

Growing *Euphorbia obesa* in the Phoenix Area

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About four years ago my favorite nursery in Apache Junction was selling *Euphorbia obesa* in 2 inch pots for a few dollars each - who can resist a few of these symmetrical beauties. Without thinking I ended up buying half a flat of these exquisite succulents. It wasn't until I got home that I began to question my impulse purchase – what was I going to do with all these plants? I tried a planter, which looked okay for a while, but dried out too quickly, so decided to put them in the ground. Knowing that the intensity of our summer sun is a death knell to all but the hardiest sun-adapted plants I opted to give them mid-day shade by planting them under an *Acacia greggii* tree.

Today, there are two sets of *E. obesa* under the *Acacia*, the original plants from four years ago (Fig. A) and several seedlings the largest of which is about ½ inch in diameter (Fig. B). These seedlings are from seed ejected by the original mother plants. There would undoubtedly be many more seedlings but the curve-billed thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) bird has a bad habit of uprooting small plants and seedlings. The original plants are now several times their original size, the largest about 4" (10 cm) in diameter. My plants in the ground are free of scarring from sucking insects; the same can not be said for the few *E. obesa* that I have in pots, which appear to be susceptible to pests.

Overall, *E. obesa* is tolerant of our environmental extremes. My plants were unaffected by the 16°F (-8.9°C) that we dipped to in Chandler two years ago. They respond well to winter monsoon rains and flower profusely during our spring producing an abundance of seeds (Fig. C). I have seen few flying insects alighting on *E. obesa* flowers, but ants are frequent visitors, suggesting they are the dominant pollinator.

Having touted their hardiness they do have an Achilles' heel – summer wetness. I have lost several plants from both my eagerness to help the parched succulents during our warmest months and from the occasional summer monsoon deluge. My advice is to plant *E. obesa* in slightly raised beds or well-draining soil and resist the temptation to water them during the summer.

It is always a pleasure to find succulents that do well in our environment. I have been experimenting with a variety of other *Euphorbias*, *Haworthias*, and *Stapeliads* in the ground with some surprising successes.