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CACTUS CARE

Watering Guidelines for Healthy Cacti

Cacti are unique desert plants that have an amazing ability to store water and adapt to new environments. However, over-watering —combined with poorly drained soil — is a recipe for these plants to struggle. The soil should dry out almost completely between watering cycles. To test soil moisture, check the root zone about 2-3 inches below the surface. If the soil is still damp, wait until it is dry before applying more water. Regularly checking the root zone before watering gives you a good idea of what your plants' watering needs are. For most native plants, supplemental water is only necessary during the summer months.

Common Problems To Watch Out For

Other than over-watering, cacti are susceptible to frost damage and sunburn. Exposed plants subjected to freezing temperatures (lasting several hours), can sustain damage. Usually the plant eventually outgrows this damage; although, severe damage to columnar cacti may cause that part of the plant to die completely. To help protect from harsh winter weather, cover your plant with a cotton sheet (never plastic) or cover the tips of columnar cacti with Styrofoam cups.

Another common issue with nursery cacti is sunburn, which can cause permanent scarring. You can help minimize this by verifying the cactus' orientation in the nursery then planting it in the same orientation at home; the side of the cactus or succulent that grew facing the rising sun in the East will need to face the East when planted. If this is not possible, you can place a shade cloth over your new plants to help them adjust to the sunlight.





Other Challenges You May Encounter With Cacti

Three main issues cause cacti to suffer or die: soil-borne pathogens, insects, and animals. Pathogens, mostly fungi, affect cacti in many different ways. Normally you'll see brown depressions form at the affected area. In some cases, the affected areas can be treated by a fungicide. If the disease has spread to the point where it is highly noticeable, it is better to remove the cactus before the disease spreads to neighboring plants. Proper watering is the key to preventing the spread of soil-borne pathogens.

Proper watering also plays a key role in discouraging insects from damaging cacti. Insects are opportunistic and need moisture to survive, so saturating your soil with water is an open invitation to an insect.

Animals, particularly rabbits and javelina, find some varieties of cacti tasty and can cause significant damage. The best way to prevent animal damage is to limit access to the plants. Install wire mesh around the plant, especially while they are young. Or simply find a different location.

Sources:

https://www.arizonacactussales.com/care-and-tips

https://extension.arizona.edu/educational-materials

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