



<http://www.cactusshop.co.uk>
Email: ralph@cactusshop.co.uk
Ralph Northcott BSc.



Trichocereus pachanoi

Contact us. Call Ralph on his mobile 07586 880472

CULTIVATION of CACTI and OTHER SUCCULENTS **DESERT CACTI and SUCCULENTS**

Light Succulents (Including Cacti) should be kept in a light, airy position all the year round. A south-facing window is ideal for most types, although some "other succulents" e.g. Aloe, Gasteria, Haworthia will be quite happy in more shaded situations.

In general, to keep looking healthy, a succulent plant should have sunlight falling on it for at least part of the day. Many would be quite happy with either morning or afternoon sun in an East or West window.

If all you have is a north-facing window, which never gets any sun, try installing a plant light, or put your plants outdoors for the summer. A North-facing window would be suitable only for some Epiphytic cacti such as Christmas & Easter Cacti and Rhipsalis, and a limited selection of other succulents such as Aloe, Gasteria, Haworthia & Sansevieria. Even these plants would flower better under these conditions if they could have even a brief "holiday" in the garden.

Watering Generally speaking, succulents need a thorough watering when they are dry in the summer. Allow the plants to become dry before watering again - they don't like wet feet all the time. An overhead sprinkle can help to keep plants free from dust and thus healthier looking. (Exceptions are the rosette types where water can become trapped and cause rotting e.g. Echeveria) The jungle cacti or epiphytes such as Orchid cacti or Christmas cacti should never be allowed to completely dry out.

In the winter, from October to March, most plants will need no water at all, unless kept at a high temperature (e.g. central heating) when a little water may be needed to prevent undue shrivelling.

Rain water is always better than tap water if you have a choice.

Temperature Most succulents are tolerant of very high temperatures and FULL sunshine, but ONLY if there is plenty of air circulation e.g. an open window or door. Without air, a sunny room can be like an oven on a hot day and your plants can cook. (Cacti start to cook at 45 deg. C)

In the winter, most plants are happy if kept at above 40 deg.F (5 deg.C) if dry. Many such as Rebutia, Lobivia, Opuntia, Agave etc; will stand many degrees of frost if dry. There are a few exceptions of course, Orchid and Christmas cacti are happier at around 50 deg. F (10 deg. C)

Flowers It is a myth that cacti flower only every seven years. Once flowering size is reached, they will flower every year and some even twice in one year. Many cacti reach flowering size at two years old, while some take ten years to mature. These latter plants are generally grown more for their attractive spines etc. than for their flowers. If a "flowering" cactus doesn't produce results, then either it is the wrong sort, or the cultural conditions are wrong.

To produce flowers, some cacti need a cool, dry, rest period in the winter. A cool bedroom is ideal for this. Given this rest each season, and plenty of sunshine, many varieties will flower on a windowsill, although there are some that produce better results in the greenhouse or conservatory. For easy-flowering, we can recommend the following -

Echinopsis, orchid cacti (Epiphyllum), Gymnocalycium, Mammillaria, Rebutia (- Aylostera), Notocactus, also Christmas cacti (Schlumbergera). Among the other succulents, easy-flowerers include Crassula, Echeveria, Graptopetalum, Hoya and Sedum.

To obtain more flowers on your Christmas cacti and Orchid cacti, these also benefit from a rest, unlike other cacti this is most effective if given for a week or two following flowering.

Flowering is greatly helped by regular feeding, with a high potash fertilizer in the growing season. Any tomato fertilizer is ideal, or a special cactus fertilizer such as Cactus Focus. We feed every third watering.

All cacti and other succulents will produce more flowers if - once they have reached their mature size - they are not over potted. A plant that has a lot of space to grow into, will do just that, and not worry too much about flowering.

Potting Don't over pot. A pot just a little larger than the plant is best. Repot generally when the plant touches the plant rim (or with a tall plant, the day before it falls over!) into a one-size larger pot. A good, gritty, porous compost is needed, in the UK an easy mix is to use is John Innes no. 2 with 30% sharp sand/grit added or Multipurpose compost with added grit.

To make your own mix, I would recommend 33% (sharp) horticultural sand (= 3 mm grit) , 33% sterilized loam or garden soil and 33% coir. A slow release fertilizer such as Osmocote (NPK 18-16-12) can be added, which provides nutritional requirements for the first season .

Many combinations of soil work well. Each book will give you a different recipe. Experiment for yourself, with locally available materials, bearing in mind that the soil must be well-aerated, free-draining and with a slightly acid pH of between 5.5 to 6.5 (for best absorption of nutrients).

The compost should also maintain this structure over a period of time. The trend today is to move away from composts with large humus (peat/leaf mould) content as this tends to break down over a year or two. Coir (coconut fibre) maintains a better structure and is a more renewable resource. Pumice or other similar "inert" materials are increasingly used, soil structure and aeration are maintained and, as with humus, the pumice can hold on to nutrients and make them available to the plant.

The above notes apply to the vast majority of succulents, although there are always exceptions.

Handling your plants Cacti and succulents grow in some extremely hostile environments, and as such have evolved some very inventive ways of defending themselves. They will not hesitate to use those defence mechanisms when you attempt to repot or otherwise handle them.

Unless you're *REALLY* tough, you're probably wondering how in the world you are going to get a grip on your spiny cactus while you repot it. Rolled up newspaper or cardboard can damage your plants, it is always best to lift your plants by sticking a fork in the soil – the bigger the plant, the bigger the fork. This way the spines or plant skin are not damaged by handling.

Beware that not all spines are created equal. Some can be especially nasty. For example, that group of cacti known as opuntias - commonly referred to as "prickly pears" - have spines that, at the microscopic level, are barbed and very easily break off and remain lodged in the skin. Opuntias also have fine spines called "glochids" which, in extreme cases, get into people's eyes and cause problems. Some other types of cacti, as some mammillarias, have hooked spines which easily grab fast to skin and clothing.

Still other succulents are known for having poisonous or irritating sap. Plants in the genus Euphorbia are especially known for this. Be careful around them.

Our sister website which has all the basic information you need to grow your cacti and succulents.

There is also a diagnostic key - if you have a sick cactus you can tick a few boxes and find out what is wrong with it and learn how to cure it (If possible!)

Find our cactus care site at www.cactusnursery.co.uk