

DIAGNOSING THE PROBLEM

Like any living thing, cacti and succulents can fall victim to a fairly wide range of ailments and illnesses, which aren't always easy to tell apart. To help you assess the damage, here is a guide to the most common signs of poor health:

- Growing to a point or into a disfigured shape (see right) is usually caused by a lack of light.
- Skin wrinkling in winter is natural contraction and generally nothing to worry about.
- Discoloration on the sun-facing side of a plant is a sign of scorching. The plant needs to be rotated or moved to a less sunny spot.
- A discoloured band on the plant stem usually signifies cold damage, meaning that the plant has been subjected to temperatures that are lower than ideal.
- A fluffy white substance on the leaves is the sign of a small common pest called mealybugs. They are often found on houseplants, but are especially fond of cacti and succulents. A dab of rubbing alcohol or methylated spirits can remove them. It is also a good idea to use an insecticide aerosol spray twice a year for those plants prone to them. Bear in mind, though, that the overuse of insecticides can actually attract bugs to the plant.
- If the plant is severely shrivelled and looks brown, black or white, this is pretty bad news, and generally means RIP plant.

