



Cactus Family
Succulent Plants

Cactus collecting has long been a widespread hobby--one could say a widespread obsession--in the United States. Cacti exhibit such unusual forms, and, when they blossom, provide such dazzling and unexpected flowers, that they appeal even to those persons unswayed by the charms of other houseplants. Cacti are almost exclusively New World natives. In common with such unrelated Old World succulents as aloes, euphorbias, and living stones, they are masters of water retention and survival in extremely dry environments. Unlike their Old World counterparts, however, they possess unique structures called *areoles*--which are where the plants' clusters of protective spines are located, and where new growth originates.

How to Care for Your Plant:

LIGHT: Direct and preferably day-long sunlight (as provided by an unobstructed southern window). Cacti will often survive for extended periods in sites with lower light levels, but they probably will not thrive or flower.

WATERING: During the plant's active growth or flowering, water when the soil surface becomes completely dry. During the plant's dormant phase, water very, very sparingly--once every month, or when the plant shows signs of shrinking or "deflating" due to low water content. When you do water, drench the soil thoroughly: at least a little water should come out of the pot's bottom drainage holes. However, the plant should not stand in saucer water for more than ten minutes.

FEEDING: Feed sparingly, even when the plant is growing actively. Use a calcium-containing cactus fertilizer at half the concentration and feeding frequency listed in the product directions.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Overwatering may promote root rot. In addition, be very careful to avoid both the long, obvious spines and the tiny bristles that grow in the areoles. The bristles are almost invisible; they can easily lodge in your skin and become painful splinters.