

# Cactus-Like Succulents Handbook

Euphorbia, Othonna & spiny look-alikes

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AGreenNest Plant Guide

Not all spiky succulents are cacti. Euphorbia and Othonna produce cactus-like shapes with a very different biology (and a caustic sap to respect). This handbook covers these look-alikes and how their care differs from true cacti.

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## African Milk Tree - Euphorbia trigona

The white sap burns skin and eyes -- wear gloves when pruning.

Care at a glance: light: lots of bright light and some direct sun for the best colour; water deeply every ~21 days (far less in winter); a sandy cactus mix; happiest around 55-85F; propagate by a stem cutting left to callus then rooted; keep it away from cats and dogs.

### Quick facts

- Light: lots of bright light and some direct sun for the best colour.
- Water: deeply every ~21 days, far less in winter.
- Temperature: 55-85F (13-29C).
- Humidity: dry air is fine.
- Soil: a sandy cactus mix.
- Propagate: a stem cutting left to callus then rooted.
- Pet: keep away from cats and dogs.

*It is a euphorbia, not a cactus, but looks the part.*

## Ruby Necklace - Othonna capensis

Purple stems with bean leaves; bright light keeps the colour.

Care at a glance: light: lots of bright light and some direct sun for the best colour; water deeply every ~16 days (far less in winter); a gritty, free-draining succulent mix; happiest around 50-82F; propagate by a stem cutting left to callus then rooted; keep it away from cats and dogs.

### Quick facts

- Light: lots of bright light and some direct sun for the best colour.
- Water: deeply every ~16 days, far less in winter.
- Temperature: 50-82F (10-28C).
- Humidity: dry air is fine.
- Soil: a gritty, free-draining succulent mix.

- Propagate: a stem cutting left to callus then rooted.
- Pet: keep away from cats and dogs.

*In low light the purple fades to plain green.*

## General Care Principles

No matter the species in this handbook, a handful of principles carry most of the weight. Get these right and the individual notes above become fine-tuning.

Match the plant to the light: sun-lovers go in the brightest window or under a grow light; shade-lovers go in east or north light. Wrong light is the single most common cause of failure.

**Water on the plant's schedule, not the calendar.** Soak thoroughly, then let the soil dry before the next drink. In winter, ease right off - most of these plants want a cool, dry rest.

**Use the right soil and a draining pot.** Free-draining for succulents, moisture-retentive but aerated for ferns and foliage. A drainage hole is non-negotiable.

**Propagate to multiply.** Almost every plant here can be cloned from a leaf, offset, division, or cutting - see each species for its best method.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How often should I really water?

Forget frequent sips. Soak the soil completely, then let it dry out fully before the next drink. In winter most of these plants want a long, dry rest. The lift test (light pot = dry) beats any calendar.

### My plant is stretching and pale - what does that mean?

It wants more light. Move it to a brighter window or add a full-spectrum LED grow light. New growth will be compact and colourful; the stretched part will not undo itself, so behead and re-root the top if you like.

### What soil should I use?

A free-draining mix is non-negotiable. For succulents that means gritty, sandy soil in a pot with a real drainage hole. For leafy types a peat-free houseplant mix is fine. Sitting in wet soil is the fastest route to rot.

### Is this plant safe around my pets?

We note pet safety per species in this guide. 'Pet-safe' means it is not on the usual toxic lists, but no plant is food - keep curious cats and dogs from chewing leaves, and call a vet if you are worried.

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