

# Succulents and Cacti

Cacti and other succulents are plants that have a number of features that allow them to survive in some of the harshest conditions on earth; the desert. These plants have fleshy stems and leaves for storing water; spines, thorns and/or hairs to reduce transpiration; light colored surfaces to reflect heat. All cacti are succulents but all succulents are not cacti. Included, also, in the succulent family are Agave, Aloe, Bromeliad, Crassula, Euphorbia, Sedum and Sempervivum.



In this care sheet we will be discussing the non-hardy Cacti and Succulents that are grown indoors as house plants in our zone. These plants are generally easy to grow and are a great choice for busy gardeners.

**Containers:** Not a lot of room is necessary for root growth: a shallow pot or bowl works great. Container must have a drainage hole. A porous container, like terra cotta, is a good choice as it can help alleviate the effects of over-watering.

**Soil:** In their natural environment, these plants have adapted to growing in rocky or sandy soils with few nutrients. The ideal potting mix for cacti and most succulents should drain rapidly and have a neutral pH. Soil that is not well drained will cause the plant roots to rot. You may purchase a potting mix labeled Cactus Soil or you may mix your own.



## Cactus Potting Mix

- 1 part potting soil
- 1 part sand
- 1 part leaf mold
- ½ part traction grit

**Light:** Cacti and succulents require direct or filtered sunlight to survive happily. You may supplement natural sun light with fluorescent lighting.

**Temperature:** Warm daytime temperatures are preferred during the growing season; 80° F. Evenings should be cooler, mimicking desert conditions, 65°F. During the winter temperatures should not fall below 55° F.

**Watering:** When growing succulents and cacti, this is the area where people tend to feel incompetent, often fearful of watering too much or not enough. These plants should be watered once a week during the growing season (spring thru fall) and little or no water while dormant (winter). Gradually decrease watering going into dormancy and progressively increase coming out of dormancy. When watering, make sure that enough is given so that it runs through the drainage hole at the bottom of the pot. Soil should be allowed to dry completely between waterings. Never water the top of the plant, water directly into the soil so as not damage the plant tissue.

**Feeding:** These plants require only occasional feeding. Feed every two weeks with a low nitrogen fertilizer, like 2-2-7, during the growing season; starting in spring thru the summer. Do not fertilize during dormancy.

**Repotting:** Repotting cacti and succulents should be done infrequently; only to refresh the soil or when the plant has outgrown its pot. Every 3 – 4 years should be sufficient. Cacti plants should be handled with care when repotting. Protective gloves should be worn and the prickly top of the plant may be wrapped in newspaper to make this task less painful.

