

Care and Maintenance

The cactus garden will need very little maintenance once established and little or no watering will be needed. Cacti will be able to survive on rainfall unless the area is experiencing an extended period of drought. A little supplemental water, however, will increase the rate of growth and can result in more attractive looking plants. Just be sure not to over water. Do not water cacti during the winter months. Cacti may be fertilized sparingly in the spring with a half-strength solution. A liquid bloom-boosting fertilizer is preferred.



Resources

The High Desert Cactus Garden, located at the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station is a great resource for the homeowner. The High Desert Cactus Garden provides information on selection, planting techniques, care and maintenance as well as design ideas. The local cactus club is a great source of information. Members can provide very helpful advice based on their knowledge and many years of experience.

Useful Links and Literature

The El Paso Cactus and Rock Club
www.cichildpress.com/elpasocactusclub

PLANTanswers Cactus Culture
plantanswers.tamu.edu/publications/trees/cactus/html

Cactus and Succulent Society of America
www.cssainc.org

How to Care for Cacti
www.aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/trees/cactus.html

How to Transplant a Cactus
Cals.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/az1376

Month-by-Month Gardening in the Desert Southwest, Mary Irish, Cool Springs Press, Nashville, TN, 2003 (Chapter 3).

Located at
TexasA&M AgriLife Research Center
1380 A&M Circle
El Paso, TX 79927



Directions: From the West, Airport/Downtown El Paso on I-10: Take exit 34, Loop 375 / Americas Avenue, 8 miles from Airway Blvd. This is the first exit after Zaragosa Road. Stay on Gateway East and go under Americas. Just past where traffic is merging onto Gateway East from Americas Avenue, turn right on A&M Circle at the green sign that says "Texas A&M Research Center".

From the East on I-10: Take exit 34, Loop 375 / Americas Avenue. This is the first exit after Eastlake Dr. Stay on Gateway West (the access road paralleling the freeway) and go under Americas Avenue. Immediately after that, bear right on the cloverleaf that takes you to Americas Avenue south. Cross the bridge and immediately take the exit for I-10 east / Van Horn. You will be on Gateway East. Just past where the traffic is merging onto Gateway East from Americas Avenue, turn right on A&M Circle at the green sign that says "Texas A&M Research Center".

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

EL PASO COUNTY
MASTER GARDENER HOT LINE
915-566-1276
elpasomg@ag.tamu.edu

DENISE S. RODRIGUEZ, M.S.
COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT-HORTICULTURE
9521 Socorro Road, Suite A-2
Ysleta Annex - Box 2
El Paso, TX 79927
Phone: 915-860-2515
Fax: 915-860-2536
Email: drodriguez@ag.tamu.edu

Educational programs of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin

The Texas A&M System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

GARDENING IN THE DESERT SOUTHWEST PUBLICATION SERIES

Create a High Desert Cactus Garden



TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

Create a High Desert Cactus Garden

Creating a cactus garden is a wonderful way to showcase High Desert native and adapted plants while creating a low-water use and low maintenance landscape. As well as an attractive addition to the landscape, a cactus garden can provide the homeowner with a very interesting and satisfying hobby.

Plan the Garden

Start by selecting a sunny location with good drainage. An area that has a lot of standing water after heavy rains is not a good location for a cactus garden, as excessive water can increase the chance of disease or even kill the cactus. If the chosen location ponds excessive water, a berm of sandy soil can be constructed on which to plant the garden. Since cacti sometimes grow in the shade of rocks or taller desert vegetation, some shade in the garden should not be a problem, and may even be beneficial, for some species of cacti. If no shade is available, the gardener may decide to add other native plants or large rocks to provide some shade for shade-loving cacti.

After selecting the location, decide on the size and shape of the garden. The border of the bed can be outlined with rocks. Remove any grass or weeds. Check the soil composition. Cacti grow best in sandy, well-drained soil. If necessary, sand or gravel can be added to the soil to increase drainage. If the location selected for the cactus bed is flat, mounds of soil can be built up, thus increasing drainage for the planted species.



Select Plants

Cacti can be purchased from local nurseries or retail stores. The local native plant society or cactus rescue group may also be able to provide information on how to obtain rescued cacti.

In selecting plants for the garden be sure to choose plants that are hardy in the High Desert. Choose healthy plants free from damage or disease. Since cacti are slow growing plants, selection of a variety of sizes will result in a more attractive garden. Keep in mind that plants grown locally may be better adapted to local soil and weather conditions and may become established in the garden more successfully.

Plants native to the Chihuahuan Desert may have developed more resistance to local diseases and increased protection from wildlife than cacti originating in other locations. It is also important to identify those cacti which do well in full sun and those which require some shade and plant them accordingly. If non-local cacti are to be included in the garden, be sure to check the cold hardiness of the plants. Cacti which originate in warm climates may not be suitable for outdoor planting but may do well indoors. Cacti kept in a greenhouse prior to purchase will need gradual exposure to the sun prior to planting in the garden.

Plant

Cacti can be planted throughout the year locally. Before planting, place the cacti in a pleasing arrangement in the garden. Be sure to consider the cacti's orientation toward the sun. Cacti tend to bend slightly towards the sun and



consider the shade requirements of the plants when determining their new location. Recently rescued cacti, as well as those being relocated, should be kept out of the ground for several days before replanting to allow time for damaged roots to callous. Be cautious when handling cacti to avoid injury.



Cacti can be easily handled with kitchen tongs or leather gloves. Wrapping leather gloves with several layers of duct tape provides additional protection. Cacti can also be wrapped in a roll of newspaper or paper towel. A carpet remnant or blanket is useful when moving large species such as barrel cacti.

Inspect the cactus and trim any damaged roots that can decay and allow disease to enter the plant. Dig a hole wide enough to accommodate the cactus and deep enough to cover the roots. Use the dirt line on the side of the cactus as a guide for planting depth. Place the cactus in the hole and use a stick or the end of a shovel to pack sandy dirt around the roots of the cactus. When planting a larger cactus such as a barrel, rest the cactus on two parallel supports such as shovel or rake handles placed across the planting hole. Spread the roots out and then fill the hole with soil. After the roots are covered, the supports can be removed. Water the newly planted cactus enough to soak the roots and to ensure good contact of the soil around the roots.