



Learn From the Masters Summary

Pruning Cacti and other Succulents

April 3, 2013

We will first discuss *Productive Pruning*. There are also other reasons to prune Cacti and Succulents, and they will be addressed at a later time and then added to this subject summary. Bonsai pruning, overgrown landscape cleaning and cleaning up show plants are possible additions.

We all understand that plants, including Cactus & Succulents, can be grown from seed. Experienced growers know that many plants, and especially Cacti, can also be grown from cuttings. And many of us know that the pups or offshoots that form around the perimeter of many succulents can be removed from the mother plant and grown as a separate plant.

The methods of selecting or making “cuttings” for propagation are many and varied. We will probably not be able to cover them all in this summary. For instance, many Agaves when they flower will produce bulbils on the flower stalk. These can simply be removed and planted like a seedling. A number of succulents, such as Senecios, Crassulas, and all Opuntia will reproduce from a single pad/leaf. Often just laying the leaf onto well drained soil will cause it to root and produce a new plant.

Some succulents such as Echeverias and other members of the Crassula family produce leaves on their flower stalks. These can be removed, before the flowers and stalk dry up, and cut into sections for planting. Leaving a little stalk both above and below the leaf included in the cutting. Again, cut the stalk a little above and below the leaf leaving the leaf attached to the stalk.

Many (most?) columnar Cacti can be encouraged to produce new columns from the base, or to branch, by cutting the existing stalk off at some point above ground. The part that is removed can then be dried to heal the cut end then planted to produce new roots and a new plant. The remaining part will produce new growth powered by the existing root system. An unsightly plant can often be salvaged using this technique. Or a healthy old, but no longer attractive, plant can be used as a mother plant to produce new plants.

Every grower has a little different approach to drying/healing the removed column. All agree the removed section should be kept dry and upright in its natural position. Some advocate covering the cut end with powdered pumice or charcoal or some other neutral desiccant. The use of rooting hormones can be helpful but most lose their potency very quickly and old powders on the shelf are probably useless. Putting the plant into an empty, preferably deep, pot where it is in the dark will encourage rooting, as will putting it down into dry crumpled newspaper. Denying sunlight to the bottom end of the column is what encourages new roots. During this period when the plant is producing new roots moist soil can lead to rot starting in the plant. Caution in watering needs to be exercised.

Many (all?) Cactus & Succulents can be encouraged to produce new young plants by simply pruning off/destroying the meristem of the subject plant. The meristem is the center or growing point of the plant. With some cactus the center can be cored out, or even simpler, use a very hot nail to burn the meristem. Rosette type succulents like Agave and Aloe can be encouraged to pup by cutting out the growing center without disturbing the roots or succulent stem. Carefully cutting the entire plant exactly in half vertically, severing the growing point will also produce two complete new plants.

Other succulents can virtually be cut up into many pieces and rooted to produce many new plants Hylocereus, Stapeliads Gasterias for example.

Maybe discuss how to remove and pot pups created on the body of globular Cacti and some columnar Cacti.

The bottom line is you can use your pruning tools to produce new plants and you don't have to just throw your pruning's into the trash pile.