

Collectors Corner Fact Sheet

Living Stones — Mesembs



FAUCARIA- Jaws. Very easily grown group of plants if kept in any sunny position. Water the plants when soil is dry and less often in Winter. Under low light only lightly every 1-3 months as a plant will easily rot under low light because the soil cannot dry out fast enough.



TITANOPSIS—Jewel Plants These mesembs require strong sunlight and seldom watering similar to a Lithops. Water when leaves soften and do not water over winter months.



ARGYRODERMA - A real challenge to grow, easily cracks and damages with overwatering but well worth the effort.



CONOPHYTUM— one of the easier stone plants to grow, popular as they come in a wide range of colours with a large range of flower colours.

PESTS AND DISEASES

- Small, hairy white insects on plants or roots- Mealy Bug. Soak plant and soil in a systemic insecticide.
- Parts of plant going soft- remove soft pieces and drench with Fongirid.
- Small holes appearing in plant- look for caterpillar or snails in amongst leaves or pots.

In conclusion, mesembs are easily grown and quite rewarding. All species flower if given sufficient sunlight. Species can survive long periods of total neglect. The phrase "killing with kindness" applies very aptly to mesembs and the most basic rule to apply to mesembs is WHEN IN DOUBT, DON'T WATER.

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Mesembs, or stone plants which they are commonly called, exhibit such a diversity of form, colour and markings that their popularity amongst collectors is quite understandable.

Through tens of thousands of years of increasingly drier conditions on the African continent, these plants have developed a very high degree of succulence (fleshiness). This allows their leaves to swell, storing water to sustain them through extended periods of drought.



Their environment is harsh and arid. Temperatures are extreme. They must struggle to survive the broiling sun and sand blasting wind. The rainfall is infrequent, sometimes as low as 50mm (2 inches) per annum.

Some species subsist solely by absorbing moisture from heavy fogs at night. During droughts many have the ability to shrivel and bury themselves underground. They must also survive heavy foraging by goats, birds, baboons and grazing bucks, therefore some have become masters of camouflage, having the colouration of the soil or resembling stones among which they grow. Being able to survive such difficult conditions, it is easy to see how these plants can survive easily, as indoor/outdoor plants.

GENERAL CARE-

Stone plants can be grown indoors or outdoor with very little to no care if certain rules are followed.

Sunlight - Stone plants all require a certain amount of direct sunlight per day. The harder leaf forms and the slower growing forms can tolerate hot sunny positions few other plants can survive in. Window sills are ideal if facing east, west or north.

Temperature - Mesembs prefer full exposure where nights get cool to cold and days can be hot. Winter cold is needed for the end of the growth cycle when leaf shed and division occurs. Over winter they should not be

watered. Most mesembs come from South Africa and share similar climates to southern Australia.

Watering - Water the plants well when the plant needs water, not on a regular basis. Do not water on colder days as pots will take too long to dry out. Media must dry out within a couple of days otherwise plants will drink too much. Plants kept in a hot sunny position require watering more often than a plant in a cool position. Plants in cool positions may survive on 1 to 2 watering's a year, Plants in dormancy require no watering for 3-5 months until the growing period starts again. If plants appear to be growing well it may be a sign that they are getting too much water. If in doubt do not water. If leaves are stiff, do not water.

Fertilise - Fertilise two to three times over the growing period with a very weak solution of any liquid fertiliser or add into the pot a small amount of 13% 8 to 9 month Nutricote which will feed the plant for up to two years.

Repotting - Repot only when the plant fills the pot. Remove all soil from roots, older roots can be removed and plant dried out for 1 to 2 weeks. And replant the plant into a dry, open sandy mix like cactus mix. Water in the plant about 1 week after Repotting. Choose a pot only a little larger than the plant, also choose shallower pots that will dry faster. Living stones can also be group planted into shallow dishes and also mixed with slower growing cacti. If growing the plant outdoor, all the slower growing forms are best kept out of the rain in winter. Some hardier forms can be garden planted.

Flowering - Mesembs produce large single flowers typical of the Aizoaceae family (Ice Plants) most are white or yellow and often larger than the plant. Flowers open in the late afternoon and close every evening.

TYPES OF MESEMBS

There are about seventy different groups of mesembs with hundreds of different members. Below are outlined only the most popular.



LITHOPS- The living stone plant, the most sought after of the mesembs, and the slowest growing. Lithops have evolved to become the perfect plant to survive in a desert. Their two leaves are tightly joined together and the body is almost spherical, most of the plant is underground with only the flat top protruding. This top has tiny windows which allow sunlight to penetrate

inside the plant where photosynthesis occurs. It is therefore necessary to keep these plants in direct sunlight for part of the day. Lithops will tell you when they require water. If the plant is growing tall, it is getting too much water or not enough sunlight. First step- stop watering. If growth continues, move to a sunnier position. If leaves crack, water less often. If there is any sign of growth, flowering or new leaves, do not water until all obvious growth is finished. If the plant body is firm and light, it is happy. If the body is soft, water more often. Recommended watering- Spring- monthly; Summer, Autumn- 2-4 weeks; Winter, not at all. Remember when in doubt, don't water. It can live up to 2 years without water.

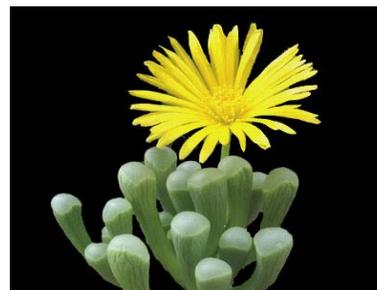


PLEIOSPILOS- The Split Rocks. These are fascinating plants for beginners and collectors alike. They are easily grown indoors or outdoors and will survive in the garden. A 4 inch adult specimen will flower for long periods in Autumn and Winter with startling yellow or orange flowers up to 3 inches across. They like far more frequent watering than Lithops but can survive very long periods of total neglect. Approximate watering periods are Spring to Autumn, every 1-2

weeks; Winter once a month. A plant kept under low light might be watered lightly only once every 1-3 months. A good indication as to the frequency of watering necessary for the position is the amount of leaves on the plant. Each head should have approximately 2 pairs of leaves, if more have grown, stop watering until the extra leaves have disappeared and then water less often.



CHERIDOPSIS- Bunny's Ears. These mesembs require similar conditions to Pleiospilos except that regular watering must be done from Autumn- Winter, twice weekly, and Summer-Spring, monthly as these are Winter growers.



FENESTRARIA- Babies Toes. Same conditions as Cherdopsis. Babies Toes have a large number of leaves and the optimum length of a leaf is 1 -2 inches. If much longer, move the plant to a sunnier position. If tips of the leaves crack, water less often.