

The Transplanted Gardener – Episode one

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As a transplanted gardener, I'm here to tell you that gardening is a site specific skill. I've had the opportunity to relearn this lesson many times as career has taken us around the country.

I come to the Sonoran Desert as a seasoned Midwestern gardener, yet, I have so much to learn. Desert adapted cacti and other succulents have many weapons to defend themselves against adverse climatic conditions such as wind, sun and drought. I never felt that I needed welders' gloves to plant a perennial in Chicago!

So, let the lessons begin. Allow me to share them with you. Maybe you'd like to buy an interesting cactus to add to your landscape. Search out a reputable local garden center. Begin by asking questions about water needs, light exposure, planting depth, temperature adaptability and soil type. Once you have a handle on what conditions the plant needs, make your purchase.

If you choose to plant in a decorative container, use a very lean, rocky soil combo with lots of sharp sand and well draining materials; otherwise, plant directly into the native soil, if you can penetrate it with a pick or shovel. Measure the depth of the soil in the nursery pot and plan to place the new plant at the same depth.

Oh, and by the way, all garden centers worth their salt have marked the pots with a white dot to indicate the south facing side of the plant. Because of the intense summer suns, plants in the SW have adapted themselves to the sun. The plant will sunburn if oriented improperly. Here's a secret. Mark a dot on the plant with a Sharpie indicating the south facing side.

Next, using a sharp knife, slash the sides of the plastic grower's pot to release it from the root ball of the plant. Once the soil begins to fall out of the existing pot, you can begin the process of plant removal. This is important. Use a rope or cord to gently lasso the ornery guy for landing him in your container or the ground at the correct depth.

So, while the lassoed plant is dangling in your hands and you are vainly trying to avoid being impaled, don't forget which side should face south. Stick him in and back fill the planting hole. Press the new soil down firmly. And remember to avoid coming in contact with those pesky spines.

In the Midwest, it is customary to "water in" a new planting; however, desert gardening requires that you allow cacti to relax before watering (maybe the swinging in the air from

a lasso part causes some stress?) So give your new feller a couple of weeks to unwind before watering.

Here comes the good part. Enjoy the beauty of your new acquisition like my *Oreocereus hendricksenianus*, Old Man of the Andes. Impress your neighbors when they ask the name of your new plant and you know it.