

Care of Non-Hardy Cacti & Succulents



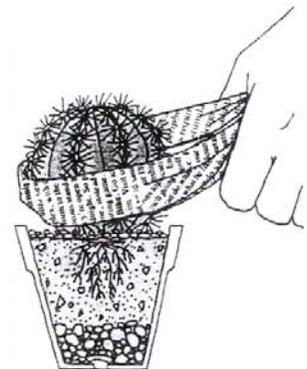
Peanut Cactus
Chamaecereus silvestrii

True cacti are natives of the Americas. Succulent plants, however, are found throughout the world wherever regular periods of drought occur. The term succulent simply means juicy. Cacti are juicy (succulents), but many other plant families also contain succulents. These plants evolved under conditions where they had to survive prolonged drought by storing water in swollen leaves, stems or roots. Spines on cacti developed as an effective method to ward off predators anxious to use the hoarded mixture. Many succulents developed protective form or coloration, which blends into their surroundings.

There are many misconceptions surrounding cactus culture. Contrary to popular belief, neither cacti nor other succulent plants grow in pure sand with no need of water. They have the same basic needs of other plants for water, light and nutrients. Maximum amounts of light are also needed for best growth.

In the warm season, cacti and succulents need abundant water, and good drainage is the basic rule. A little water frequently results in weak, shallow roots, and sickly plants. Apply water until it runs from the drainage holes, then wait until it dries out before watering again. Most problems with cacti result from overwatering during the winter dormant period. During dim winter months cacti need only enough water to prevent them from shriveling. A regular feeding schedule with an all-purpose fertilizer is recommended for only the growing period from April through August.

A good soil mixture includes 2 parts good garden soil, 2 parts sharp builders sand, and 1 part peat. All succulents must have perfect drainage. Use clay pots with drainage holes. The root systems of these plants are small and overwatering causes rapid death. Excess root room is not needed. A container which is too large for the plant often stays wet too long. Cacti need repotting every year or two but move them up only to the next size pot each time. Cactus roots will be damaged during potting. A damaged root system leaves plants susceptible to soilborne diseases. For this reason, don't water newly potted cacti for at least a week, and keep them out of strong sunlight. After a week, water lightly, and place them back in the sun. Do not resume a fertilizing schedule for at least one month. Cactus spines are sharp and handling plants can be painful. An easy way of protecting both your hands and the plant is with old newspaper wrapped around the plants.



Propagation. Propagation by seed is easy and inexpensive. Plant seeds in a sterile medium and cover with glass or plastic to maintain humidity and even temperature. Germination should take place in from 3 days to 3 weeks. When seedlings begin to grow the cover should be cracked gradually to

allow for more air circulation. After 3 to 6 months, plastic can be completely removed. Transplanting is not generally necessary for at least a year.

Vegetative propagation of cacti is faster than seed. Cacti can be propagated by tip and leaf cuttings, and occasionally offsets. Allow cuttings to callus or heal for several days before inserting them in rooting medium. A rooting hormone may speed up this process. Perlite, sand, or vermiculite makes satisfactory medium for rooting. Leaf cuttings, while slower than tip cuttings, are interesting to watch. Some crassulas, kalanchoes, echeverias, sedum and aeoniums will develop into full-sized plants from a single leaf.

Pests. Scale and mealy bugs attack cacti and succulents. Remove them with a cotton swab dipped in alcohol, or apply an insecticide recommended for these pests. Follow directions carefully.

Some Recommended Genera and Species

Cacti		Succulents	
Peanut Cactus	<i>Chamaecereus sylvestri</i>	Burro's Tail	<i>Sedum morganium</i>
Eagle's Claw	<i>Echinocactus sp.</i>	Bear's Pawpaw	<i>Cotyledon tomentosa</i>
Rainbow Cactus	<i>Echinocereus sp.</i>	Crown of Thorns	<i>Euphorbia splendens</i>
Lace Cactus	<i>Echinocereus sp.</i>	String of Pearls	<i>Senecio rowleyanus</i>
Barrel Cactus	<i>Ferocactus sp.</i>	Jade Plant	<i>Crassula argentea</i>
Pincushion cactus	<i>Mammillaria sp.</i>	Tiger Jaws	<i>Faucaria tigrina</i>
Bunny Ears	<i>Opuntia microdasys</i>	Ox Tongue	<i>Gasteria sp.</i>
Blue Candle	<i>Myrtillocactus geometrizans</i>	Panda Plant	<i>Kalanchoe tomentosa</i>
		Burn Plant	<i>Aloe vera</i>
		Rosary Vine	<i>Ceropegia woodii</i>
		Zebra Plant	<i>Haworthia fasciata</i>
		Zipper Cactus	<i>Crassula imperialis</i>

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Chemung 7/1993

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