

Crown of Thorns

GENERAL INFORMATION:

This euphorbia, among the 2,000 or more known species of the spurge family, is an old trooper. It is not fussy, and can produce cheery bracts of orange to salmon-pink and white-red all year round. It comes from Madagascar, where it grows happily in granite crevices, reaching up to 40 inches, though as a houseplant it rarely exceeds this height. Its long thorny branches are about as thick as a little finger and are easily trained over a hoop.

Euphorbia lophogona, again from Madagascar, is an evergreen with pink flowers. The two species have been crossed to produce *Euphorbia* hybrids in a range of colors from yellow and pink through to violet.

Euphorbia Mili is poisonous, particularly the juice from its woody stems.

LIGHT AND TEMPERATURE:

Average warmth and as much light as possible. During the flowering period it will do well in average home temperature (68° - 72°F). Let this temperature drop by only a few degrees in winter.

WATER AND SOIL:

As a succulent, water the plant moderately and scarcely at all in winter. Young plants can be repotted every 2 years. Use cactus soil. Prune or trim before new growth begins in spring.

FERTILIZER:

Use cactus fertilizer in the water every 2 weeks, January to September, while the plant is in flower. Stop fertilizing in November thru December during rest period.

PROPAGATION:

Take cuttings and dip them in tepid water to halt the flow of milky sap. Leave them to dry off for 24 hours and then pot in a peat and sand mixture. Keep the cuttings very much on the dry side. Once they have rooted, which takes around 6 weeks, situate in bright morning sun. Make sure there is good drainage.

COMMENTS:

If the leaves drop, check that there is adequate drainage, that the plant is not overwatered and that it is in a warm enough spot. The leaves grow only on new growth and will not be replaced if they fall. The Euphorbia should flower for most of the year. If it fails to flower, move it to the sunniest spot you have.