



LOVING AND LIVING WITH PLANTS
BY LAILA KARIM



LET YOUR WALL speak for you!

We are famous for writing on our walls – our walls are everybody's property. Anybody can mark his/her presence by writing their issues, sticking images of leaders, expressing love or hatred towards others. We have been using our walls for so many purposes – these non-verbal bodies became our tools and weapons to let other people down and show our power and position. Our walls also became the place of choice to release the untimely calls of nature and they also play a critical role in updating us on unseemly current events.

However, this need not be common practice. With the other changes that our lives have benefited from in the last decade or so, a change in what Dhaka's walls look like would also be a welcome respite. Now we buy flowers instead of sweets when we visit a friend or a relative. Flower shops and nurseries are seen everywhere in the city. Our roofs are greener than before. These are all hopeful signs of the changes in the air.

In past two years or so, I have observed that our walls have also begun to take on fresh, new appearances – mostly the walls and exteriors of corporate houses and some residential buildings are being decorated with plants. The other day while I was passing through the left lane of Aziz Supermarket towards the extension of the Bangabandhu Post Graduate Medical College



facade with greenery. Winter is the best time to decorate your walls with colour by planting common seasonal flowers or tolerant plants like bougainvillea.

A simple and usual brick box building can stand tall in the jungles with its green and coloured look. I think the owners and gardeners who decorate their walls and inspire others too! Be a proud owner of your exterior walls and let the walls speak for you!

Photo courtesy: Laila Karim

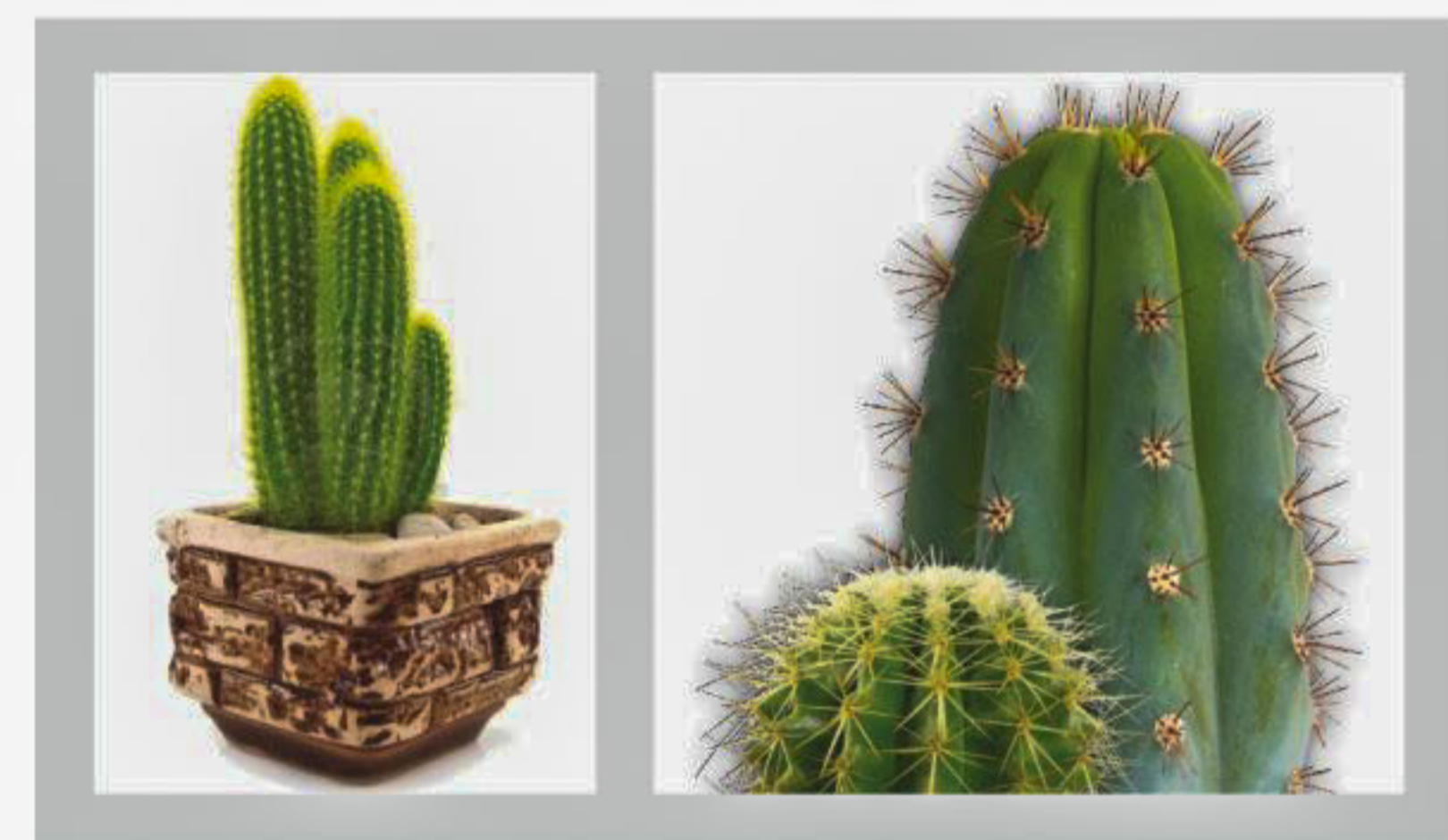
Hospital/IPGMR, I was really amazed to see the boundary walls of the hospital. Similarly, have you noticed the very special vertical wall garden of the Chinese restaurant at Bijoy Sharani (at Rangs premises)? I have seen this type of vertical and layer gardens in European and North American cities.

