

# Real Estate

## GREEN HOUSE

### Cacti you can caress

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Whenever one talks about a cactus, the first image that comes to mind is that of thorns that can cause painful pricks. But there is a pleasant surprise for those who shun cacti because of the thorns. Many of cactus species are actually without thorns and these "spine-less" beauties are much sought after by gardening enthusiasts and are a collector's delight. So if your Vastu expert has cautioned you against keeping a cactus inside your home because it has "disturbing" thorns, you can opt for these thorn-less marvels. Not only this, a beautiful and unique collection can be made from these as they can be accommodated in a small area.

**Here are some of the species that don't have spines and grow well in our region:**

Lophophora williamsii, Turbinicarpus pseudopectinatus, Frailea castanea, Pelecyphora aselliformis, Aztekium ritteri, Tephrocactus diadematus, Astrophytum asterias, Astrophytum myriostigma, Echinopsis subdenudata, Echinocereus viereckii var. morricallii, all eight species of Ariocarpus, epiphytic cacti, and some more.

#### Cluster grace

Aztekium ritteri is one of the most stunning and one of the slowest growing diminutive globular cacti. It seldom exceeds 5 cm across. Despite its small size, when this plant matures, it readily offsets and forms a cluster of heads.

This may take 25-30 years to form a 10-12cm group. Due to its unique shape it can't be mistaken for any other species.



## Growing tips

- Water this plant sparingly during summer, but during winters it should be watered regularly.
- Grow it in filtered light conditions.
- Compost used should be gritty and freely draining.

The distinctive features are its secondary ribs which form numerous furrows on the main ribs to make it an architectural wonder. The blooms are pink to white and flower profusely throughout the summer. As it is a rare and a difficult to grow cactus, it is generally grafted on pereskiosis stock to encourage growth and also to reduce its difficulty in growing.

## Royal riders

Epiphytic cacti also known as jungle cacti are often found growing on trees in tropical rainforests and have evolved in forests where the climate remains warm and humid throughout the year. They are called epiphytic because they grow on other plants without being parasitic on them. Unlike other cacti, these are thorn-less plants with flat and thick stems resembling leaves. Popular Christmas cactus also falls in this category.



## Christmas cactus

If you have not seen a Christmas cactus plant, then you surely have missed something. These are good looking plants with magnificent display of 5-8 cm long tubular shaped, white to pink coloured blooms during winter months. These add colour to the garden when most of the other cacti are still dormant.

Christmas cactus is the common name of a species of epiphytic genus Schlumbergera. With some of these plants having pendulous type of growth, a long lasting and a beautiful hanging basket can be created using these. It is easily propagated through stem segments.

This is one cactus whose top foliage can be pruned from the nodes with a sharp knife to encourage the plant to become bushy and to have more clumps of blooms in the ensuing season. This is done after the flowering period is over and when the cactus is in rest. Pruning helps in removing damaged or diseased leaves and imparts vigour to the plant.

## Growing tips

- **Keep the plant in shade or under filtered light, away from direct sunlight**
- **Use normal freely draining cactus compost for good growth.**
- **Fertilise with NPK (nitrogen, phosphorous and potash) every month during summer season.**
- **As it comes from a humid area, don't allow the plant to dry out completely.**

## Soft-bodied beauties

Lophophora williamsii is a bluish green Mexican spine-less cactus with a soft body and well-defined ribs and furrows. Its beauty is enhanced by the growth of tufts of wool which are equally spaced on the ribs. The climax comes when it is seen with pink flowers on its apex. It has a large tap root and needs to be grown in a deeper pot for its good growth. It is a slow-growing species and takes three to five years to flower. However, it can be grafted for rapid growth. Normally the plant remains solitary, but sometimes forms clumps.



## GROWING TIPS

- Acclimatise it to grow where it receives about 1-2 hours of sunlight and water freely during summers.

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- Don't water during extreme winter of north India.

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- Fertilise only twice in growing season, as over fertilisation will force the epidermis to split.

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- Grow it in a deep pot to accommodate large tap root for good growth.