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# How to Increase Branching and Flower Bud Production of Christmas Cactus

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*Configure foliar sprays applied during the spring when the plants were vegetative resulted in increased phylloclades.*

Based on research completed at North Carolina University, here are some methods for increasing branching and flower bud production of Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgessii*).

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## Increasing Branching (Phylloclades – a flattened stem or branch having the function of a leaf):

Configure foliar sprays were applied during spring to Christmas cacti when the plants were vegetative. The application resulted in increased branching (additional phylloclades) (photo, left).

The trial showed a single foliar application of 100 to 200 ppm Configure is ideal for increasing the number of branches on most Christmas cactus cultivars. Your initial trials should target the rate of 100 ppm and adjust the rates accordingly to your growing conditions and the cultivars grown. Overall, a Configure foliar spray to Christmas cactus is an excellent method of increasing both the number of phylloclades and flower buds being produced.

### Key Points

- After transplanted cuttings are established in the final pot, apply Configure to stimulate an increase of phylloclades. This will improve branching. The application must be early enough to allow phylloclades to fully mature before the start of short days.
- Initially, target a rate of 100 ppm. Lower rates of 50 ppm may be effective on some cultivars. Establishing a trial with a few plants of each cultivar to be tested and different rates is recommended to ensure success.
- Complete spray coverage is required, especially for pots containing multiple cuttings.

### Increasing Flower Buds

Timing of application is critical to achieve the desired effect. Apply Configure after the start of short days to stimulate an increase of flower bud production. The floral initiation period in Christmas cactus begins under short-day conditions (around September 21 in the northern hemisphere).

Optimally, short-day conditions are achieved with exact control of the long-day and short-day photoperiods. The time to apply Configure is one week after floral initiation



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begins when using black cloth.

Most growers rely on natural season daylength to induce flowering. This method requires that you observe the crop to determine when the optimal application period should be. If relying upon natural season daylength conditions, apply Configure within two days after the first flower buds are visibly emerging from the phylloclades. This occurs in early October. Gently feel the end of the phylloclades for a slight enlargement. This will let you know a flower bud will emerge soon. Based on our trials from last year at North Carolina State University, flower bud emergence occurred around Oct. 10.

A single foliar spray application of 100 ppm to 200 ppm Configure is ideal for increasing the number of flowers on most Christmas cactus cultivars. If you have never used Configure, consider starting your initial trials with the rate of 100 ppm. Growers have reported that lower rates of 50 ppm may be effective on some white cultivars. Concentrations of 400 ppm or greater can result in the production of an excessive number of small flower buds, which may not fully flower.

Be careful to apply Configure only after the plant has begun flower initiation. Applications made in late September while the plants are still vegetative will stimulate additional phylloclades instead of flower buds. This will result in plants with fewer flowers.

Complete spray coverage is required, especially for pots containing multiple cuttings. Configure is not actively transported by the phloem within the plant. Therefore, if a portion of the plant is not sprayed, Configure will not move there in the phloem to stimulate additional flower buds.

## Conclusions

Applying Configure as a foliar spray on Christmas cactus is an excellent method of increasing both the number of phylloclades and flower buds being produced. This will lead to top-quality plants that consumers will enjoy. Consider conducting your own Configure trial on



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Christmas cactus to see how your flower power can be increased.

To learn more about using *Configure* on succulents, check out ***“Branching Out With Configure on Succulents.”***

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