

RealEstate

GREEN HOUSE

Romancing the cacti

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With the increase in population, the prices of land have sky rocketed resulting in smaller houses having no room for gardens or even for big pots. Not only this, the longer commuting time and busy work schedules have left people with little time to devote to gardening. Annuals and other plants need lots of soil, space and water and in metropolitan and big cities there is scarcity of water also. So in such a scenario cacti appear to be the best bet for those looking for plants that need less care and maintenance.

Cacti need smaller pots, less space, soil and water and have the unique ability to grow well without much attention. If you are away on a holiday, most of the cactus varieties will survive and may also surprise you with flowers on your return. Here we bring you some tips and tricks on growing cacti successfully so that you can have a beautiful but low maintenance garden.



THE COMPOST

The single most important factor in growing a healthy cactus is the correct potting mixture. The compost used should be porous and rich in nutrients. Mix 50 per cent each of coarse sand and mature dung manure (or leaf mould). To a cubic foot of this mixture add:

- Nitrogen, Phosphorous, Potash (NPK) in equal ratio - 50 gm
- Bone Meal, a slow releasing phosphorous nutrient - 100 gm.



- Thimet or Furadan, a fumigant - 25 gm.
- Trace elements - 10 gm
- Sprinkle some water in the above mixture and mix thoroughly. Put it in a bag or some container for a couple of weeks to make it ready for use.

LOOKING BEYOND POTTED CACTI

Dish gardening is an art of planting small ornamentals plants in shallow vases or dishes in a creative manner. A pretty impressive miniature landscape can be developed in a dish garden of cacti and succulents. These plants are ornamental in nature and come in various shapes, sizes and colours. Such dish gardens have become popular among plant lovers, as these plants can remain in the dish for years. They can be placed artistically to enhance the ambience of your home during special occasions and also make excellent gifts for special friends.



CREATING A DISH GARDEN

- Spread half an inch layer of crocks or gravel at the bottom of the dish for better drainage and fill the dish with moist potting compost leaving one centimetre space below the rim of the dish.
- Place the selected plants one by one in the dish as per the abstract design, which can be changed for better creativity. Tap the dish on the ground 2-3 times so that the plants are firmly set in the compost. Do not press the compost tightly as this will prevent drainage and exclude air, which is necessary.
- To enhance the beauty of the dish garden, spread some gravel on the top surface and suitably place decorative items such as small pieces of rock, ceramic huts and animals etc.
- Place the dish garden in shade and don't water it for a week. After a week bring it gradually to morning sunlight.
- Cactus dish garden needs very little care and maintenance once set up. It is watered only when the top soil gets dry during the growing season, and once in a week during winters.