
CACTUS and SUCCULENT SOCIETY of NEW MEXICO

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CULTIVATION TIPS

When your plants arrive, lay them out in a place that is not hot or very cold, and away from full sunlight. It is best to pot them up very soon, especially some of the smaller, fall-growing mesem species. Use pots that have drainage holes in the bottom, which you can cover with stones, paper, screen, etc. Use soil that is only a little moist so it will crumble after you make a ball of soil in your fist. That way it will settle into the pot and fill in around the roots much better. For mesems and regular cacti we use this mix:

50% coarse sand (for making cement)
30% natural sandy loam soil, screened
20 % grit (pumice, perlite, etc.)

For type /13/ limestone-requiring species: Use the same soil, and add approximately one part limestone per 250 parts of soil (one tablespoon per gallon of soil). You can buy horticultural limestone at most garden centers. Add more if your water is acidic, less or none if your water is hard and alkaline.

Be very careful about the sand. Look at several types and make sure that it will not compact with age. Concrete sand from a sand/gravel company usually is a good type to look at. A good sand should have different particle sizes and contain many small stones. The sandy loam soil should not be sterilized unless you have serious pests like nematodes. Natural soil has very beneficial bacteria present that help plants grow much better. The odd weed seeds will sprout. Pull most when they come up, but leave a few as they help you "read" the soil moisture very well: they quickly wilt when the soil dries out.

When potting your plants, tap the pot gently to make sure that the soil is well settled. We prefer not to use any top dressing so that you can always see the moisture level of the soil. Dressing will act as a mulch and hold in the moisture much longer, which often leads to rot.

If the soil used is just moist, there will be enough moisture present for a couple of days until the plant starts rooting again. For the first couple of days, keep the plants in a warm place, lighted but away from brilliant sunlight. Do not soak the pot with water right after potting, as the roots are inactive and you will only promote rotting. With cacti, you can start watering lightly after the first few days. Slowly introduce them to brighter light; usually after about seven (7) days of shading they should be able to take your normal conditions. Most cacti like a bright location, with nearly full sun and lots of ventilation. The degree of spination and flowering will depend on the amount of light. Also important is the winter temperature. You can give them cool sunny conditions, using the minimum temperatures suggested in the catalog.

You should help mesems re-root by misting them daily while keeping them in subdued light for a few days. Mist them only a little, so that the soil does not become soggy. Gradually introduce them to brighter light and keep misting until you see signs of growth, then water as usual. The shrubbies and most summer growers do not need long periods of mist to get them established, just a couple of times to settle the soil.