
CACTUS and SUCCULENT SOCIETY of NEW MEXICO

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MESEMBRYANTHEMUM CULTIVATION TIPS

Mesembryanthemaceae (or mesemb)

Mesembs are succulent plants, also known as ice plants or living stones. They store water in their leaves, using water from their old leaves to make new leaves. They have woody capsules that open in the rain, exposing the seeds.

Distribution: Southwestern Africa, Angola to the Cape

Conditions: Most grow in winter with fogs and rainfall, with cool short days; dry hot summers is the dormant time with little growth.

Soil: grow in a well-drained sandy gritty loam, no wood or bark pieces.

Four Major Types:

Fat-leaved Spring Growers (Lithops, Faucaria, Titanopsis, Nananthus, Stomatiums, Aloinopsis) Some grow in NM gardens.

Conditions: SPRING - active fast growth, new leaves form using old leaves, water freely.

SUMMER - protect from heat and bright sun, they rest, mist in the evening to cool them.

FALL- many will flower, water freely.

WINTER - when cold they go dormant, most can take subfreezing temps, little water needed.

Tip: Old leaves should dry up.

Fat-leaved Fall and Winter Growers (Conophytum, Cheiridopsis, Oophytum, etc.) Grown with cooler nights and shorter days. They love fog and mist.

Conditions: FALL - new heads appear from old dried leaves, mist often in the evening, flowering calls for more watering.

WINTER - flowering continues, mist often, evening watering is good, if leaves split water less.

SPRING -with longer days they go dormant, the outer layer of the leaves turns color and later dries to a papery covering.

SUMMER - protect from heat and bright light, with an occasional evening misting.

Tip: The paper sheath protects the dormant plant from the hot summer sun.

Shrubbies (Ruschia, Lampranthus, Drosanthemum, Delosperma, Trichodiadema) Grown for the huge flower show in spring. Some grow in NM gardens.

Conditions: SPRING - ample water and sun, soaking leads to more flowers.

SUMMER - heat causes them to stop growing, water a bit less often.

Tip: Save cuttings in fall to grow for next year; also easy to grow from seed.

Annuals (Dorotheanthus is the most common) Grown in cool of spring (like sweet peas), then die.

Conditions: Start from seed in early spring when cool. Keep moist and cool with plenty of sunlight. They will flower in 2-3 months, then flower profusely until it turns hot. They usually die when hot weather appears.

Tip: Save seeds to start over again next spring.