
CACTUS and SUCCULENT SOCIETY of NEW MEXICO

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ADENIUMS

The genus *Adenium* has around 11 species of plant, all of which are often called the “Desert Rose.” *Adeniums* are found throughout South and East Africa, along the south coast of Arabia and on the island of Socotra. They are members of the Apocynaceae family and closely related to the genus *Pachypodium*. Morphology ranges from dwarf geophyte shrubs to small trees. Most have a caudex but that varies depending on species and habitat. They are winter deciduous, usually dropping leaves in October and greening up again in March/April. Flowering generally occurs in late spring and summer. *Adeniums* are fairly easy to grow, they need coarse, well-drained soil (½ perlite and ½ cactus and succulent mix is a good start) and a warm, sunny location. They like warm to hot weather and most cannot tolerate cold (<50°F) temperatures so they must come inside for the winter. They can dehydrate quite a bit without becoming too stressed. Water sparingly or not at all when dormant and once or twice per week when active. Drench the soil and then let dry out between watering.

Adeniums are not self-fertile. If the flowers are pollinated, then they form impressive seed pods then eventually mature and split open, revealing seeds with fine hair-like fibers at both ends. The seeds are readily dispersed by the winds. Fresh seeds have a high germination rate in warm moist soil.

Pests:

Spider mites love *Adeniums*. If you only have a few plants this is not much of a problem. Watch for signs of mites—yellow spots on leaves or “cobwebs.” You can see the mites with a magnifying lens. Spray foliage with insecticidal soap to kill adults. I use a mixture of one (1) tablespoon liquid soap (not detergent) to one quart of water. You can use dormant spray to kill eggs and adults.

Mealy bugs are also a frequent pest. They surround themselves with a sticky white mass of bug waste at the junction of stems and leaves and can also infest roots. They can be treated by physically removing the white mass and then while out of bright light spraying the affected areas with a mist of rubbing alcohol or insecticidal soap. Alternatively, the plant can be treated with insecticides.

Toxicity:

Adenium sap and foliage are poisonous. Native Africans used the sap of some species to tip spears for hunting. *Adeniums* are closely related to *Nerium oleander*, a poisonous Mediterranean species commonly used for landscaping in the arid southwest. Although the sap is very bitter, it's a good idea to keep an eye on pets and children.