

Real Estate

GREEN HOUSE

A date with Desert Rose

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Adenium, a genus from Africa and Arabia referred to as desert rose, is not only grown for its swollen caudex but also for its beautiful flowers that give the plant a majestic look.

As the genus has evolved in a huge area, various different forms of this have developed. The species range from shrubs with caudices to small trees with swollen trunks up to 3 metres tall.

These plants adapt to pot culture very well and should be ideally grown in clay pots that allow water to evaporate through the porous walls lowering the temperature during peak summers.

Whether grown as natural dwarf bonsais or small trees, these make eye-catching specimens. The beauty of the caudex increases as it ages. The flowers range from pink to red and bloom from the beginning of spring to autumn.



Nutritional needs

For healthy caudex and good flower development, adeniums need free draining porous compost with a lot of nutrients and full sun. Such compost will enable the plant to take up nutrition with each watering for good growth and form.

Seasonal care

Most people tend to lose these beauties during winters by over watering or by keeping the plants in the open without any shelter from dew.

During summer these plants can be watered daily like any other house plant but during winters in our region these need not be watered from December to February. Keep the pots in a veranda or in some sheltered place to protect them from dew.

Growth cycle

The plant shows maximum growth during first 4-5 years and hence the development of its caudex and more number of branches during this period needs emphasis. The plants grown in deep pots or in beds develop a carrot-like caudex which is not desirable. The secret to getting better results for overall development of a larger caudex lies in growing the plant for the first three years in a shallow bowl-shaped container without exposing the caudex. Then with each re-potting lift the caudex a bit enabling the plant to form more roots that will go down. To get more number of branches for better foliage formation, pinch the growing tips of branches twice in the growing season. Seed-grown plants develop better caudex than the plants grown from cuttings. For further boosting the growth, a teaspoonful of NPK in equal proportion and some micro-nutrients should be added to the plant twice in a growing season.

Proper propagation

Propagation is carried out by seeds, cuttings and grafting. Large scale propagation of adeniums for commercial purposes is usually done by grafting. Mature *Adenium obesum* plants are used as the stock material for adenium grafting. *Adenium swazicum*, *arabicum*, *multiflorum*, *somalense*, *oleifolium* and *boehmianum* species develop into excellent specimen plants.

Caudex BOUNTY

Adenium arabicum: It has an exceptionally beautiful thick caudex formation having multiple branches emerging directly from the caudex with hardly any differentiation between the trunk and the branches. It makes the largest squat caudex of all species. With porous and nutritious compost the formation of caudex is quicker and in 4 to 5 years a good specimen plant can be developed. Its leaves are comparatively larger with a broad surface and leathery appearance. The plant loses its leaves early in winter months. Plants grown under full sun to partial shade conditions give a compact look of a miniature tree. It flowers profusely with red to pink tinge to enhance the beauty of a uniform canopy of leaves. Bonsai lovers can create a bonsai of it in a short time. Besides creating and decorating a plant in pot, mature *arabicum* can be grown in rockeries.

Adeniums with largest leaves

Adenium boehmianum: It is a beautiful slow growing but easy-to-grow adenium having wide glossy leaves that are 10 to 15 cm long and are the largest in the genus. The species tend to bloom in clusters near the branch tip later than other species. The flowers are trumpet-shaped and range from pink to deep purple. This is the most slender caudex-forming species with multiple stems emerging from it. The beautiful flowers and the leaves compensate for such caudex formation.

Adenium compost

Adeniums need special compost which is porous and rich in nutrients. Add the following to a cubic foot of the mixture of mature cow dung manure, coal cinder powder (Rakhee) and coarse sand in equal proportion. To obtain usable compost, allow the moist mixture to rot for a week's time in a closed container.

- Neem cake 500 gram
- Bone meal 500 gram
- Micronutrients 200 gram
- Bavistin powder (antifungal) 100 gram

Care of adeniums

- To prevent rotting use well-drained potting compost.
- For profuse blooming place the plant in a sunny and airy location.
- Needs lots of watering during growth period for better development of caudex.
- During extreme winter, shelter the plant for protection against dew.
- Remove the shoots which emerge from the base of a grafted plant periodically.
- Avoid re-potting during winter.
- Add fertiliser only after watering.
- The plant should be gradually brought to full sun to prevent sun-scorching of the caudex.
- During winters of north India do not water from December to February to prevent rotting.

The writer is President of the National Cactus and Succulent Society of India