

# PORTULACARIA AFRA (DWARF JADE) CARE

## General Background:

The *Portulacaria afra*, commonly known as Dwarf Jade or Elephant Bush, is a prolific growing succulent species that thrives as a bonsai. Its resilience, low maintenance requirements, and appealing appearance make it an excellent choice for beginners and experienced enthusiasts alike.

This comprehensive care guide will help you cultivate and nurture a thriving *Portulacaria afra* bonsai.

## Features:

*P. Afra* sports thick, round, deep green leaves and delicate pink to yellow flowers atop succulent stems and branches. As a succulent, this plant's water-retentive attributes enhance its charm. Getting a *Portulacaria afra* to flower is not easy. Young plants are less likely to flower, and generally only old and established specimens will flower

## Temperature:

*P. Afra* prefers temperatures between 50 and 71 degrees Fahrenheit, with a preference for outdoor exposure during summer. The Dwarf Jade can thrive indoors near bright windows but truly flourishes when allowed outdoor exposure during the warm months.

It is critical to protect specimens from freezing temperatures, and care should be taken in any climate where temperatures can drop below 50 degrees.

## **Lighting:**

P. Afra are desert and steppe dwelling species. They prefer bright indirect sunlight as leaves can sunburn in hot direct sun. Aim for 4-6 hours of direct sunlight daily. During winter place P. Afra in southern windows or supplement with grow lights.

## **Watering:**

P. Afra is a true succulent species which means it is very drought tolerant. Water when the soil is completely dry. Be sure soil is fast draining to prevent root rot. Water more frequently during the summer and less frequently during winter months.

## **Fertilizing:**

Typical growing season spans from early spring to early autumn. Fertilize with well balanced diluted liquid fertilizer every two to four weeks during the growing season. Winter fertilizing is at the discretion of the winter climate: if your tree continues to show growth, continue feeding.

## **Pruning / Training:**

P. Afra is very receptive to directional pruning. Pruning should consist of cutting branches back to a pair of healthy leaves. Wiring may be used with caution. P. Afra bark is generally thin and delicate and branches can snap, especially older, more developed branches.

## **Insects / Pests:**

P. Afra is fortunately not highly susceptible to pests, although instances of mealybugs and aphids infestations are not uncommon. Mealybugs typically target the roots and Aphids tend to emerge during warmer and more humid months, particularly when conditions are damp. They primarily target the tender new growth that emerges in spring. In both cases, rinse well with water and spray the plant thoroughly with insecticidal soap. Repeat in 5-7 days to ensure all pests have been removed.

## **Propagation:**

Propagation of the P. Afra can be readily accomplished through stem cuttings. Take a healthy cutting, allow it to dry for a few days, then plant it in a well-draining soil mix. Keep the soil lightly moist until roots establish.

## **Repotting:**

Repot every two to three years in late spring. Repot P. Afra specimens in well-draining soil. Up to  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the root mass can be pruned off healthy specimens.

## **Additional Comments:**

P. Afra can quickly grow out of control without proper pruning and maintenance. Consider a bi-monthly pruning schedule to prevent plants from becoming tall, thin and “leggy”.

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