

# Pencil cactus

# Euphorbia tirucalli



*Euphorbia tirucalli*, or Indian Tree Spurge, is a succulent, spineless shrub or tree with a heavy trunk, brown primary branches, and pencil-like, green, new branches. Leaves cluster at the tip of the branches as do insignificant flowers within showy bracts, and the branch tips turn brightly colored when grown in bright sunlight. It is tropical to semi-tropical by nature and reliably winter hardy to USDA Zone 11. It is currently surviving in southern parts of Florida and California in Zone 10. It is drought tolerant and when grown outdoors in warm climates, the tree can reach heights of 30 feet and is typically used as a hedge or barrier. When grown in more temperate climates, it can be kept smaller and used as a houseplant.

When grown outdoors, the plant does best in dry climates where the temperature ranges from 50 degrees in the evening and 75 degrees during the day. Plant in well-drained soils that are nourishing but without high organic content and water only when the soil is dry. If local conditions include hot summers, it is best to site

the plant where there is some afternoon shade. When grown indoors, use coarse loams with peat moss or leaf mold plus gritty material such as coarse sand.

Wear gloves when working with this plant to avoid contact with its toxic sap.

