

CACTI & SUCCULENTS

Always keep in mind that the aim in growing cacti & succulent plants successfully is to provide them with the most optimum growing conditions. The fact that these types of plants can endure drought conditions should in no way be construed as a basis for how you should grow them in your home. Although they can survive extended dry periods the quality and appearance will suffer. It's the difference between "thriving" or "just surviving".

Watering: Correct watering procedures are crucial to the successful culturing of cacti and succulents. Cacti and succulents do not necessarily culture in like manners, so it is therefore important to treat each group differently.

Cacti: Most cacti actively grow during the long, hot summer months and tend to become dormant during the short days of winter. It is very important that you recognize when your plants are actively growing. This is difficult since cacti tend to grow at such a slow rate, but during the time between early spring and late fall you can be pretty well assured that your plants are in a growth stage. During this time, water the plants whenever the soil becomes dry. Do not extend this dry period for too long or your plants will begin to suffer from lack of moisture. Only during their dormant periods will cacti be able to successfully withstand long periods without water. When the soil is sufficiently dry, water the plant thoroughly. Be sure that excess water drains from the hole in the bottom of the pot. Make sure that the soil is completely saturated. Never water cacti by giving minimal amounts of water. It is an incorrect notion that one should try to duplicate desert conditions in order to grow cacti. Methods such as this often lead to failure. Repeat this watering procedure when the soil once again becomes thoroughly dry. During the winter months when cacti often become dormant, it is advisable to water less frequently; two to three times less often than during the summer. Most people attempting to grow cacti suffer the greatest amount of plant loss during the winter, usually the direct result of incorrect watering techniques.

Succulents: Succulents are usually less demanding of careful watering schedules than cacti. Succulents do not necessarily become dormant during the winter. In fact many succulents are more active in their growth during the winter as opposed to summer. Therefore, the most general rule of watering succulents is to water the plants thoroughly when the soil starts to become dry, by careful observation. Be sure that the plant is actively growing when you water in this manner. Succulent plants which have become dormant will require less frequent waterings than those which exhibit active growth. Do not overly stress the plants by lack of water for their quality and appearance will suffer.

Light Requirements: Correct amounts of sunlight are an important factor to the successful culturing of cacti and succulents. Very few varieties of cacti can withstand full sunlight when they are in a seedling or young stage of development. Therefore, be

extremely careful of placing your plants in southern windows where the amount of the sunlight may be too much for the plants to easily adapt to. Cacti as well as succulents may actually sunburn if the sunlight is too strong or intense.

When you obtain a new plant. Place it in a location in your home where the sunlight is not too intense. You may later slowly move the plant towards its final location being careful to observe it to see that no signs of sunburn or stress are occurring. You will find that young succulents can seemingly withstand stronger light than most cacti. Optimum lighting for most cacti is approximately 50% shade, whereas most succulents prefer about 25% shade to produce the best results. As with watering, careful observation of the plants is of utmost importance in successful growing.

Feeding: Contrary to most popular beliefs, cacti and succulents do need to be fed in order to obtain the best results, as with all living plants. Nutrients must be supplied regularly in order for the plants to reach their full growth potential. This is better accomplished by feeding a lesser amount on a continuing basis as opposed to full strength feedings as is often recommended. Check the instructions on your plant food container. If the manufacturer suggest a full strength feeding every month. You may wish instead to feed your plant one quarter of the recommended amount each time you water. In this way the plant will have a more stable supply of nutrients on a continuing basis. Most professional growers are well aware of this fact and feed on a regular basis.