

Desert Flowers In the Home



Like most collectors and gardeners, Mrs. Arnold (Betty) Roy can never resist the temptation to add just one more plant. She has 500 cacti and succulents. The plants shown here are one type of prickly pear (far left), a corncob plant (front), a variety of the jade plant and the night blooming cereus, which she is examining in this photo, taken at the Roy home, 4179 Cedar Lane.

Why do people collect the things they do, for instance cacti?

When there are roses, violas, and chrysanthemums to be had in abundance in Oregon, it seems most strange to some enthusiastic gardeners that anyone should want to import desert flowers into a state known for its generous rainfall.

Perhaps it is the challenge encountered in producing anything in an unnatural habitat. The same urge that impels men to nurse trees into growing on the plains; to dislodging heavy rocks from mountain precipices to place them in verdant gardens; or to carrying driftwood and shells home from the seashore.

A look into Rogue River valley gardens reveals a kinship shared by cactus growers, rockhounds and collectors of driftwood.

Fondness for Rocks

It was because of her fondness for rocks that Mrs. Arnold Roy, who probably has the largest collection of cacti in the valley, started collecting the desert flowers.

She was making an extended stay in one of the southwestern states and was gathering rocks for her collection when she suddenly became really aware of cacti for the first time. Now, she has about 300 cacti and 200 succulents at her home, 2179 Cedar Lane.

Arnel P. Butler, 28 North Barneburg Road, another collector of cacti and succulents, also collects driftwood and old

glass. It was during a vacation in Death Valley, Calif., where he had placed old glass treasures to color in the sunlight, that he developed his interest in cacti.

"Stone Face", a succulent he has nurtured for seven years, is blooming for the first time. Perhaps this is part of the plants' appeal, succulents and cacti are not predictable, at least when they are transplanted into unnatural environments. Growers wait and wait for flowers to appear and then when hope is abandoned and the watchful waiting discontinued a flash of sunlight suddenly reveals petals opening from the areoles, that part of the cacti from which the new branches and the flowers grow.

While cacti are unpredictable here they are dependable in the desert. Twelve different times in 15 years Butler has gone to Death Valley for his winter vacation. Just twice he has seen the desert blooming with the tiny annuals that make it unforgettable. The seeds of some of these little plants remain dormant because of drought for 10 years. Then, coaxed by moisture, spring into a galaxy of color, characteristic of desert blossoms only.

But the cacti he has seen every year. The drought does not stay the realization of their destiny.

Several Jades Listed

Mrs. Roy's "Jade Tree", also, is in bloom. There are several Jades listed in the catalog of succulents and cacti, among them tricolored jade and green jade.

She has arranged her plants with unusual rocks, petrified wood and driftwood in her garden. But in recent weeks she has been bringing many into winter quarters. Some can remain outdoors and others must be taken into protected areas. One room of the Roy home has been converted into a plant room by her husband who cooperates in her hobby.

When the Reys moved from Forest Grove to Medford, they brought along all of her plants: the strawberry and flame cactus, a hardy hedgehog, a rainbow, a pink nymph, a devil's club, eagle claws and a violet sea urchin. There are many other exotic and unusual names for cacti and succulents found in the local garden and in the catalog of the Johnson Cactus Gardens of Paramount, Calif., which both the local collectors give high rating. Some of these are calico ox tongue, African living rock, Mexican firecracker, burro tail, pink stars, Crassula Hummel's sunset and Euphorbia canariensis or Hercules Club.

Many collectors find the barrel or echinocactus of particular interest. Mrs. Roy claims no favorites. In its natural habitat the barrel cactus is more than an ornamental growth. It contains a generous supply of sticky juice, which according to the Huntington Botanical Gardens has saved the lives of thirsty travelers lost in the desert.

Covered With Fine Hairs

In this same family are the "old man" and "old woman" varieties, so named because they are covered with what appears to be fine white hairs.

"Christ Thorn", also called "Crown of Thorns", is one of Butler's favorites. It is everblooming. It is of the Euphorbia family to which the Christmas poinsettia also belongs, as do many of the succulents, distinguished by the white milk, which the stems exude.

The only true cactus that has leaves is one from Cuba, Butler said.

In most plants, the food for the plant is made in the leaves, and the leaves also give off water. In the cactus, however, there are no leaves in order that the plant may better hold its moisture. The fleshy stems of the plant make the food for the cactus. These same stems store the water. The barrel cactus is a good example of this process.

There is also a reason for the spines with which nature has festooned the cactus. They protect the plants from the



This plant, in full bloom in this photo, has a mate in the Butler collection on the shelf in the window. The smaller plant has a large bud distinguishable on the far right. The blossom on this giant starfish, also called carion flower because of its unpleasant odor, measured 15 1/4 inches in diameter. An odorless Black Starfish has been developed. It has purple-black flowers. This particular flower is yellow and maroon striped.



This south window in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Arnel P. Butler, 28 N. Barneburg Road, offers a favorable setting for the collection of old glass, which Butler arranges as a complimentary background for cacti and succulents. The camphor bottle on the left, which has a darker replica, is at least 75 years old and was used by Butler's grandmother. Also on the glass shelf are Japanese floats and giant marbles, childhood toys.

little animals of the desert which would otherwise devour the cactus to extinction.

There are 1,000 different kinds in the family commonly called cactus and most of them live on the American continent, half of them in Mexico. The largest belong to the genus cereus and the best known in this family are the saguaro or giant cacti of Arizona. The blossom of these stately desert giants is the Arizona state flower. The cactus wren is the Arizona state bird.

