

RealEstate

GREEN HOUSE Plump up your garden Maj Gen C.S. Bewli



Plants having thick or swollen base, either underground or over ground are Caudiciforms. The beauty of these plants lies not only in their leaves and flowers, but also in their swollen trunks. They have a very unique look which makes them the centre of attraction in any garden. The recent spurt in interest in these plants is attributed to their easy availability in the region now. The swollen portion of the plant is called caudex. The formation of caudex and its character varies from species to species. Seed-grown plants generate a much better caudex than those grown from cuttings.

As most of these Caudiciforms are adapted to arid conditions, they have the ability to store water and nutrients in their caudices and need comparatively less water than other plants.

Some of adeniums, adenias, bombax, dioscoreas, eurphorbias, fockias and pachypodiums have amazing caudices and are relatively popular plants.

Here are two species that grow well and look beautiful in Indian conditions.



Jatropha berlandieri

EUPHORBIA

Wonderful specimens of this plant are created in pots. In nature the caudex of this plant is underground. It has beautiful, artistic and intermingled roots. The unknown secret of beautifying the plant is to pull the caudex out. The technique to do this involves the following steps:

- Grow the plant in a deep pot for about two years.
- At the time of re-potting, lift the caudex



Euphorbia

over ground as much as possible.

- Repot the plant alternate years, and at every repotting, lift the caudex further by about an inch.

Within five years you get a wonderful specimen of a caudiciform, which looks beautiful all round the year. The plant can accept neglect and can survive over watering and under watering, however it is always better to water only when the top soil becomes dry. It bears thorny branches about 12-18 inches in length emerging from the top central portion of the plant. Some of the older branches that hang from the pot should be removed from the base. It can also be made into a beautiful hanging basket, provided hanging branches are kept intact. The plant does not shed its thorny branches and grows well from full to partial sun conditions. Propagation can be easily done by cuttings.

FICUS PETIOLARIS

This looks like the peepal tree and is a much sought after plant worldwide. It develops a very fine and wide caudex at the base. It can grow to a height of 30 ft in the natural habitat (Mexico). The fresh growth of leaves is reddish in colour with pink to red veins, but with the passage of time the leaves give a metallic green sheen. Its heart-shaped leaves, which are leathery with pointed tips, resemble leaves of the peepal tree. For the caudex to develop well it should be grown in a shallow pot. The plant should be watered regularly during growing season (summers). Care should be taken that watering is done only when the top soil gets dry as over watering will kill the plant. During winter months the plant goes into dormancy and sheds its leaves; its requirement of water also reduces considerably. It grows well under full to partial sun. With some pruning and shaping, the plant can be trained as a beautiful bonsai and for aesthetics; the size of leaves can be reduced during growing season by the process of defoliation. Propagation of the plant can be done by taking cuttings of preferably 4 inches.



**Ficus
petiolaris**

A beautiful and healthy caudex is normally generated by providing:

- Porous soil mix with good drainage
- Two to three hours of sunlight for better photosynthesis
- Fertilisation with NPK once in three months during growing period
- Re-potting once in two years during growth period
- Water only when the top soil gets dry

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