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RealEstate

REAL ESTATE

GREEN HOUSE
PACHYPODIUM LANDSCAPING MARVEL
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Landscaping is an outdoor activity to modify and improve the visible features around a home in an aesthetic manner.

plants is very important for attractive landscaping. A The selection of suitable few well-selected plants grown at proper locations have more impact than trees planted at random.

Some of the succulents which have gained popularity as landscaping plants in the recent years are plants of the genus pachypodium. Some pachypodiums are caudiciform, where as others are stem succulents. All these ornamentals are much sought after and highly valued for their long lasting and beautiful flowers and amazing caudices. Even young pachypodiums will amaze you with their prolific floral display. The trumpet shaped white, red or yellow flowers appear at the stem tips of plants aged 6-8 years.



Pachypodium lamerei (left) and geayi enhance the beauty of any green space

Pachypodium in Greek means 'thick rooted'. It is a native of Africa and Madagascar. There are 25 known species, of which five species come from South Africa and 20 from Madagascar. They range from pachypodium brevicaulis, not more than a couple of inches off the ground to pachypodium geayi, which grows up to 15 ft.

Madagascar is best known for its lush green forests and endangered lemurs, but the island's west coast hosts another equally endangered species of Pachypodium plants. By storing water in their thick tuberous trunks these prickly beauties survive the hot and dry climate.

Most of the pachypodium species are rugged and easy to grow. They grow well in porous compost and thrive during summer with hardly any care. During winters these plants shed their leaves and go into dormancy.

This week we focus on two species of pachypodium — lamerei and geayi — that have withstood the test of being one of the best landscaping plants.

Grace in your garden

Both lamerei and geayi are surely not cacti as is normally assumed. These are, in fact, stem succulents and are among the fastest growing pachypodiums. These grow best in cultivation. One can easily mistake geayi with lamerei. The trunk of geayi is thicker and metallic grey, where as that of lamerei is thin and shiny silver. They have a beautiful vertical trunk which is covered in clusters of three spines, spiralling around them. The stems are usually solitary and branch only after reaching a height of about 12 ft when grown in open. With the branches, the plant reaches about 15 ft in height and forms a beautiful crown with lanceolate leaves about 1 ft long and 2 inches wide. The leaves of lamerei are dark green, and those of geayi are bluish dark green. In pot culture, the plant attains a height of about 5 ft. and needs a nutritious and well-drained soil. Long lasting, white and scented flowers are borne on the crowns of mature plants.

Propagation is usually done through seeds. The seed pod resembles banana. As these species are fast growing, other slow growing species of pachypodium are grafted on to these species to expedite their growth.

PLANT CARE

- Take care of the spines from external damage as they don't regenerate.
- In pot culture, repotting should be carried out every three years.
- Grow the plant in a sunny location.
- During summers, these can be watered as normal houseplants, but during winter, water only when the top soil gets dry.
- Compost should be porous for good drainage.
- Fertilise once in two months during growing season.
- Spray solution of 4 ml of contact insecticide in a litre of water, twice in growing season.

EYE CATCHERS

- The solitary tall spiny trunk with branches on top gives a unique look
- Long lasting bunches of white flowers at the crown
- Gives a different and a unique look to the whole landscape
- Can tolerate harsh weather conditions
- Though deciduous, these shed leaves only in extreme winter conditions
- They grow till a suitable height and are neither too high nor too low

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