

The crassulas

Crasula arborescens.

Family: Crasulaceae.

Origin: South Africa.

There are more than 130 species of crassulas. The leaves are thick and used by the plant as water resort for the dry seasons. Some species have white or light red flowers in spring. Particularly in Spain you can find a lot of crassulas in Cadiz and surroundings as this plant grows best in very dry and hot regions. I have seen crassulas with trunks with diameters of 20 cm.

Light: Crassulas need much light and resist hot summers, but to protect them from accidental dry out choose a site in mid shadow.

Temperature and exposure: Crassulas may be exposed to direct sun as their normal habitat is a nearly deserted zone of Cadiz. They need a lot of light. In winter they must be protected from temperatures below 10° Celsius.

Wiring: Be sure to wire only old branches and be very careful not to break them. Leave the wires only two months or less. Always protect the branches with raffia. Anyway, wiring is not the best method to give these trees their structural form.

Pruning and cleaning: Remove the yellow and dry leaves everywhere they appear and keep trunk and main branches free of new shoots. In spring their growth is quite fast, the rest of the year this process slows down nearly to zero so be sure to form them in this season. Pinch the new branches as soon they have reached the desired length. I also eliminate the leaves of the lower part of the branches.

Repotting / Soil: Repot every two or three years depending on the size of the plant and the pot. Cut 1/3 of the roots. Crassulas prefer deep pots, as colors I recommend dark blue, dark green ceramic pots. Form may differ from plant to plant. I use a quite sandy mixture of soil, 1/3 compost, 1/3 sand and 1/3 of clay (light brown type) as it is accustomed to for example in Cadiz. Once repotted, don't water it for about 10 days.

Fertilizer: With these very special plants I use a liquid fertilizer from may to September, making a stop in summer.

Watering: Water generally enough to keep the plant humid but never wet. You can even let it dry out from time to time. Remember that crassulas are desert plants, in winter water them in very little doses. Be sure to keep humidity high, vaporize from time to time, this will accelerate the formation of new branches and growth in general.

Diseases: These plants are not very sensible against diseases, many of them can be avoided by controlling the watering. On my particular plants I had aphids which I eliminated by hand and then applied a small dose of Folithion to kill the rest.