

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 49

Indoor Cacti

Succulents

The name “succulent” is also used for cacti, plants that can withstand extreme heat and dryness in the environment.

Cacti hold water in their stems due to the absence of leaves through which water could evaporate. A waxy coating on the stems provides a protective layer that helps to reduce water loss.

A unique feature about these plants is their prickles and thorns, which help to protect the plants from grazing animals.

Believe it or not, these plants thrive on neglect. Many of the cacti are flowering, and if the conditions are right, they will bloom.

Soil

One of the conditions that need to be met is sandy soil due to their original home, which is the desert. Too much of the fine sand, however, may kill the plant, so the perfect soil would consist of one that has peat and loam but that drains well. To help produce plant growth, adding lime to the soil can regulate the acidity.

Potting

Plant growth is best when the plant has space to grow and watering is controlled properly. The minimum size of a pot should be 2½ inches. A layer of rocks or pebbles at the bottom of the pot is usually desirable and adds character if a pot is transparent.

The roots should be able to grow comfortably around the pot. If repotting is needed, about the same size of pot should be purchased.

Watering

The plant should get a good soaking so that the roots are wet. The next watering should occur when the soil is dry. Little to no water should be given between mid autumn and early spring. One does not want to promote growth in the winter because it will shrivel and become weak.

Temperature

During the winter, the cacti should be kept cool, but during the spring and summer, average warmth is ideal. If temperature drops to about 5° C., no harm will occur. Windowsill plants should be brought into a room at night to regain minimal heat. Along with heat, a sunny spot needs to be available.

Pests and Diseases

A warm plant may not always be a healthy plant because many pests and diseases can live on it. Some of the pests are aphids, mealy bugs and scale insects. Treat these pests by maintaining the temperatures and proper watering times.

Some diseases are spotting and root rot. Scraping off the decaying spots and dusting the plant with sulphur can save it. Root rot is identified by the shriveling of the top portion of a plant. The base becomes discoloured and soft. If necessary to save a plant, cut off the rotting sections back to green, healthy growth. Re-root this healthy portion.

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