



# Where can I grow them?

The short answer is anywhere there is sufficient light! However this leads to another question. What is sufficient light?

When plants are completely dormant and the compost has dried out completely, cacti and other succulent plants need less light and could be moved to a position with lower light levels if necessary to achieve an appropriate temperature level. This applies to all those cacti and other succulent plants that grow in spring and summer, and then stop growing in autumn as the days shorten, though there are some winter-growing exceptions discussed in other sheets.

When growing actively, plants need very good light. This ensures that no etiolation (spindly growth) occurs. Many garden centres are unaware of the needs of cacti, and you will see plants with pale thin growth on top of normal bodies. Do NOT buy these unless they are very cheap and you are prepared to spend some time and effort chopping off the spindly growth and waiting for offsets to develop below that can then be rooted down. (Fig. 1). Normally a windowsill with a southerly aspect will provide an adequate light level. Given some ventilation and carefully controlled watering (again watch for any etiolation), this will provide a growing space for plants with lower light-level needs, such as haworthias and gasterias, and smaller-growing cacti such as rebutias, gymnocalyciums and some mammillarias (Fig. 2). However it will be difficult to grow more vigorous plants with higher light demands satisfactorily in such conditions.

Your next option is a cold frame. Site your frame in the sunniest position available in your garden, where the fewest shadows fall. The temperature in a closed frame rises rapidly when the sun hits it, so ventilation is vital. In winter, the frame will keep your plants dry, but not warm unless you use a form of heating (see later). Because of the better light, the range of plants you can grow increases. (Fig. 3).

The best option, when money and space are available, is a glasshouse! Flat sites are easiest, but the site can be levelled or built up where needed. If possible, put in a concrete base or paving slabs with a damp-proof membrane below to stop damp rising from the ground in winter. Choose the sunniest position you can, and buy as large a glasshouse as you can afford that fits your site. You do not have to fill it. Growth will absorb your spare space in time. Almost everyone who collects for several years complains about their lack of space. Another advantage to a larger glasshouse is that it maintains a more even temperature, without the extremes met in, for instance, a small frame (Fig. 4).

Generally you will find a glass-to-ground building offers more usable space. Whichever you choose, ensure it has good ventilation. This may mean purchasing extra vents or side louvres as so many glasshouses come with a minimum of vents. Automatic ventilators are excellent and can be fastened easily to windows to open and close them automatically as the temperature inside rises and falls. Extra air circulation can also be provided by electric fans, either free standing or attached to the roof or side bars of the glasshouse. You will need some staging to display your plants and the area under it can also be used for shade-loving plants. Good foundations prolong the life of a glasshouse, so make sure that you prepare them well.



Fig. 1a An etiolated and damaged *Rebutia* plant, 1b How a small *Rebutia* plant should look and 1c A columnar cactus, *Cleistocactus reae*, cut off near the base, with offsets forming



Fig. 2 Some suitable plants growing on a sunny windowsill (small agaves, gymnocalyciums, echeverias, gasterias, small aloes, haworthias, rebutias and rhipsalis)



Fig. 3 Some suitably cold-tolerant plants (mainly rebutias and echinocerej) growing in a frame with an electric tubular heater for a low level of winter heating. Some plants may need no heating

Photos: 1a Alastair Glen, 1b and 1c David Quail

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