

How to Care for your Cacti

Position

Ideally cacti require as much light as possible, though sometimes there is no choice. You will find it more difficult to keep the plants looking good in poor light conditions.

Watering

Our main advice is “do not be afraid of watering cacti”!

Cacti and succulents can be watered overhead, using a lance and rose if possible, but if there is no hosepipe available then use a can and rose. Alternatively, if you have a tray that can be flooded, then flooding is an acceptable method – you only provide sufficient water so that it is soaked up.

Problems with water containing lime

Flooding is preferable if you have a problem with lime in the water, as lime leaves a deposit on the plants and makes them unsightly.

Spring to Autumn (mid March - mid September)

During spring, summer and autumn, the plants will probably require watering each week, and, if your water doesn't contain lime, overhead watering to keep them dust free will do no harm. The amount you water them will obviously depend on the position, because more light = more heat = more water. Low light situations can be a little more difficult.

Winter watering (October- February)

As the plants will still be in a warm atmosphere during winter, they will still need some water, but probably a reduced amount, once every two weeks or so. Lithops need hardly any water in the winter.

Planted arrangements or 'gardens'

The planted arrangements and especially the ones in terracotta bowls need special attention, as there are a variety of plants depending on a small amount of compost. They will tend to look very sorry for themselves, if left to dry out too much!

Cacti are often grown in terracotta and ceramic containers, most of which will not have drainage holes.

* The ceramic will need a light watering approximately every two weeks.

* The terracotta will need watering more frequently, (being porous they dry out more quickly).

Clues to when cacti and planted arrangements need water!

* Compost looks dry and plants are light when picked up

* Compost comes away from the side of the pots

* Plants look 'tired' or 'grey' and can wrinkle or shrink

* Plants can also change colour and not look fresh

* The gravel in the planted arrangements will shrink away from the sides or sink, when dry.

Pests

The most common and occasional problem, is mealy bug. This shows itself as white fluffy patches in the joints and between ribs, or sometimes in the growing point of the plant. You might see the mealy bug, which is like a small white woodlouse.

Treatment

Mealy bug can be wiped off or even washed off with a pressure water spray. You could also spray the plant with an organic soap-based insecticide (though this should be tried on a small area of the plant first).