

## Learn More and Get Involved

Many hobbyists find associating with other like-minded plant enthusiasts expands their knowledge and enjoyment of these fascinating plants.

Serving western Colorado and surrounding areas, the Chinle Cactus and Succulent Society is devoted to fostering understanding and appreciation of all kinds of succulent plants including cacti.

Information about the Chinle Cactus and Succulent Society can be found by calling Colorado State University Extension at 970-244-1834 or by going to: <http://www.coopext.colostate.edu/TRA/PLANTS/chinlecactus.shtml>.

Besides joining a cactus and succulent club, there are many books aimed at helping beginners become proficient cactus and succulent hobbyists. Two such books are: *The Complete Illustrated Guide to Growing Cacti & Succulents* by Miles Anderson and Simon & Schuster's *Guide to Cacti and Succulents*.

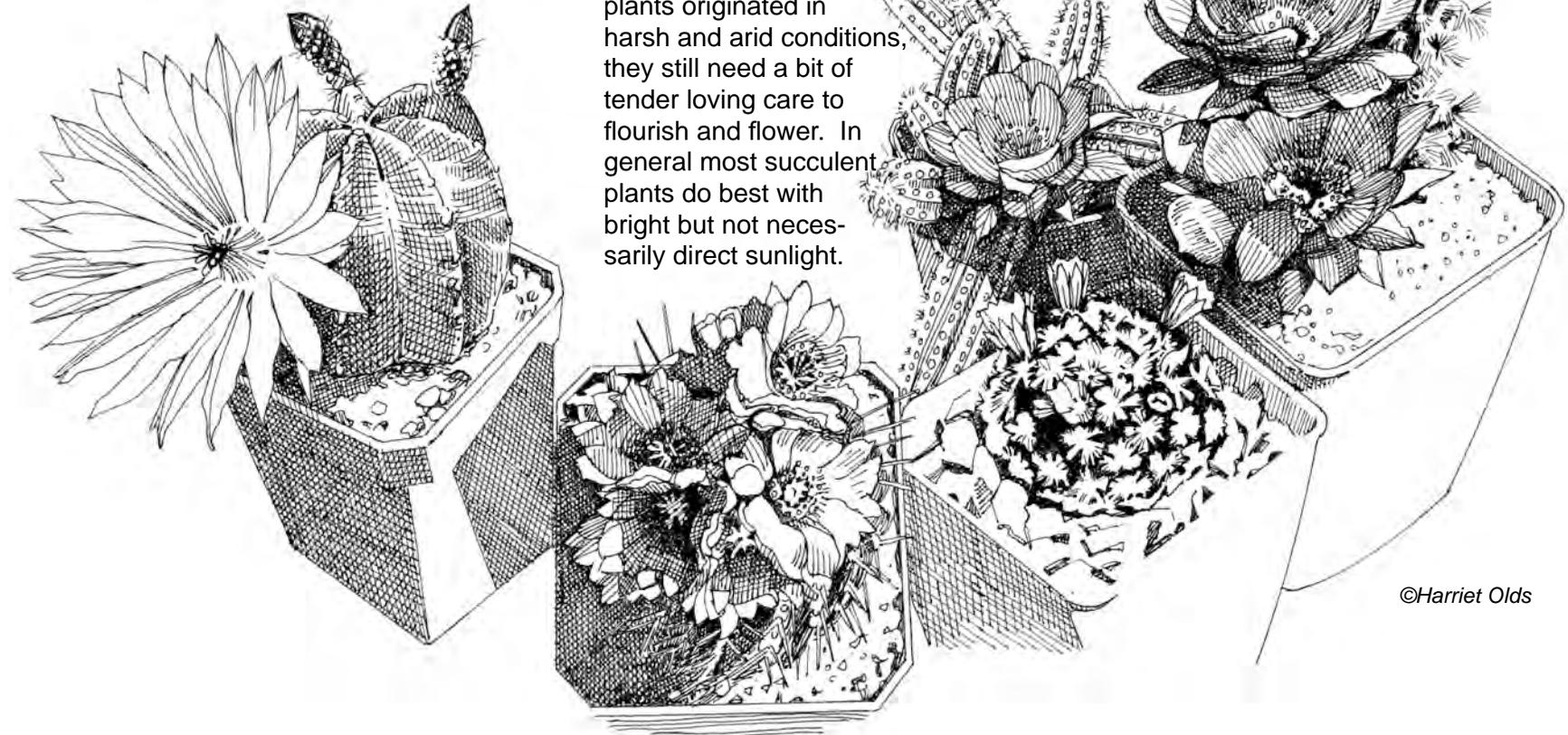
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# CACTUS AND SUCCULENT PLANT CULTURE

## *A Beginning Guide*

*By Don I. Campbell*



**Succulent plants, which include cacti, are among the most beautiful and bizarre in the entire plant kingdom. Their distinctive, sometimes weird adaptations for survival in hostile habitats endear these fascinating plants to a growing number of plant enthusiasts.**

The tremendous diversity of succulent plants and their natural habitats makes their cultivation and care as much an art as a science. Growing many of them can be quite easy as long as their basic needs are satisfied. Even though many succulent plants originated in harsh and arid conditions, they still need a bit of tender loving care to flourish and flower. In general most succulent plants do best with bright but not necessarily direct sunlight.

High daytime temperatures are helpful during their growing season. A well-drained porous soil, properly regulated watering, occasional light fertilizing, a cool and dry rest period, and attention to possible pest problems are also required.

## **Soil and Containers**

Most plants when purchased come in a container with nursery-provided soil and can be kept this way for some

time. Excellent soil mixes are commercially available, but many hobbyists mix their own. A mixture of one-third standard compost, one-third coarse sand, and one-third perlite is a good general composition. Rapid drainage and good aeration are the main requirements for growing healthy plants.

