

Care of a Boojum Tree

Boojum tree (*Fouquieria columnaris*) is a large succulent closely related to the ocotillo. A remarkable looking plant, often compared to an upside down parsnip, it naturally occurs only in Baja California and in a restricted area of Sonora, Mexico. Long-lived plants, some are thought to have achieved over 500 years of growth.

Boojum trees will grow very well in the Phoenix area despite the fact that they are cold tender. Plants put in the ground should be covered when they are small, and placed in a very warm area of the yard away from cold air accumulators such as washes or depressions.

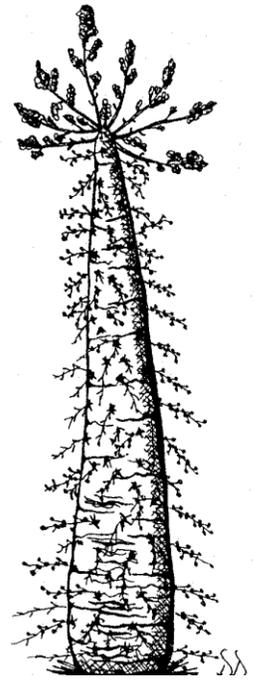
DORMANCY: Boojum trees are summer dormant. This means that beginning sometime in April plants begin to lose their leaves and reduce metabolic activity significantly. The plant blooms during this dormancy, usually in July and August. Leaves will reappear and growth will resume sometime after mid-September, occasionally as late as November.

WATERING: In the cool weather, when the plant is actively growing, water a Boojum regularly. Small plants in pots may need water weekly. During this time, leaves which turn yellow or brown, or begin to drop are a sign of too little water. Plants in the ground, which are over 3 feet tall, do well with regular watering every 2-3 weeks during the cool season.

While dormant, during the warm weather, Boojum trees require only enough water to keep them from shriveling. Leaves which turn yellow or brown and drop in late spring are a signal of the onset of dormancy, and cannot be encouraged to resprout with watering. Watch the tip; if it begins to shrivel or shrink, water the plant, otherwise it is best left alone. The onset of leaf buds, or the sudden appearance of leaves marks the end of the dormant period.

PLANTING: Boojum trees are fairly slow growing, so they will remain happily in a container for a very long time. Very small plants should only be planted out if they can be protected from full sun by a bush or tree as they grow up. Larger plants do best in full sun, but even then plants need shade during the first summer to avoid sunburn. Sunburn will show up as a yellowing of the skin on the south or west side of the plant. Boojum trees are best planted in the fall, at the beginning of their growing cycle. However, a spring planting can be successful if care is given to shading the plant.

Boojum trees are not particular about the type of soil in which they are planted as long as it has very good drainage. Be careful that the plant is not placed in an area that accumulates water, or is in the fall of a roof drip line. The addition of gravel, decomposed granite, or sand will help loosen heavier soils, thereby allowing the root system to get spread out and established evenly. Other soil amendments are not necessary.



Planting a Boojum is quite simple. Once the hole is dug and gravel, decomposed granite, or sand if necessary is added, remove the Boojum from the container. Be gentle with the root ball as it can be quite fragile and break off from the plant if handled too roughly. Shake the soil from around the root ball until the roots are exposed. This will allow the roots to spread more readily.

Take care to plant the boojum at the original soil line, no deeper. Firm the soil around the roots as you backfill the hole. Be careful that the plant is placed in the hole so that it will be straight. Water thoroughly after the hole has been backfilled.

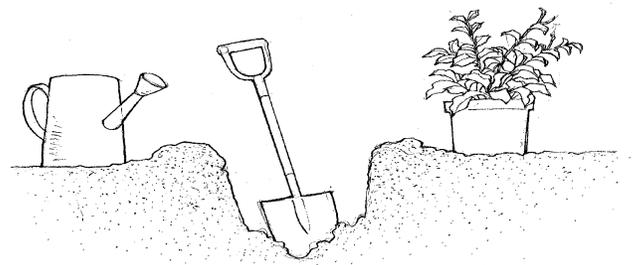
FERTILIZATION: Boojum rarely require fertilization, and certainly not in their first year in the ground. Fertilize lightly only during the growing season.

PRUNING: It is not necessary, and generally not desirable, to prune the branches from a Boojum. An exception would be in moving a large one, where it may be necessary to remove side branches to prevent injury to the plant or to the movers.

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

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