

# Starfish Cactus Flower, Carrion Flower, *Stapelia gigantea*



*Stapelia gigantea* is a clump-forming succulent with fat, green, erect, deeply ribbed stems, up to 8 inches (20 cm) tall and 1.2 inches (3 cm) thick. The flowers are large, star-shaped 5-petaled, up to 14 inches (35 cm) in diameter, pale yellow in color, with transverse crimson lines variable in color and covered with purplish or crimson hairs.

The hairy, oddly textured and colored appearance of many *Stapelia* flowers has been claimed to resemble that of rotting meat, and this, coupled with their odor, has earned the most commonly grown members of the *Stapelia* genus the common name of "carrion flowers".

*Stapelia* are good container plants and can grow well under full sun or part shade, and light to moderate watering. They should be planted in well-drained compost as the stems are prone to rotting if kept moist for long.

These plants are hardy Zones 9-11. They can be grown in colder zones if brought in during the winter. Watering should be cut back dramatically during the winter to keep them from rotting. Bring inside when temperatures start to fall into the low 40's (Fahrenheit).

**UN-ROOTED CUTTINGS:** These plants are VERY EASY to root; simply place each stem cutting, cut end down, vertically into some well draining (cactus suitable) soil. If more than one end is cut, then place the end down that was wrapped in the newspaper when it arrived down. I usually bury mine about 1/3 - 1/2 of the way down (so, if the cutting is 4" long, bury 2" of it; if it is 6" long, then still bury about 2" of it) in the soil; leaving the remainder of the stem above ground level. Be sure to pack the soil tightly around the stem to remove any air pockets and make sure the whole bottom of the stem has good contact with the soil.

Water sparingly but regularly (don't allow water to stand or soil to be soggy), as you would a cactus, and within a few weeks you'll have rooted, growing plants! When the plants are larger, they will appreciate some 'bloom booster' fertilizer; when they are small, regular water-soluble fertilizer applied monthly will keep them growing strong.

These root quickly in warm temperatures (80°F and higher), often you'll see new growth within 3 weeks; in cooler temps it will take longer. Don't overwater trying to get them to root or grow faster, that will cause them to rot, just give them time; as long as they are still green, they are ok. For best results, keep them as warm as possible, but out of direct sun to begin with. These can be moved to more sun / full sun once they are rooted and growing well.