



5930-E Royal Lane
140
Dallas, Texas 75230
caresheets@txtriffidranch.com
www.txtriffidranch.com

Medusa head (*Euphorbia flavaganii*)

Euphorbia flavaganii is a member of the family Euphorbiaceae, one of the most widespread and variable succulent groups on Earth. It gains its common name of “medusa head” from the long tendrils spreading from a central axis, sometimes growing to the size of a human head. This plant is native to South Africa, but has acclimated very well in arid areas such as southern California. It may appear carnivorous, but it’s completely harmless to anything not attempting to eat it, and regularly appears in succulent collections as an easy-to-raise oddity.

A Word of Warning

One of the common traits of many Euphorbia is the ability to exude copious amounts of latex sap, and the medusa head can drip sap for as long as ten minutes if cut, torn, or sufficiently bruised. This sap can cause allergic reactions in some people, caustic burning in others, and gum up hinges and keyholes to boot. If exposed to this sap, wash the exposed area IMMEDIATELY with soap and water. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD YOU GET SAP IN YOUR EYES. If medusa head sap gets in the eyes, get immediate medical attention, as with any allergic reaction. The use of rubber or neoprene gloves and eye protection when trimming, repotting, or otherwise working closely with a medusa head is highly recommended. Please keep this plant out of the reach of children and/or pets.

Care and Feeding

The medusa head is remarkably undemanding in its care, only needing direct sun for six to eight hours and watering every week or so. Fertilizing every month is recommended in order to get maximum growth and regular blooming: the Texas Triffid Ranch uses Mexican bat guano in the ratio of one cup of guano to five gallons (18.93 liters) of water. The medusa head may be raised outdoors in a garden with well-drained soil, but must be brought inside at any possibility of freezing.

Blooming and Propagation

If growing under the right conditions and fertilized regularly, the medusa head will bloom

from the innermost tendrils nearest its axis. These blooms are about the size of the end of a pencil eraser and range from brilliant green to chartreuse. Most American insect pollinators seem to avoid the blooms, and seed production appears to be very rare in American cultivation.

On the other hand, medusa heads are very easy to propagate from cuttings. Upon reaching a certain size, some outermost tendrils start to grow side-branches, each of which will gradually swell and turn into a new plant axis. Once the axis is about the diameter of a US half-dollar or Canadian toonie coin, the umbilical tendril may be cut with sharp shears (taking great care to keep the white latex sap off skin, clothes, and tools) and the cutting allowed to dry for two or three days until the cut calluses over. At that point, it can be put into standard potting mix in a small plastic or clay pot, watered lightly or misted heavily (daily misting seems to encourage rooting), and either transferred into the garden or put into a larger pot. To achieve full size, medusa heads should be put into at least an 8-inch pot, and only repotted once completely rootbound.

Copyright information and Disclaimer

The information in this Plant Care Sheet is ©2009 Texas Triffid Ranch, and permission is given to reproduce this sheet in its entirety for personal or reasonable use. Please feel free to contact the Texas Triffid Ranch for further information on what constitutes “personal or reasonable use,” because we’re reasonable. If used for reference materials in other published materials, please refer back to the Triffid Ranch, particularly when used as a research resource. Further copies may be downloaded directly from www.txtriffidranch.com. All information in this Plant Care Sheet is offered in good faith on an “AS IS” basis, and neither the Texas Triffid Ranch nor its employees will be held responsible for any financial loss or personal injury from use or misuse of the information presented herein. The Texas Triffid Ranch reserves the right to alter any information on this Plant Care Sheet at any time, particularly when new scientific developments require a revision of obsolete or outdated material. Medusa heads may not be carnivorous, but they sure look as if they want to be.