

Cacti Gardening in Oklahoma

by Tony Furrh

Most people think that due to our unpredictable winters cacti will not survive here in Oklahoma outdoors. It is my opinion that it is not the cold but the sporadic rainfall in Oklahoma, which kills most cacti. So, with that in mind, when planning a cacti garden the secret is drainage, drainage, drainage!.

Surprisingly to most people there are quite a number of cacti that grow wild in Oklahoma. After years of studying these plants in their habitat, I planned and laid out my garden in 1993 with extra careful attention paid to drainage. The following are my suggestions regarding the necessary steps to successfully growing cacti outdoors in Oklahoma.

- 1- Map out your plot carefully with a garden hose, string, etc
 - A. Be sure that your location provides ample sunlight
 - B. If the area is currently in grass, I suggest scalping it as close to the dirt as possible and then using roundup or a similar product to further deter the grass. After this is done, cover the area with a biodegradable mulching cloth (not plastic). This will allow moisture thru but not light.
 - C. Using various sizes of fill rock (I used chunk of concrete collected at a local building site) create varying heights in your garden. (raise level off rock at least one foot above ground level).
 - D. Over fill the large rocks with six inches of pea gravel.
 - E. Add a good quality sandy loam mixed well with composted cow manure. This will be your planting surface.
 - F. Place landscape rocks.
 - G. After placing landscape boulders and planting your cacti, place another layer of pea gravel over the entire bed. This serves many purposes; it acts as an insulator, helps water runoff, and it is more pleasing to the eye than just planting dirt.

As a final step, I would suggest putting out other non-cacti plants such as Yuccas, Sedums, Sages, etc. This helps create an atmosphere as well as create a vacuum for moisture. Do all of these things and you will have a successful outdoor cacti garden. Don't get disappointed if you loose some plants occasionally and experiment a lot!.

Happy growing