



DESERT BOTANICAL GARDEN GARDENING

Guide

DESERT ROSE | *Adenium*



CARING FOR DESERT ROSE (*Adenium*)

Adenium species are members of the Dogbane family (*Apocynaceae*) and native to semi-arid and arid habitats from South Africa to the Arabian Peninsula. Common names include desert rose, Karoo rose or adenium. Desert roses produce trumpet-shaped flowers and when pollinated produce fingerlike double fruits. They store water in their branches, roots and swollen trunk called a caudex. Their succulence creates fascinating forms and makes them well suited for container growing.



Light

In the Southwest, desert roses grow from April through October. Large specimens are ideal in full sun, but can also be grown in filtered sun. Small specimens perform best with filtered light—under or near a desert tree canopy. Most adeniums prefer full morning and filtered afternoon sun.

As temperatures drop, adeniums enter dormancy and may lose their leaves. Bring plants indoors to keep them protected from frost and kept dry. When dormant, they need minimal light and may be stored in a dark garage or shed. In warmer climates, they may overwinter in a space outdoors, such as a patio, that is protected from cold and rain. Winter weather exposure may cause stem tip damage.

Move adeniums outdoors in the spring. If a dormant plant has retained leaves, they may sunburn and drop once exposed to outdoor sunlight, though the plant will likely recover and sprout new, sun-adapted leaves. To avoid sunburn, move plants to their outdoor space before summer. Avoid changing the orientation of the plants once they are in place for the season.

Indoor growing is not recommended for adeniums. Greenhouse conditions with bright sunlight, excellent air circulation and daytime air temperatures of 80 degrees Fahrenheit are required. Unlike outdoor plants, indoor specimens must be turned regularly to avoid lopsided growth.



Water

Higher temperatures and sun exposure increase the water demand of adeniums. Begin watering in the spring when temperatures are consistently above 50 degrees Fahrenheit and signs of growth are visible. Water generously once they are actively growing. Through its peak growing season, an adenium growing in full sun and in a pot 12-inches in diameter or more should receive deep soaks at least twice a week. Small specimens in pots smaller than 10 to 12-inches, require water three to four times a week. When watering, soak the soil until water drains from the container's bottom, wetting the entire soil mass and leaching out salts. Because they are able to tolerate temperatures up to about 120 degrees Fahrenheit, adeniums in well-draining soils typically do not suffer rot problems during a growing season.

Taper frequency of watering at the end of the growing season. Dormant plants will need little to no water. Young plants may benefit from light watering once a month when dormant to avoid shriveling—large specimens usually require no water. To avoid rot, adeniums overwintering at nighttime temperatures below 50 degrees Fahrenheit must be kept dry, regardless of plant size or location.



Fertilizer

Mature adeniums benefit from a solution of general-purpose houseplant fertilizer, applied at half-strength monthly during the growing season. Growth in younger specimens may be encouraged with a half-to quarter- strength fertilizer applied weekly. A fertilizer that is low in nitrogen and high in phosphorus and potassium will foster even growth and blooming. A fine limestone or gypsum dressing added to the soil's surface will provide calcium for sturdy growth.



Temperature

In their native habitat, adeniums rarely encounter freezing temperatures. In the Southwest, winter freezes can occur. Allow plants to go dormant and remain in a cold-protected storage location through winter. If the plant is stored in an indoor location where temperatures stay above 55 degrees Fahrenheit, force dormancy by withholding water until all leaves drop. Indoor night temperatures above 70 degrees Fahrenheit may induce a plant to grow out of season, resulting in weak growth. In this case, a more suitable storage location should be located. Prune any weak growth in spring after the plant is moved outdoors.



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Growth & Flowering

Adeniums are naturally slow growing. Less water and fertilizer can result in a more compact growth. Conversely, generous watering and fertilizer combined with repotting in larger containers every couple of years may produce a larger specimen in a relatively short time.

Generally, flowering begins in early spring, often before leaf growth and depends on the species. *Adenium multiflorum* flowers only in winter while *A. swazicum* and *A. boehmianum* flower in late summer through fall. Some species flower in autumn only. Flowering may pause in midsummer when plants attain mostly vegetative growth. If kept in warm, bright greenhouse conditions, others can flower virtually all year, especially hybrids. Colors range from white to pink to solid red in wild species. Breeding has produced hybrids with large, showy flowers and bloom colors of white, yellow, purple and even black. Some flowers are variegated featuring colorful edges with white centers or throats.



Soil & Potting

Potting soil for adeniums should be fast draining to both absorb and allow water to pass through. Combining a quality potting soil with equal parts of pumice or small rock gravel will create an effective mix. Commercial cactus-mix blends may also be used.

Adeniums tolerate being pot-bound. Root confinement may restrict growth rate. When repotting is necessary, repot at the start of the growing season. Repotting is usually a simple matter of placing the plant with its intact root ball into a larger pot and filling in with a preferred soil mix at the same depth as it was in the old pot. Plants with shallow roots will benefit from shallow pots. A pot too large or deep may retain too much soil moisture and risk root rot. If you wish to display an interesting section of the caudex just below the soil line, the plant may be raised and backfilled underneath to expose more of its surface. If lifting the caudex, monitor the newly exposed tissue for sun damage and protect with shade cloth if needed. Wait several days before watering a replanted adenium to allow any root damage to seal.



Pests

Cultivated adeniums are rarely subject to disease, but they may occasionally host certain insect pests. Spider mites, aphids and mealy bugs can all cause cosmetic damage, causing distortion of leaves and flower buds. Growing outdoors can often diminish these pests. For spider mites and aphids, dislodge with a firm jet of water and may require several treatments to control. Eradicate mealy bugs by wiping them from the plant using a cotton swab dipped in rubbing alcohol. Repeat for several days to ensure removal of all hatched insects.



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