

SEED RAISING

Seed raising is a cheap and rewarding method of increasing a collection of cacti or other succulents. Some plants are easy to raise from seed, others are particularly slow and/or difficult. A beginner would be well advised to gain confidence and experience growing seeds of the easier genera (e.g. Rebutia, Echinopsis, Notocactus) before becoming more ambitious.



Method

Most cactus and other succulent seeds germinate readily, but care is required to raise the tiny seedlings into mature plants. In particular care should be taken to ensure all compost and containers are sterilized.

Containers

Small individual pots (say 50mm) in a larger tray are ideal, this keeps each type of seed separate, making identification easier.

Compost

Soilless composts are often advocated because of their open structure and slightly acidic reaction. They do however encourage sciarid flies (small black flies which can be seen above the pots, the small maggot-like larvae of which can decimate a pot of seedlings very quickly if not controlled).

A suitable alternative is a sterilised mixture of 2 parts of sieved John Innes No. 1 compost and 1 part very fine, dust free, grit.

Sowing the Seed

The pots of compost should be thoroughly wetted (care being taken not to compress the compost). Large seeds can be individually pressed into the surface of the compost (flat seeds on edge). Finer seeds can just be sprinkled onto the surface of the compost and sprayed lightly. It is not necessary to cover them.

Watering

To combat the risk of fungal growth the use of cool, boiled water is recommended. Until the seedlings are well developed (say, about 3 months) the compost must never be allowed to dry out. As the plants develop watering is reduced to a normal succulent plant regime.

Light

Light is necessary for germination, however some light shading should be provided to prevent scorching. Healthy seedlings are a nice green colour, if they start to turn pink they are getting too much light - a condition which can be fatal. If they turn yellow colour they are not getting sufficient light and will become weak.

Temperature

Ideally temperatures for germination should be around 21°C (70°F). After germination temperature is less critical though in order to help the seedlings survive their first winter it is advisable to keep them growing throughout. In order to achieve this it is necessary to provide warmth (say 13°C (55°F)) to allow watering to be continued.



Acknowledgement

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