*a plant with its own rules*

# Elephant's Foot care

It sleeps through summer and does its growing when it's cool, so forget what you know about watering.



## Meet your Elephant's Foot



**Dioscorea elephantipes** is an African caudex succulent, best known for the big tuber that sits above the ground and looks like an elephant's foot or a tortoise shell. In ideal conditions that tuber can grow to over 6 feet across.

Its creeping vines carry small, green, heart-shaped leaves, and tiny sweet-smelling flowers appear in early winter.

## How its year goes

### Late spring

The leaves and stems dry out and die. Don't panic: it's saving energy for the heat of an African summer. Once the vines are completely dry you can trim them back, but not so close that you damage the tuber.

### Going dormant

**Don't water** for the first 4 to 6 weeks of dormancy. After that, give it its first drink for the summer, then no more until new growth has begun.

### Mid-summer

New leaves start to sprout. Once it's properly growing again, go back to your regular watering.

### Cooler months

This is its growth phase, and it likes to drink a lot. Give it a good drink, then let it dry out completely before the next one.

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**Water around the side of the pot** so you don't wet the tuber. That corky wood can start to rot if it gets too wet.

**Want more growth?** Add a very weak fertiliser when you water during the growth phase.

## Repotting and planting

### What to plant it in

Use a well-draining potting mix, or sandy loam if it's going straight into a garden bed. Any compost must be very well rotted. If you're moving up to a larger pot, choose a porous material like terracotta or cement, which lets the soil dry out quicker.

### Where to put it

In the ground, plant it on top of a dirt mound rather than digging a hole, so it drains easily. Young plants won't cope with frost. Mature plants will likely tolerate down to -4°C, and temperatures over 40°C.

## Still stuck?

Send us a photo. We've seen it all, and you're never bothering us.


**Email**
sales@cactuscountry.com.au

**Instagram and Facebook**
@cactuscountryplants

**Call**
0427 745 271

Cactus Country · 4986 Murray Valley Highway, Strathmerton VIC 3641 · cactuscountry.com.au/elephants-foot-care