

Care of Euphorbias in Containers

The genus *Euphorbia* is one of the largest in the plant kingdom with more than 3,000 species, including poinsettias and the garden weed spurge. About 460 of the species are succulent, originating almost entirely from the drier regions of Africa, Arabia, Madagascar, and India. Succulent *Euphorbias* are amazingly diverse in their forms, ranging from small globular shapes to shrubs to massive trees. Many resemble the cacti of the New World in shape and thorns.

The name of the genus comes from Euphorbus, physician to one of the kings of Mauritania in the first century A.D. The king was said to have been reminded of Euphorbus when seeing the plant *Euphorbia resinifera*, because both were portly in shape.

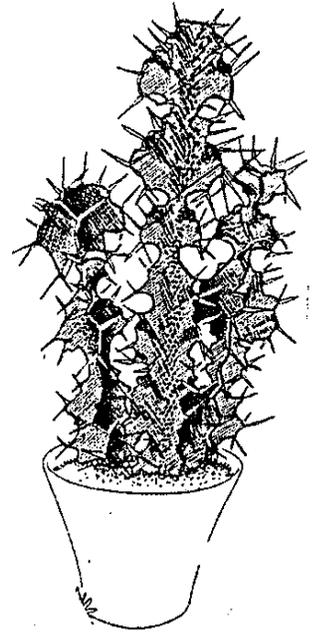
Care of *Euphorbias* is difficult to generalize, because of their great diversity and range of habitat; however most respond to a system of care similar to that of cacti.

SOIL: Like other succulents, *Euphorbias* require soil that is very well drained. While some growers prefer to mix their own soil, you can do well with a commercial potting mix designed for cacti and succulents. For additional drainage, gravel or pumice can be added. Try to avoid peat moss in the mix, as this will repel water if it should ever go dry.

WATER: Water *Euphorbias* during the warmer months about once a week when they are growing and only once a month during the cool months to maintain healthy roots. While the majority of *Euphorbias* are summer growers, there are a few which are strictly winter growers. When in doubt, it is always better to withhold water than to give too much. Become familiar with how much the pot weighs when dry or use a moisture meter as a guide. Signs of growth are new thorns and tissue at the ends of stems and the addition of leaves in some species. Water the pot thoroughly in order to wet all portions of the soil. If you must use saucers under the pots, you will have to leach out accumulated salts several times a year.

LIGHT: The full sun in the low desert regions is too strong for most *Euphorbias*. These plants require bright, but indirect light. In higher altitudes this will mean full sun in the summer, and as much sun as possible in the winter. Many *Euphorbias* will do well in a covered patio or in a bright spot in a house. Outdoors, the addition of shade cloth in the summer months will minimize sunburn.

FERTILIZATION: A soluble fertilizer such as Miracle Gro or Peters is recommended at $\frac{1}{4}$ the usual strength. Fertilize during the growing season two or three times a month. Avoid fertilizer with high percentages of nitrogen.



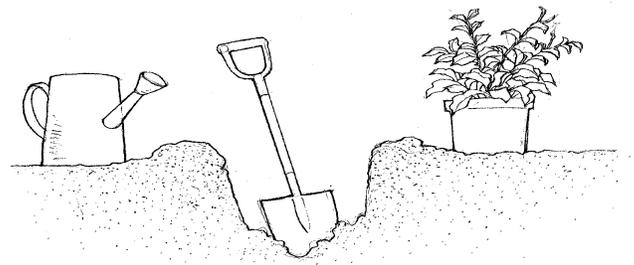
PROPAGATION: Euphorbias can be grown from seed, cuttings, or root divisions. Like cacti, cuttings need to be allowed to dry and callus over for one to two weeks before planting. When cut, Euphorbias bleed profusely. Their white milky sap contains latex and can cause burning and irritation to those with sensitive skin. Contact with the eyes, nose, or mouth can be extremely painful, and it should be washed off with water at once. If the condition persists, seek medical attention immediately.

PESTS AND DISEASES: While Euphorbias are relatively pest-free, spider mites, mealybugs, and aphids can occasionally be a problem, especially on the leafier species. Malathion and Disyston work well but can cause some tissue burn. It is advised to spray late in the day and to use a slightly weaker solution until you are familiar with the safest concentration. Both of these products are available over the counter, but still should be handled with great care.

Need Help?

For more information about particular desert plants or problems, call the Desert Botanical Garden's Plant Hotline, 480-481-8120, Monday through Friday, from 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. or email your questions to planthotline@dbg.org

The Desert Botanical Garden provides a range of services to homeowners including a desert Plant Hotline, a variety of classes about landscaping and gardening in the desert, an onsite library, and an extensive selection of resources in the Garden Shop.



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