

Pencil Bush

GENERAL

Origin	: sub-tropical, tropical
Vigour	: fairly fast growing
Humidity	: very arid, semi-arid, semi-humid, very humid
Propagation	: sowing and pricking out, cuttings
Maintenance	: moderate

CONDITIONS

Urban climate	: resistant
Dessication	: resistant
Stagnant water	: vulnerable
Irrigation	: low
Salinity/ppm	: moderate (2500 ppm)
Hardiness	: -3°C

SHAPE

Type	: cacti, succulents
Height	: 4 m-15 m
Spread	: 3 m-10 m
Foliage	: semi-evergreen

FLOWER

Colour	: pale green
Period	: July - September

FRUIT

Type of fruit	: capsule
Fruit size	: 0.8 cm - 1.2 cm
Toxicity	: highly poisonous

The Pencil Bush may be found growing wild in Madagascar and southeastern Africa, where it sometimes forms large trees of 10 to 15 metres in height. In cultivation and especially in Arriyadh, it is a multi-branched shrub with a noteworthy shape and some 4 metres in height. Its cylindrical branches are dull green and measure about 8 mm in diameter, just like a common pencil. They give this fast-growing plant the appearance of a giant round brush. Mature bark turns grey and occasionally shows harmless swellings and black bands. The linear foliage is short-lived and leaves small dents that give a pattern to the branches. In autumn, clusters of tiny yellow flowers appear without much visual impact. Subsequent capsules measure 12 mm across and dehisce while still on the plant. Seeds, but also cuttings, are used to propagate the plant. Cuttings' loss of sap should first staunch in water and dry for a few days thereafter. Any injury immediately releases latex that cause blisters on the skin and is poisonous if ingested. On the other hand, it is used as an antidote for snake bites. Plants should not grow next to a pond, since they are toxic to fish. Pencil Bushes tolerate some salinity, drought and, surprisingly, they tolerate poor drainage better than other succulent shrubs. However, supplemental irrigation should be omitted in autumn and ceased in winter in order to achieve healthy plants. The plant looks best amongst boulders in rock gardens or grouped on embankments along roads, where it tolerates full sun.

