

Why Stan's the man for cactus growers

By Ken Tudor

WEST Bromwich cactus and succulent expert Stan Griffin won gold medals at Chelsea and other top shows this year – and is now working to ensure his prize plants get through the winter months safe and well.

And Stan says this will mean that his super specimens will get no water in the months ahead to protect them in the cold and dark months – and recommends that home growers turn off the tap on their plants too.

Stan says that a lot of people get confused about cacti and succulents and their watering and feeding regimes – sometimes believing that plants from the deserts of the world do not need much water, while others water far too much.

Displays

Stan, who lives in the Hateley Heath area of West Bromwich, has been growing cacti and other succulents for 45 years. He started showing cacti 20-odd years ago and now runs the highly-successful Craig House Cacti with his coproprietor Vicki Newman, a former teacher from Great Barr.

The displays are appreciated by the enthusiasts and top gardeners like Chris Beardshaw, Carol Klein, and Diarmuid Gavin have paid homage at their stands at shows from Suffolk to Dundee, taking in Chelsea, Hampton Court Palace, Harrogate and at Shrewsbury where I caught up with a couple of



Stan Griffin with his stunning display which attracted much attention in Shrewsbury



The amazing elephant's foot cactus

months ago. The display at that show was stunning, and, of course, brought a gold medal and the appreciation of the large number of enthusiasts.

One of the super specimens which caught the imagination of the public because of its unusual appearance was *Dioscorea elephantipes*, described by experts as one of the most beautiful and weird and interesting plants in the cacti world. Its popular name – the elephant's foot – comes from the appearance of the bark on the top of the plant which supports

lovely foliage and flowers. "To win at these shows is wonderful, but the highlight is to get a gold at Chelsea Flower Show," says Stan.

Yet, Stan adds, that often people get confused about watering and some think there is no need for watering at all.

Attention

"Succulents plants are adapted by nature to take up moisture quickly and store it over a long periods – so they do need water.

"Like all houseplants, they need regular attention, re-potting and checking for pests or disease, and

they will not survive long periods of cold, especially if it is damp," he says. "We suggest once a week of watering during the growing season from March to October. But if you are in any doubt, don't water, and in winter it is particularly important that little or no water should be given. Water either from above or below, but never let the plants stand in water for more than an hour."

Stan and Vicki, who have already had an invitation to show at Chelsea next year, are proud the work they have done to help people

who grow cacti seriously and those who just grow a plant or two on their windowsill.

"There are many misconceptions about cacti and succulents and one of them is that there is some kind of mystique about their flowering," he says.

To help people with their plants, Stan and Vicki have produced a cultivation booklet which takes the growers through seed growing, watering, repotting and general care. It is available from Stan on www.craighousecacti.co.uk or on 07788 753215.

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