
CACTUS and SUCCULENT SOCIETY of NEW MEXICO

P.O. Box 21357

Albuquerque, New Mexico 87154-1357

<http://www.new-mexico.cactus-society.org>

HOW TO GROW SARCOCAULON AND PELARGONIUM SUCCULENT SPECIES

Sarcocaulon and Pelargonium are both members of the Geraniaceae (Geranium) family. We are concerned mostly with the succulent varieties native to the dry southern regions of Africa.

I grow my plants in a greenhouse that is heated to about 40 degrees +/- 10 degrees in winter that has walls I remove in the summer for better airflow. Almost all year long I get sun starting right at sunrise and missing only the last 1- 1½ hours of afternoon sunlight. I have grown a number of these plants over the years and have not found them to be overly difficult, as long as I've followed their growing requirements.

Most of the 15 varieties I've grown were started from seed, and this is where I'll start. These plants are mostly winter growers and this means fall is the time to encourage sprouting. All seed was started during the months of August-November, planted with the tip pressed all the way down and the tall stem sticking up or broken off (either way, it doesn't seem to matter). Keep seeds moist until they germinate, using distilled water. I've had good success using late spring rain to start off sprouting and I've also had seeds sprout after being in the pot for more than a year (some varieties seem to need the heat of summer in order to break dormancy). They have pretty good initial growth, reaching a handleable size in a year, but I grow them on for two. I try to transplant them just before, or as they start to grow in late August/September.

The growing season for these plants starts as daylight and temperature decrease; this is usually mid-August. This is when you can increase watering. Some, like *Pelargonium appendiculatum*, completely vanish when dormant. They grow through the winter, requiring strong light and light fertilization (10 percent strength) when watered. Temperatures should not go much below 35 degrees but some cool is ok. Getting too hot can cause plants to return to dormancy. These plants bloom normally and seed can be produced by pollinating two different plants. They tend to bloom approaching spring and the seed heads carry up to five seeds in a cluster that scatter when ripe. I place the plants in a bucket with a screen top to collect them.

These plants usually go dormant around April and dormancy can involve loss of all foliage or merely a slowing down of growth. I cut back watering and stop fertilizing at this time. Some of these species will continue to grow even through the summer and it will be up to you whether or not the plants experience dormancy. I find dormant periods help keep plant growth from becoming too lush and seem to promote regular blooming. These plants do better for me in a greenhouse than indoors, but this will vary with your situation and care.

In addition to seeds, these plants can also be propagated from stem cuttings, even in the case of those with their stems underground. These plants stay mostly pest-free but can be troubled, especially if over-stressed, by mealy bugs and mites. They do allow for bonsai-style planting and can be quite attractive when given careful attention.

This is a general overview and you should research your specific plants to determine the particular care they require.