Many types of containers are available. Soil dries out more quickly in unglazed clay pots than in plastic or ceramic pots. Large pots tend to retain moisture longer than small ones. Be sure the container you select provides plant stability and good drainage.

## Light

Southern exposures provide the maximum light, but many plants will grow quite well in bright western or eastern exposures. Insufficient light causes plants to show weak, pallid growth and poor flowering. Too much direct sunlight can result in damage from sun scalding to stems and leaves. Artificial lighting can be used to provide or boost lighting in darker situations. A timer will help regulate lighting for some plants which prefer 14-18 hours of light each day. All lighting requirements are less during the plant's dormant period.

## Water and Nutrients

Over-watering is probably the most common problem when growing cacti and other succulent plants. However, under-watering can also be a problem

during growth periods. The basic rule is to water when dry! Plants may require weekly (or more) saturation waterings during the spring and summer and only occasional light waterings during the fall and winter. Beginners may find a moisture meter helpful. Experience is the best teacher concerning timing, frequency and amount of water. Watch your plants. They can tell you a great deal about their needs.

Light fertilization during the growing season is usually beneficial. Use a standard 10-30-10 plant fertilizer at about one-half the recommended amounts.

## Temperature

Indoor succulent plants will not tolerate freezing temperatures. Temperatures of roughly 50 to 90 degrees are optimum, with the lower values occurring during dormant periods. Good ventilation is important.

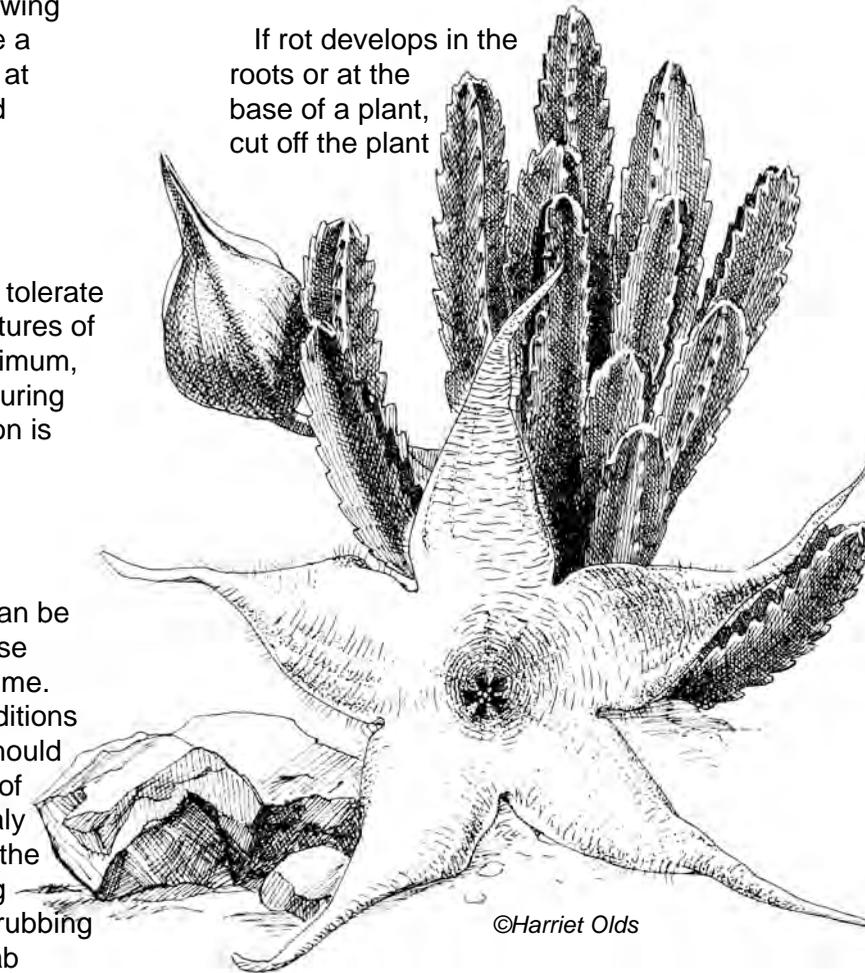
## Pests

Cactus and succulent plants can be quite tough, but insect and disease problems do occur from time to time. Maintaining healthy growing conditions and carefully inspecting plants should minimize such problems. Some of the more common pests are mealy bugs. They are recognizable by the white cottony substance covering them. Repeated applications of rubbing alcohol applied with a cotton swab

will destroy them. Root mealy bugs, because they live on the roots of cacti, are usually undetected until repotting. White chalky webs on the roots indicate their presence.

Spider mites are very small and very hard to see. Fine webs and/or pale yellowish white to brownish spots on new growth usually indicates the presence of spider mites. Sprays are available to assist in control.

If rot develops in the roots or at the base of a plant, cut off the plant



above the rotted part. You may be able to save the unaffected part by letting the cut callus over for a few days and then repotting it in sandy soil. Water very sparingly until roots develop.

## Propagation

Many hobbyists find plant propagation to be an effective and satisfying way to either expand their collection or share plants with others. Plant cuttings and divisions are the easiest and most common propagation methods. While growing plants from seed is slower and may be a bit more challenging, it is definitely one of the more gratifying aspects of the cactus and succulent hobby.

## Outdoor Cactus & Succulent Gardening

In addition to growing cacti & succulents indoors, many aficionados enjoy growing cacti and succulents year-round in their outdoor gardens. Beginners are often surprised to learn there is a wide variety of succulent plants able to survive the Western Colorado winters.

The Chinle Cactus and Succulent Society maintains two well-established outdoor Cactus and Succulent gardens at the Mesa County Fairgrounds and the Western Colorado Botanical Gardens.