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Care of Cacti and Succulents

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Cacti and succulents are a group of plants that come in many varieties of shapes, sizes, colors, and textures. The distinction that they all share in common is that they possess fleshy leaves and stems that store water. Understanding their basic requirements is essential for meeting their needs for successful cultivation. Once you gain this understanding, you'll see that cacti and succulents are fairly easy to grow and you will be rewarded with all the beauty and splendor they have to offer.

Cacti and Succulents require fast draining soil. For container planting you may use a ready mix cactus soil, or a potting soil amended with sand, gravel, or volcanic rock to ensure adequate drainage. Perlite and pumice are also amendments commonly used. If planting in the ground, it is recommended to incorporate sand, gravel, or lava rock in sufficient amounts depending on the density of your soil. Always check the area for low spots where water may collect and not properly drain. Cacti and succulents are not tolerable to having their roots remain wet for extended periods.

Cacti and succulents can be planted in almost any type of container that allows for adequate drainage. Proper drain holes are essential so water flows through the soil and does not remain too wet. Containers should generally be wider than deep, as cacti and succulent roots tend to be more shallow. Try not to use oversized pots as the extra soil tends to stay wetter and will not dry quickly.

When selecting cacti and succulents to buy, purchase plants that are healthy with full leaves and good color. Check for damages and any symptoms of disease or bug infestations. Plants should be transplanted with care as to not damage tender

parts. Roots do not generally need to be pulled apart when planting and the top of the root ball should be level grade with the surrounding soil so as not to bury any stems or lower leaves.

After transplanting, do not water them for several days in case of any damage that may occur during planting. This allows any wounds to callous and heal over to prevent any fungal infections.

When watering cacti and succulents, try to water directly onto the soil rather than overhead. Many of these plants do not care to have sitting water on their leaves. Placing a layer of river rocks on top of the soil can help separate the leaves from touching the soil and help minimize leaf rot. Water thoroughly so the water flows through the drainage holes, wetting the soil completely. Improper or light watering may not allow for uniform root growth and lead to misshapen plants. If you are using a catch tray underneath be sure to remove excess water. Allow the soil to dry completely between watering. This may take differing times depending on time of year, location and type of water requirements of the particular plant. Fertilizing should be done about monthly during growing seasons using specific cacti and succulent formulas or a half strength solution of an all purpose fertilizer.

Most cacti and succulents prefer a bright light location. Many varieties are tolerant of full sun and others would benefit from filtered afternoon sunlight. Species that grow well in full sun tend to take on deep color tones during warmer seasons. Check with your plant provider to ensure the light requirements of your plants. Often gradual exposure to sun is necessary to prevent any sunburn from occurring on newer plants. Cold tolerance can be an issue if you live outside a frost free area. Depending on the hardiness of the species, covering with protective cloths or structures may be needed on nights with freezing temperatures.

Try to keep plants looking good by removing dead and decaying leaves. This helps prevent insect infestations and lessens chances of any diseases forming. Overwatering is usually the largest reason for cacti and succulent decline and death rather than under watering.

Knowing and understanding the specific needs of your cacti and succulents can reward you with many years of gardening enjoyment!