

LITHOPS CULTURE

By Bette Eliason

Description:

Small succulent plants native to dry areas of South Africa. Plants consist of two leaves fused together in the shape of an inverted cone. A fissure at the top of the plant divides the two leaves.

Lithops grows in stony, gravelly soil. They so closely resemble the stones among which they grow that they are hard to see. Their mimicry is a defense mechanism to deter grazing animals seeking moisture.

In the wild they are found in mineral soils with a pH range from 4.5 to 10.5 in rainfall areas that average from 10" – 25", and some in areas that average only 2". The latter plants receive moisture in addition to the 2" from fog and mists.

CULTURE

Upon first bringing lithops home from a nursery, introduce them gradually to bright, hot sunlight or they may sunburn. A southern exposure is best. Morning and some afternoon hours of sunlight are safe once the plant has adjusted to more light than the nursery provided. Protect from burning during exceptionally bright, prolonged hot sunlight by giving shade in the afternoons. (Inside, near a window protect from hot late afternoon sun, and also from very cold nights by removing them back a distance from the window glass.) If you have had a long, dark spell, again reintroduce them to periods of sunlight gradually, allowing them time to adjust. If plants begin to "reach" or elongate, they are not getting enough sunlight and they will die.

WATER

Remember, there are normally two periods of time in the growth cycle that you may water, and there is possibly a third time which could become necessary.

In Summer the plants are in dormancy. No water at this time. Mid-August to late August water deeply to start the growing period in dormant plants. (Every two weeks to four weeks during active growth.) The fissure will begin to part and depending upon the age of the plant, usually 4 to 5 years old, a bud may appear. It will open in the afternoons for about 10 days, unless it should become pollinated earlier. The flower is daisy-like.

After the bloom, two new leaves will appear. Stop watering. From this point onward, the new leaves will draw moisture from the old leaves. When the old leaves are completely dry they may be removed. Now you can water lightly two or three times to increase the size of the new leaves and STOP watering. Always let the soil dry out completely between waterings. Now comes the Summer dormancy period.

THE EXCEPTION

Should plants become spongy during the dormant season, water lightly two or three times only to allow the plants to regain their firmness.

POTTING

Use a pot that is 4" – 5" deep with holes for drainage. Use 40% Supersoil with the addition of about 50% pumice, 10% coarse sand OR you can use a cactus mix with the addition of 1/3 pumice. If you fertilize at some point in the future, use a highly diluted mixture of a nitrogen fertilizer.

METHOD

Poke a hole in the soil and insert the root cone into the soil leaving about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the plant above ground. Firm up soil around the root. Plant randomly. You may add a few pebbles and then cover the rest of the soil with gravel. Lithops may multiply by sending out new plants from their root cone once they are fully mature plants.

Your own observation will, over time, be your guide. Plants differ. Some may be hardier than others and more adaptable to your own circumstances and care.

References: Lithops in Habitat, by Cole, D.T.; Lithops Flowering Stones, by Cole, D.T.; Lithops for the Curious, the Collector, and the Cultist, by Rowlette, Nicholas.