

Othonna

Leo Martin

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Mostly small to very small shrubs, this genus is in the daisy family, *Asteraceae* (sometimes called *Compositae*). They all come from African winter-rainfall climates. Flowers are yellow bottle brushes much like those on dandelions, also in *Asteraceae*; some flower just before beginning their summer rest, and others flower after beginning growth in the fall. Quite a few have thick stems or even caudices, which explains their appeal to succulentophiles.

It is amazing to see a seemingly dead stick or brownish rock leaf out and grow in the space of a few days, but this show is repeated annually for *Othonna* growers.

Now is the time of active growth. Water thoroughly and heavily, not allowing the plants to dry completely. Give as much sun as possible in our winters, but protect from frost. Fertilizer results in faster growth.

As nights warm up in the spring, *Othonna* will look stressed. Stop watering; let them go dormant for the entire summer. The leaves will be shed and the fashionable dead stick look will return. Put them someplace with good air circulation but no rain and no watering. Mine summer indoors, a dead stick collection on a high windowsill.

In the fall, sometime around early to mid-October, when nights cool down, the plants may start growing on their own. If not, take them to their sunny winter home and give them a good soaking. If they are ready to grow, they will leaf out. If not, let the soil dry and try again in 10-14 days. When it is definitely cool, they will grow.

I neither over pot nor under pot these plants; they have an average-sized root system. I prefer heavy clay soil because it needs to be watered much less often than do lighter mixes in order to keep the soil evenly moist in the growing season. In fact, most of my winter-growing plants are in heavy clay. The drawback is that pots are heavier. Any soil may be used; *Othonna* is not picky.