

It works for me Environment

Environment – This is possibly one of the most misunderstood words that you will encounter while growing plants. Many cacti and succulents are very sensitive to their environment. What does environment include? Everything that the plant encounters where it lives is environment. This would include, but is not limited to: exposure to direct sun, shade, temperature, water or lack thereof, fertilizer, soil conditions, temperature, and air movement. How sensitive are these plants? A couple of feet can make a significant difference in the growth and health of many cacti and succulents. Yes, they can survive in different environments but consider how much better these plants would look and grow in an environment that they like.

How you determine the best environment for the plants that you grow would prefer is not difficult. One of the easiest ways is to find out where they evolved. As an example let us consider the plants belonging to the cactus family of gymnocalycium. I am told that they evolved in the grass plains of northern Argentina. The climate is similar to ours and since the plants grow on a grass plain that would suggest that they would thrive in shade with moderately rich soil. I moved the gymnocalyciums that I grow to an area that gets heavy shade for part of the day and they are no longer stressed from growing in direct sunshine. The plant color has turned from red or brown to green, and they are producing flowers for a longer period of time.

Since we are speaking of environment I am sure that you have noticed the media is full of suggestions that we use “sustainable plants” or “native plants” that are capable of surviving with less water or in a harsh environment. While the concept is good, before you tear out your lawn, let me suggest that you remember the old saying – “Be careful what you ask for because you may get it!” My suggestion is that you thoroughly research the characteristics of any “native plant” that you put in your yard before you purchase and plant it for the following reasons.

First – Nearly all plants need water until they become established and if they live they will grow larger. Anyone need a 4 foot in diameter Echinocactus grusonii?

Second – In most cases, drought tolerant does not mean that the plant can survive for years with absolutely no water.

Third – If the plants can survive in a harsh environment they may reseed themselves and survive where you don't want them. If this happens they could become invasive, or in other words, weeds. Wild flowers can be weeds if they grow where you don't want them! Some agaves survive by putting out underground runners or stolens that develop into plants that, when they are ready, will come up – even if it is in the middle of your driveway.

Fourth – Many native plants have very different water requirements. For example the native California Oak, as well as some aloes, are summer dormant. If they get too much water during their dormant period the roots may rot off and the plant subsequently die.

I am not saying don't use native plants – just do your research first and know what you are asking for!

One last word – water! We and our plants can survive without many things but we BOTH MUST have water. Use it wisely! In our nursery we use the small tubs that are designed for mixing small batches of concrete, to soak the plants in when they get very dry. This insures that the entire root ball is wet and no water is lost. Use water wisely. It is precious!

Harvey

[Link to Mexican Hat Cactus Website](#)