



Aloe Vera

This incredible plant has been known for centuries to have remarkable healing properties. It originated in Africa and was widely used by Egyptians. The pulp was used in lotions, cosmetics, salves and potions. As trade spread, Greeks and Romans began to cultivate aloe. The physicians of the Roman Legionnaires carried this plant on their conquests and on crusades across Europe. Its introduction to North America is credited to Spanish explorers and missionaries.

There are 250 species of Aloe in the world, ranging from one-inch miniatures to massive plant colonies amassing hundreds of plants. Some aloes are kept for their medicinal value.

All Aloes are sub-tropical succulents and may be grown outdoors in areas where there is no chance of freezing (hardiness zones 10-11). They also make wonderful indoor houseplants when provided sufficient light. Potted Aloes may benefit from spending the summer outdoors in warm enough climates. Older plants may even produce a flower stock in the summer. Their flowers are a particularly attractive to hummingbirds.

Temperature:

(USDA hardiness zone 10-11); average warmth spring to fall. Minimum night temperature: 30 degrees F. They need variance between night and day temperatures in the winter months. Keep cool indoors with 50 to 55 F night temperature for 6-10 weeks.

Light:

Some direct sunlight is beneficial, though some shade in the summer may be necessary to prevent scalding. If put outdoors in the Spring, make sure to gradually acclimate it to the sun and outside temperatures. Too much sun can dull the appearance of the flesh and cause a red margin (a tanning effect) on the edges of the leaves.

Water:

Treat as you would any succulent from spring through summer. Allow the soil to dry completely before giving it a thorough soaking. Don't allow the plant to sit in water for more than an hour or so after watering. In the winter it will take the plant longer to dry out, especially in lower light levels and cooler night temperatures.

Repotting:

Only repot when truly necessary: if the plant is top heavy, drying out too fast, or the soil has become compacted. Transplant into a pot only ONE size larger than its current pot (2" larger in pot size), and use a shallow type rather than a deep one. Use only well-draining cactus soil or a good commercial potting mix with extra perlite, granite grit or coarse sand or scoria (lava rock) added.

Medicinal properties:

The sap of Aloe Vera "Aloe barbadensis" is a thick, mucilaginous gel. It's this gel that is used as healing salve. The outer skin has no medicinal effect, and can even cause rashes. Whole leaf juice has been touted as having the most benefits, but can cause allergic reactions. For cuts, burns, rashes and insect bites, immediate application of fresh aloe gel can relieve some of the pain and blistering from burns. Cut the leaf in half lengthwise to expose the gel. Rub the gel on the skin until liquid is absorbed.