

How to Fertilize Cacti, Orchids and Succulents

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When you buy pretty, unique potted plants, you want to make sure that you can care for them so they continue to thrive. Understanding fertilizer is a big part of keeping plants strong.

A Quick Overview

Plants need a few [basics to survive](#): air, soil, sunlight and water.

Think of the sunlight as the plant's food, and the air and water as integral parts of the plant-feeding process.

But what's the soil for, then?

A couple of things:

1. Soil is a natural sponge for water, letting the plant's roots absorb the water.
2. Soil has nutrients that help the plant grow stronger. However, there are epiphytes plants such as Tillandsia (air plants) and certain types of orchids that do not need soil.

Think of the air, sunlight and water as the plant's food, but the soil as the vitamins and minerals.

If you take away the air, sunlight and water, the plant will starve. Without the right soil, though, the plant may live, but it won't flourish as beautifully and strongly as it can.

Recognizing When Your Plant Needs Fertilizer

If you notice a drastic difference between your plant's old leaves and its new leaves, it may not be getting the nutrients it needs. A nutrient-

deficient plant may show the following:

- New leaves that are smaller than the older leaves when fully developed
- All of the old leaves or some of the new leaves are turning yellow
- New leaves that are fully developed remain pale green instead of darkening
- All of the new leaves have a shape or texture that's different from the old leaves

How to Buy Fertilizer for Cacti, Orchids and Succulents

An all-purpose fertilizer like [Maxsea](#) should work fine for most houseplants.

Since cacti and succulents don't need nearly as much fertilizer as other standard houseplants do, apply it monthly, which is about half as often as is recommended for other plants.

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