Cacti are not viewed as purely ornamental by the Indians for whom they provide a way of life. They use the dried woody ribs of the saguaro stems for fuel and for making the frames of their houses. They eat the fruit raw and in preserves.

Many of the house plant cacti also are members of this family, one of the most admired being the night-blooming cereus, which has large white flowers that open at night.

Has Powerful Narcotic

A very small cactus, called peyote, contains a powerful narcotic which has been used by Indians for many years in religious ceremonies.

There are many other uses for cacti, known to the people who live where the bristly plants grow. The joints of the opuntia are boiled and fried. Its flowers are made into salads and its fruits are eaten raw and cooked.

The seeds of many cacti are ground into meal and the meal is made into cakes.

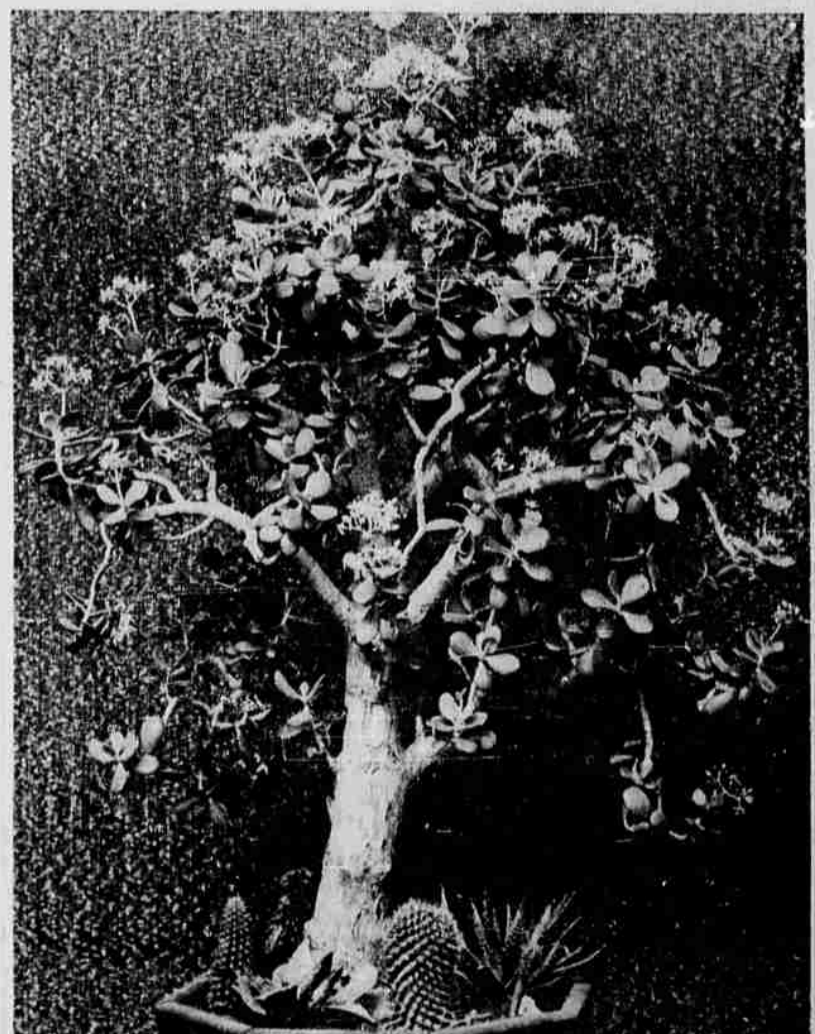
So it is that the natives of the cactus country often eat or drink their cacti while their wetland neighbors treasure them in rock gardens, window boxes and porch baskets waiting, many years sometimes, for the smallest one to bloom for just an hour.



Only an expert is able to identify the hundreds of varieties of cactus and succulents obtainable in this country. Collectors such as Mrs. Roy obtain some from their natural settings, buy some through commercial dealers and swap with other collectors. Pictured here are cacti and succulents. The latter have fewer blossoms than do the cacti, and in many cases the flowers are more strange than beautiful. All cacti are succulents but all succulents are not cacti. The succulent on the right, second from the bottom, is an echeveria, a type of which there are many variations. The Mexican Gam, the Chenille Plant and the Painted Lady are a few of them. The Chenille Plant from Mexico, flowers in midwinter with crimson and yellow bells.



Two of the plants in this threesome, the one on the left, and the one on the right, are of island origin. They are in Butler's collection. The Hercules Club (left) is a native of the Canary Islands. The Hawaiian Air Leaf (right) is from Honolulu. When the Butlers toured the Islands, he picked a leaf from a plant to test the story that one leaf would produce a plant and that it could live with only air as food. He carried the leaf in his suitcase for two weeks. When he laid it on wet sand, it did just as the Hawaiians said it would. The two stalks he later broke off the plant continued to grow with only air for sustenance. In the center of this picture is the Christ Thorn.



This is the Jade Tree in Mrs. Roy's collection. It was photographed last week when it was in full bloom. The flowers are white. Light plays an important role in the colorings of the jade plants. Green jade has very smooth, yellowish green to dark green leaves, depending upon the light. The flowers form large rosettes sometimes four to six inches across. The tri-colored jade, a long time favorite of easy culture, according to the catalog, has cream colored variegated leaves tinged with pink when the plant receives sufficient light to produce this shading. Mrs. Roy also has an orchid cactus that blooms about Easter. Rocks and petrified wood from Arizona, New Mexico and Oregon blend with the desert flowers in her garden.