

Basic Characteristics and Requirements

If you live in USDA zones 10 through 12, you can grace your outdoor living space with the desert rose year-round. This drought-tolerant succulent thrives in warm, dry climates, as it's native to the drier regions of the Arabian Peninsula and sub-Saharan Africa and won't tolerate freezing conditions. In colder climates, given enough light for proper blooming, the desert rose grows well as an indoor plant. If your area experiences regular winter frosts and freezes, you can also grow it outdoors in warmer periods of the year and bring it indoors for protection during winter.

Typically in spring and summer and depending on the cultivar, the desert rose produces large, 2- to 3-inch, funnel-shaped pink, red, white, purple, yellow, orange or bicolored flowers at the tips of its thick, grayish branches complemented by glossy-green, oval leaves. In consistently warm conditions, however, some cultivars flower year-round, despite going dormant in winter and suffering partial to total leaf drop. Indeed, flowering won't skip a beat, even if the desert rose has been pot bound in its container for years.

Soil: Desert rose prefers soils that are fertile and drain well. Repotting the plant to a potting mix that's rich in organic matter, like coco, produces the best growth, whereas heavy mixes that tend to retain water can cause root rot. If necessary, mix 2 parts commercial potting mix with 1 part perlite to promote better drainage.

Tip

Repot your desert rose into fresh potting mix approximately every two years if it contains peat.

Light: To promote maximum flowering, situate the repotted desert rose in an outdoor location that receives full sun. If you're growing the plant indoors, place it in a spot that gets at least six hours of daily sunlight, such as a south- or west-facing window.

Containers: Desert roses grow slowly, and the size of the container determines the ultimate size of the plant. In fact, it's common for a 30-year-old plant to reach a height of only 20 inches when kept in a 9-inch pot. Desert rose isn't fussy about the composition or size of its container as long as the pot has adequate bottom drainage so root rot doesn't occur. If you don't want your plant to grow too large or you're using it in an area of your house where space is limited, control its size by simply keeping it in a smaller container. On the other hand, encourage it to grow taller by repotting it every few years to a container that's slightly larger than the one it was previously growing in until it reaches your desired size. Don't use a container that's much larger than the plant's root system, though, because the larger volume of soil may cause too much water retention.

Tip

Your biggest challenge when repotting a desert rose may be removing a root-bound plant from its container. You might have to break a ceramic pot with a hammer or cut a plastic pot off the plant's roots.

Repotting

It's best to repot your desert rose during its active growing season. Remove the plant from its container, breaking it or cutting it away from the root mass if necessary. Place the entire root ball into the new container and fill the container with soil, making sure to plant the desert rose at the same depth at which it was originally growing. If you want to highlight the top portion of the plant's intricate root mass or its swollen trunk or caudex, place several inches of potting mix in the container to lift or root wash the plant before repotting it or use a slightly shallower container. Once you've planted the desert rose in its new container, firm the soil up around the roots and water it a day or two after repotting. Continue watering several times weekly during the growing season, but cut back to monthly waterings during winter when the plant is dormant.