

# CARRION PLANT

## *Stapelia gigantea*



### Characteristics

- Type: Succulent
- Zone: 9 to 10
- Height: 0.50 to 1.00 feet
- Spread: 1.00 to 2.00 feet
- Bloom Time: September to October
- Bloom Description: Pale ochre-yellow with maroon lines
- Sun: Full sun
- Water: Dry to medium
- Maintenance: Medium
- Flower: Showy
- Leaf: Evergreen
- Other: Winter Interest
- Tolerate: Drought, Dry Soil, Shallow-Rocky Soil

### Culture

Winter to USDA Zones 9-10 where it is best grown in fertile, sunny, dry to medium, well-drained soils. New plants appreciate somewhat consistent watering, but established plants perform quite well with minimal moisture. Plants propagate easily by division and cuttings. Allow plants to rest in winter (cool temperatures of 50-5 degrees F. at night with reduced watering). Grow in a sunny window as a houseplant. Flowers may be snipped from indoor plants if aroma becomes a problem.

### Noteworthy Characteristics

*Stapelia gigantea*, commonly called carrion flower, is a spine-free succulent member of the milkweed (not cactus) family that is native to dry desert areas from Tanzania to South Africa. Common name comes from the malodorous flower aroma which resembles the smell of rotting meat. For those willing to look the other way on flower aroma, additional common names include giant toad flower or starfish flower. The focal point of this plant is the fleshy, 5-pointed, star-shaped flowers (to 10-16" across), each being pale ochre-yellow with thin transverse maroon lines. This is one of the largest flowers in the plant world. Flowers bloom in fall (flower buds are triggered by shortened daylight hours in fall). Flowers are pollinated by flies which reportedly find the carrion aroma irresistible. Spineless, 4-angled, succulent stems grow upright to 8-12" tall before scrambling sideways with the tips still erect. Plants in the ground may grow to 24" wide. Seed pods resemble milkweed and each individual seed has a milkweed-like parachute. Plants in Hawaii have escaped gardens (they spread easily by vegetative means and wind-blown seed) to the point where the plant is now considered in Hawaii to have invasive potential.

### Problems

No serious insect or disease problems. Susceptible to mealybugs.

### Garden Uses

Where winter hardy, this plant can serve as an effective ground cover. Slopes. Rock gardens. Xeric gardens. Where not winter hardy, it should be grown in containers.

*Courtesy of Missouri Botanical Society Plant Finder*