

# West Coast Plant Guy

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## Bursera fagaroides Care Sheet

History:

**Bursera fagaroides** comes from northwestern Mexico, including Baja California and at least up until the mid 20th century was found growing in southern Arizona. (*Bursera fagaroides* is now protected in Arizona)

*B. fagaroides* is basically a shrub or small tree with a very short, thick, trunk and wide spreading branches. From the family: Burseraceae, the genus was named after Joachim Burser, a German botanist. Also called the Elephant tree, the dried sap of some of the species is sold as frankincense.

*Bursera fagaroides* is one of the most common *Bursera* of Mexico, typically growing 1 to 5 feet tall but capable of reaching taller when irrigated. Because of its swollen trunk and cold/drought tolerance they make a very nice bonsai specimen. Their bark is a very attractive, reddish brown and peeling to reveal gray-green. In the right bonsai pot this is a show stopper.

The *Bursera fagaroides* flower usually appear sometime in the spring they are very small perhaps 3/16" across at the maximum, creamy white, borne on long stalks that may be clustered or solitary. The leaves have distinct citrus odor when crushed. The fruit is brown maturing in late fall. Newly set seeds look like a green pea around 1/4" diameter. It takes close to a year for them to mature at which time the outer covering splits and falls away leaving the seed on the plant. The seeds when new are from a very bright yellow to a near day glow red, size is around 5/16".

**Watering:**

*Bursera* like well drained soil and full sun. Extra water in the summer is a good idea. We're hot and dry here in Southern California except for our occasional summer storms which have been few and far between these past several years so I always make sure to check the potted plants regularly. In the ground or in a pot *Bursera* need very little water in the winter when they are dormant. This plant is drought deciduous in habitat but will also drop its leaves when temperatures drop in winter. In the ground plants can tolerate light frosts but temperatures below the high 20's F will result in damage.

**Growth:**

Established *Bursera* are among the easiest pachycaul trees to care for, and will tolerate most errors in culture. Plant in full sun in a well drained soil and irrigate very little - too much water and high nitrogen fertilizer promotes lanky unattractive growth. This is the problem with most seeds propagated in pot culture.

**Overwintering conditions depend on the size of the plant.**

Seedlings - keep seedlings just at the very edge of being completely dry. Very occasionally offer just enough water to moisten some, but not all of the soil. Do this every time the soil is just about to dry out completely.

Mature plants - If you have a mature, established plant, they can be kept totally dry until spring. When it starts to warm up again, you can offer water to get the growing season started a little early, or just wait until it shows new growth, and water it then.

**Reproduction:**

From seed or wood cuttings.

**Seed;** I have had my best success with seeds after a boiling water 24 hr. soak. Just bring some water to boil and remove from heat, drop seeds into water and let it cool naturally for 24 hours. Plant in a well draining medium about 1" deep. Keep moist until you see them break the surface in 10 days or so.

**Cuttings;** select a good wood cutting in the spring when the growth spurt starts, one that shows some nice movement and girth. NOTE: do not be afraid to use a large cutting, these are very adaptive plants and you would be surprised what will grow. Make a clean cut using a grafting knife or razor. (this is critical) Soak the cut end in a solution of Superthrive or B-1 or your favorite soak medium for at least 1 hour. Now dip in a rooting gel and place in growing pot, I suggest a pot large enough that you will not have to transplant for at least 2 seasons. Secure the cutting using a support stick and light wire or landscape tape. Water well and never let it dry completely between watering for the first season.

**Important Notes; OK so what have we learned?**

- 1) Bursera are among the easiest pachycaul trees to care for, and will tolerate most errors in culture  
HOWEVER
- 2) **Do not allow your plant to freeze.** Established Bursera can tolerate light frosts but temperatures below the high 20's F will result in damage.
- 3) **Do not overwater or use too much fertilizer.** too much water and high nitrogen fertilizer promotes lanky unattractive growth.