from European breeders.

Peckett's sells 60-count liners (Chet says he has quite a few customers who produce for local and regional sales), plus finished sizes from 2.5-in. pots to 10-in. baskets and bowls.

While you might consider them a good addition to poinsettias, the challenge with schlumbergera is crop time: 10 to 11 months from stick to finish, at least. Larger pots can take even longer—Chet says they've already stuck the cuttings for their larger pots. European growers may grow a crop for twice as long to produce a high-quality crop.

Schlumbergera is labor-intensive, too, with multiple pinches on each plant and each plant starting with numerous cuttings (16 in a 6 in., 20 in an 8 in. and 60 in a 10 in.).

But schlumbergera is a prolific cutting producer, and Peckett's produces all its own stock, which reduces production costs. And being a succulent, they hold up well in the greenhouse. "I can water [Christmas cactus] in the summer once a week. My spath get watered every day." **GT**