

## **Cucurbits**

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Q: I bought a *Cephalopentandra ecirrhosa*. It hasn't grown much and the leaves turn brown quickly. I thought it produced long vines?

A: This plant is in the squash family, Cucurbitaceae. Like most squash, cucumbers, gourds, or melons, it likes lots and lots of water during warm weather, and is accustomed to growing under other plants, vining up into them. It does have a caudex, but that is for surviving the cool dry season, not the hot growing season. You probably aren't watering it enough. Treat it like a zucchini plant.

Make sure, after watering, that the soil is actually wet. Many potting soil mixes have only the surface wet, with water running down the outside of the root ball, and most of the soil dry. Run your finger into the soil 15 minutes after watering to check.

It does better with a little shade in our hot summers. It does even better planted out in the ground. Be careful you don't sunburn the caudex.

And, cucurbits here are susceptible to spider mites. The mites are almost too small to see without magnification. They suck juices from the leaves and spin silvery cobwebs on the leaves, especially the undersides. The mites like warm dry weather. Control by spraying leaves with a stiff water jet being sure to get the undersides or, spray the entire leaf surface with rubbing alcohol.