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It works for me

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Beginnings

Welcome to what I believe may be a different view of the cactus and succulent industry. I own and operate, what is, by nursery standards, a very small cactus and succulent nursery in Riverside, California. Our nursery has been involved in the industry for over 40 years and has been a licensed California nursery for nearly that long. The plan and reason for this column is to share information about cactus and succulent culture that has and still does work for me in my nursery. Be aware that what you are reading 'works for me', here, in this nursery, that is located on the western edge of the city of Riverside, California. What works for me may not work for you!!! Before I get into the nuts and bolts of what I personally do in the realm of propagation and growing plants here are a few words about how I came about the knowledge I am going to share as well as some random thoughts may be helpful.

First let me assure you that I have never read or known anyone in this business that gave out information that they thought was incorrect or would be detrimental to the reader. There are many books and articles that are excellent sources of information. Find and read them – just be aware of WHERE the person was that wrote the book. For example, if the book was written in England and you follow the advice regarding providing a plant with “the maximum amount of sunlight available”, and live in my area you may cook or at least sunburn a valuable plant.

I suggest that you join one of the many Cactus and Succulent Societies/Clubs that exist across our great land. The members of these associations can provide you with information that will prove helpful in your specific area.

I consider myself very fortunate to have known many of the individuals that are quite possibly responsible for your being able to collect and enjoy these unique and interesting plants. Do the names such as Harold Gates, Harry Johnson, Gil Tegelberg, Slim and Pat Moorten, Frank Fielding, Jim and Elsa Peck and Bob Schick, to name just a few, sound familiar? These persons and many many others, both growers and hobbyists, were and are my friends, mentors, instructors and critics. If I have enjoyed any success as a cactus grower I owe it to these and many others both living and dead.

So let us begin with a very short, true story that over the years has often guided my actions.

The first year that we had a nursery license we joined the California Cactus Growers Association. Meetings were held at the individual nurseries. The particular meeting that I am referring to happened at our nursery was during the winter of 1968-69. At that time we had one 15'x 50' greenhouse (cold frame that was covered with shade cloth and 4 mil plastic to keep the rain off the plants).

After the business meeting and lunch was over Gil Tegelberg asked if he could see the nursery. Of course I proudly took him down to see what I thought was a marvelous growing facility.

He carefully looked over my plants and then asked, "Harvey, what is the most valuable plant that you have?" I considered carefully and then pointed out a *gymnocalycium saglione* that had set seed for me.

Gil smiled and then pointed to a dead plant off in one corner of the greenhouse and asked, "What happened to that plant?" I told him that the plastic over the plant had a small hole that allowed the water to drip on the plant and a result of too much water when the plant was dormant caused it to rot and die. Laughingly Gill said "That plant, Harvey, is the most valuable plant in your nursery. The plant died and you know why it died and it probably won't happen again."

Lesson to be learned. If a plant dies and you can determine the cause, the plant's death was not in vain. It served a useful purpose. Observe and learn! Let your plants teach you – they will!