All these initiatives do not cost much. The first thing is to make the decision that you will give life, voice and colour to your walls. You can do it in many different ways. You can ask your gardener to look around the neighbourhood and do something nice to your walls or you may take assistance from professionals in this field. In one of the earlier columns, I talked about the easiest way of planting creepers. Just get a bunch of those, and plant them at the floor of the wall, nurture them with water and they will start growing and one day cover the

TIPS

Cracking cactus care

Cactus are legends when it comes to holding their drinks. You'd think they'd be a natural occurring fauna from the Irish or Scottish lands given their reputation, but their name instantly conjures up images of dry, parched lands. This image of a plant thriving in such extreme conditions, deludes people into thinking that anyone can raise a cactus, be at the office or at home. Except, of course anyone can't and there are two dead cacti in the office to testify to that very fact. Sure, cactus aren't high maintenance but



they aren't zero maintenance either. There are things you have to do to make sure a cactus lives as long as it is supposed to.

First, you need to dispel the myths. You may think that cactus don't need water because of how they survive in the desert and stuff but remember that there is a difference between surviving and thriving. During a cactus' growing season, between spring and into fall, your plant needs to be watered at least once a week. Add a bit of fertiliser every now and then too and make sure the water soaks the soil thoroughly but doesn't flood itself. Rainwater, devoid of alkaline, can be better than tap water so whenever possible collect rainwater for future use. As the weather cools and days become shorter, increase intervals between watering, unless your cactus grows in the winter. That's a different story.

This brings up the point, that more important than watering your cactus is actually understand your cactus. Like any plant, different cacti have different requirements and in the near future, before you fall prey to Plants Rights Activists, its best to have a defence ready. So learn about your plant well. Depending on what kind of cactus you have, you will have to prepare the lightning accordingly. If your cactus is getting too much sunlight, it will soon wear a bleached outlook and if it gets too little, the shape will change with the plant stretching towards the light. Sometimes, when light and heat changes rapidly, your cactus may actually scorch permanently so one needs to be careful towards that end too.

The next things for consideration are potting, what kind of soil to use and how to avoid pests. But those are things for another day. Our main concern today was the light and water because that's how our last two cacti died. If your cactus lives healthily past the first few months and the water and light don't bother you, then it is time to think soil and things. Having a plant is like having a baby. Having a cactus plant is like having a nasty baby. Of course, both are generally the same thing so have fun and get busy. Nurturing is not for the lazy.

By Osama Rahman

Photo: Collected