

Cactus and Succulents

So, you just picked up one of those neat cactus gardens in a box. Now what? Here are a few thoughts that can help your cactus garden be a big success.

While succulents are native to arid regions and generally thrive in poor soils, it does not mean one should not water them or provide nutrients. How often should you water? There is no answer that is universally correct. There is a direct relationship between water, light, temperature, soil conditions and humidity. The higher the light level and temperature and the less humid the more often watering is required.

Most cactus and succulents have an active period about 1/3 of the year. During this active period watering can be frequent and fertilizer applied. The most active time for most cacti is during the spring and early parts of summer. As this period passes, it is best to reduce the frequency of watering as winter approaches. They require very little water during the cold months. A good watering once a week in hot weather and once a month in the dormant period is a good point to start as you learn your plants needs. Another approach is when the soil is completely dry, water thoroughly then let dry. If in doubt, don't water.

Too much fertilizer can be worse than none at all. Use a low nitrogen fertilizer at about ¼ the recommended rate.

What is the best soil for cactus and other succulents? Most commercial potting soils are too rich in fresh organic matter for these plants. The most important factor in choosing a planting medium is that it allows food, water and air to get to the roots and is porous enough to let water drain through.

Direct sun and light are not the same! Succulent plants need light but they grow better if they don't cook in the midday sun. In the desert you will find young plants tucked under a bush, tree or something else that provides filtered light. If new growth on your plant is pale green and elongated, it needs more light. If the side of your plant facing the light source is yellow, tan, red or indented, it is getting too much light.

Happy succulent gardening.

"...when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."
- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

FAVORITE FLORA: ECHINOCEREUS ENGELMANNII- STRAWBERRY HEDGEHOG



One of the most common of the Hedgehog Cacti is the Strawberry Hedgehog (Echinocereus engelmannii). Named after the German born physician and botanist George Engelmann (1809-1884), the Strawberry Hedgehog is native to the desert Southwestern United States and Northern Mexico. Engelmann is credited with describing numerous plants throughout the country including more than 108 species of cacti. This particular cactus has a clumping form, which can reach 1-2 feet tall by 3 feet wide, is made up of cylindrical stems. The stems can range from 4-12 inches in length and 2-4 inches in diameter. They are light green in color and covered with 2-3 inch brown spines.

After a plant has 2 or 3 stems it can start producing showy magenta or purple flowers each spring. In and around Las Vegas the Strawberry Hedgehog usually blooms in April although more southern plants can bloom as early as February. Flowers will open to a diameter of 3 inches in the day and close at night only to reopen again the following morning. This cactus derives its common name from the inch long fruit it produces. The fruits are edible after removing all the spines and are said to taste similar to strawberries.

The Strawberry Hedgehog can easily be grown in a cactus garden or native landscape. It needs little to no water once established. Situate this cactus in full sun to partial shade locations as it can tolerate very high heat areas. The Strawberry hedgehog can also cope with temperatures reaching into the teens. If this plant does not fit into your landscape it can easily be grown in a pot with well drained soil.

Photo of the Month

Structural Eclipse
Sunset Park
Matt Durham

