

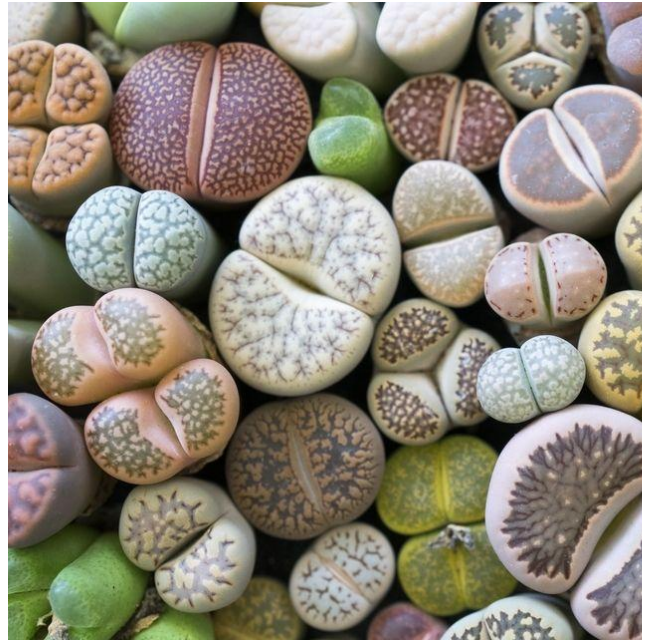
REEMS CREEK NURSERY

Lithops

Living Stones

A Garden Guide

Unique and adorable! Native to Southern Africa, these members of the family Aizoaceae are amazing perennial plants that survive in extremely harsh conditions, and have developed specific adaptations in order to do so. The bulk of the plant is actually two (occasionally more) plump water-storing leaves. They grow new leaves every year, with the older ones dying off. Relative to the size of the rest of the plant, they have large root systems, to better find water. In order to hide from herbivores, they rely on mimicry of natural stones, camouflaged in plain sight! They will start to bloom white or yellow flowers when they are 3-5 years old, these flowers may have a scent. These extremely slow growing plants can live 40-50 years. Different species have different shapes and colors, like other succulents their colors can also change with the seasons. Because they are adapted to such uniquely dry conditions, while they are low maintenance, they do need specific watering care.



Dissected Lithops 0133
by Yellowcloud
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This picture of a dissected Lithops shows their unusual anatomy. The two plump sections are the water-filled leaves. The tops of the leaves are tough yet translucent, acting as "windows." Light filters down through the clear water storage, to the inside green walls of the leaves where photosynthesis happens. Haworthias and other plants of extremely harsh climates have similar adaptations. The green blob in the bottom middle is the protected growth area, where future flowers and foliage will emerge. Amazing!!

Light: 4-5 hours of direct sunlight, earlier in the day, is preferable. South-facing or east-facing windows are best, but keep in mind they may need to be moved in winter if that location gets too cold. They need time to adjust to new lighting conditions, so it is best to gradually transition them. Too little light can cause them to stretch, and lose their interesting colors and patterns.

Water: Watering needs depend on time of the year. The best strategy - when in doubt - is to NOT water. They are prone to rotting when overwatered. They time their life around the harsh conditions that they evolved in, where rains - if they happen at all - only happen at certain times of the year. Lithops prefer dry, not humid, air.

- **Summer:** Semi-dormant/dry period. If you see the foliage starting to shrink and/or become wrinkled, give just enough water until the leaves firm up again. Otherwise leave them alone.
- **Fall:** Usually around August or September, the fissure between the two leaves will start to open, this means it is a time of active growth. Water deeply, but allow to completely dry out between waterings. If your plant is old enough, this is usually when it will flower. After it finishes flowering, taper down your watering.
- **Winter:** Dormant/dry period. As the new leaves are emerging, the plant is pulling moisture and nutrients from the old leaves. Do not water at this time, even if the foliage becomes shriveled, as the risk for rot is high and they have evolved to not need water during this time.
- **Spring:** The old outer leaves are now papery husks and if desired, they can be removed. Plants can be watered at this time, starting from a light amount to deep watering. Always be sure to wait until they have entirely dried out before watering again. As summer approaches, taper the watering back down again.
- **Signs of overwatering include:** mushy yellow leaves, leaves bursting open, roots brown and mushy in wet soil.

Fertilization: Lithops do not need much fertilizer, and can happily survive on cactus potting soil. However, if you insist: you can apply a cactus fertilizer that is low in Nitrogen but relatively high in Potassium - dilute it down 10x, and apply to the soil (not the leaves) during spring. Applying even highly diluted fertilizer to the foliage can burn the leaves.

Maintenance: Lithops are best planted in cactus soil amended with extra coarse sand, 2 parts cactus soil to 1 part sand is a good ratio. Because of their relatively large root system, planting them in pots 3-5" deep is recommended (unglazed terracotta pots are ideal). Although in the wild the tops of their foliage are flush with the ground, it is not recommended to imitate this in the home environment due to the risk of rot. However, the soil can be topped with attractive stones and gravel, to better showcase these "living stones."



Temperature: Thrives 65-80°F. Version 1.0 Sept 21

76 Monticello Road Weaverville, NC 28787 828-645-3937 <https://reemscreek.com>