

Lithops & Mesemb Care Handbook

Living stones for the patient gardener

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AGreenNest Plant Guide

Lithops look like pebbles with a window on top - and they behave like no other plant, splitting and shedding leaves on a strict annual rhythm. Fenestraria and Pleiospilos follow the same rules. This guide is the patient gardener's manual for keeping them alive for decades.

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Baby Toes - Fenestraria aurantiaca

Grow in a deep pot; the windowed tips should sit at the soil line.

Care at a glance: light: full, direct sun for most of the day; water deeply every ~25 days (far less in winter); a gritty, free-draining succulent mix; happiest around 45-85F; propagate by fresh seed sown on the surface or splitting the clump at repotting; pet-safe.

Quick facts

- Light: full, direct sun for most of the day.
- Water: deeply every ~25 days, far less in winter.
- Temperature: 45-85F (7-29C).
- Humidity: dry air is fine.
- Soil: a gritty, free-draining succulent mix.
- Propagate: fresh seed sown on the surface or splitting the clump at repotting.
- Pet: generally safe around pets.

The clear leaf tips are 'windows' that pipe light to the buried body.

Living Stones - Lithops aucampiae

Water only when the old pair shrivels; overwatering is fatal.

Care at a glance: light: full, direct sun for most of the day; water deeply every ~30 days (far less in winter); a gritty, free-draining succulent mix; happiest around 50-85F; propagate by fresh seed sown on the surface or splitting the clump at repotting; pet-safe.

Quick facts

- Light: full, direct sun for most of the day.
- Water: deeply every ~30 days, far less in winter.
- Temperature: 50-85F (10-29C).

- Humidity: dry air is fine.
- Soil: a gritty, free-draining succulent mix.
- Propagate: fresh seed sown on the surface or splitting the clump at repotting.
- Pet: generally safe around pets.

They mimic pebbles so well that collectors lose them in the gravel.

Living Stones - Lithops lesliei

A single new pair appears in autumn and replaces the old -- never water the old and new at once.

Care at a glance: light: full, direct sun for most of the day; water deeply every ~30 days (far less in winter); a gritty, free-draining succulent mix; happiest around 50-85F; propagate by fresh seed sown on the surface or splitting the clump at repotting; pet-safe.

Quick facts

- Light: full, direct sun for most of the day.
- Water: deeply every ~30 days, far less in winter.
- Temperature: 50-85F (10-29C).
- Humidity: dry air is fine.
- Soil: a gritty, free-draining succulent mix.
- Propagate: fresh seed sown on the surface or splitting the clump at repotting.
- Pet: generally safe around pets.

Each plant is just two leaves fused into a stone-like body.

Split Rock - Pleiospilos nelii

One pair of leaves a year; water only when the fissure widens.

Care at a glance: light: full, direct sun for most of the day; water deeply every ~35 days (far less in winter); a gritty, free-draining succulent mix; happiest around 45-85F; propagate by fresh seed sown on the surface or splitting the clump at repotting; pet-safe.

Quick facts

- Light: full, direct sun for most of the day.
- Water: deeply every ~35 days, far less in winter.
- Temperature: 45-85F (7-29C).
- Humidity: dry air is fine.
- Soil: a gritty, free-draining succulent mix.
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- Pet: generally safe around pets.

It splits open like a little green mouth when a new pair forms.

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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