



A Few Thoughts on Cactus

I have been lucky enough to be able to spend some quality botanical time two winters ago in Tucson Arizona. Sometimes I find it hard to get my head around the enormous difference between our Cowichan environment and the desert. Although Cowichan means warmland, warm has a whole new meaning in a desert! Plants that love our wet and mild climate would implode in the searing heat and skin cracking dryness of Arizona.

Do we really have nothing in common? Hey, I think not! We have our very own native prickly pear cactus in the gulf islands. Many gardeners are able to find appropriate dry spots in their gardens for lots of other kinds of cactus too. Many cacti are able to stand periods of cold, and some are even adapted to handle rainy winters.

In Tucson the most common cactus are Barrels, Saguaros, and Chollas. These plants are like our cedars and firs in that they live everywhere. It's not uncommon to have a saguaro growing beside a gas station or a bunch of chollas in the city ditches. The saguaros get to be quite old – often over 150 years. When they die they leave an interesting collection of sticks. These were the water and nutrient carriers in the center of the cactus. The dried up body of the dead cactus often falls around the base like a dropped pair of trousers. Seeing a dead saguaro always makes me sad.

For a bit of entertainment one day I went into a garden centre to see what they offered. Oh so expensive and such limited variety. We are so lucky to have the diversity and wealth of inexpensive plants in our garden centers at home! This did not stop me from picking up some interesting seeds and collecting some garden ideas for planters.

One I really like because it's an upcycling project, is the broken cactus pot garden. Basically you go to the garden center and buy a big decorative plant pot with the side broken out. Don't bother asking for it for free as most merchants will not give these away. Find a nice one and dicker away. Take the pot and fill it with high drainage mix topped with at least an inch of attractive gravel. Pop your cactus and succulents into the pot and use broken pieces to make terraces to hold in the moisture. Enjoy your new project!



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