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Grow Jade Plants for Good Luck in 2018

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Jade plants have been a favorite houseplant in the Americas and Europe for over 100 years. These succulents are native to South Africa and Mozambique and are typically *Crassula ovata* cultivars. In some cultures, they are considered symbols of good luck or prosperity or friendship.

One reason for their popularity is that they are easy to grow. Plants are fairly undemanding and respond well in situations with moderate light and moisture and over a wide range of temperatures. While jade plants are tolerant of less than favorable conditions they will be happier when provided with more optimum conditions. Mature plants might even fill the darkest part of the year with starry white or pink blooms.

Like all houseplants, jade plants do best in a certain moisture, light and temperature range. In their natural habitats, they grow in dry but very sunny sites. Jade plants enjoy a sunny, southern exposure but do not move plants from subdued lighting into a full sun situation. Instead, gradually expose them to brighter light so leaves will not get sunburn. Sometimes in very high light situations, the leaves develop a red tinge around their edges. Keep plants around 60 to 70°F during the day but temperatures can drop into the 50s at night.

Overwatering is the biggest killer of houseplants, especially succulents like jade plants. Succulents store water in their leaves, stems and roots. When plants are actively growing which is usually from about mid-March through mid-October, they like to be watered enough so the soil remains moderately moist. Some like to really soak plants once a week or so and let them drain thoroughly so no water accumulates in the saucer. Once the top inch or so of soil feels dry to the touch, this watering procedure is repeated. Watering may need to be done more frequently in hot, dry weather.

During the other 6 months of the year when temperatures are cooler and the sun's rays are weaker and days are shorter, jade plants slow their growth and require less water. Do not let plants completely dry out but reduce the amount and frequency of watering. If you are not giving the plant enough water, often it will begin losing leaves and may shrivel.

Overwatered plants may start to exhibit signs of root rot or a condition known as oedema. Water taken up by the roots is greater than the plant can use or be transpired through the stomates. This encourages blisters to form on the leaves that turn into corky brown spots. Sometimes, small white spots that rub off easily appear on the leaves. This again can occur when plants have more water than they need so some water is released through the leaves along with plant minerals. These two problems most often occur in late winter during cool, cloudy weather.

Jade plants should be fertilized according to their growth cycles as well. Just feed plants every other month with a flowering houseplant fertilizer from April through September.

Potting mixes for jade plants need to be very well draining. Because plants tend to be top-heavy, commercial potting mixes for succulent usually contain sand, grit, rock chips or other weighty materials. A source of organic matter such as peat moss, coconut coir or composted bark will also be in the mix and sometimes bark chips or perlite is added for improved drainage. If not listed on the package, I mix in two tablespoons of ground limestone for every gallon of potting mix as jade plants prefer a pH of around 6.5. Usually plants need repotting every 2 to 3 years. Clay or ceramic pots are ideal to use for these hefty succulents.

Jade plants can live a long time and if content, may reach 5 feet or so in height. Mature plants produce starry white or pink blossoms during the winter months. One would have already cut back on watering during this part of the year but like holiday cacti, cooler nights and avoidance of supplemental light after the sun sets encourages bud formation.

Because jade plants are so easy to propagate, some refer to them as friendship plants as they are perfect for sharing. Simply remove a few leaves, leave in an open area for the end of the leaf to callous over and then simply stick it in some moistened potting mix in a small container. Put a clear plastic bag over it to retain moisture. Roots should form in a few weeks and then the small plants can be potted up.

The leaves of the common jade plant are a rich jade green, hence the name. My favorite is 'Variegata' with green and cream leaves. 'Tricolor' jade plants grow 2 to 4 feet tall and have lovely pink and cream streaks on green leaves. 'Bronze Beauty' has small coppery colored leaves and is very slow growing. Lord of the Ring fans might seek out 'Hobbit' with its tiny, curled leaves or 'Gollum', a curious plant sporting long, fingerlike leaves.

If out searching for a touch of green during these bone-chilling winter days, check out the selection of houseplants at your local garden center and maybe bring home a jade plant both for its easy-going ways and for good luck.

If you have questions on growing jade plants or other horticultural topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.