

Exercise 1

Read the article about an unusual type of plant called the living stone plant, and then answer the questions.

All about living stone plants

Living stone plants don't really look much like typical plants, but resemble instead small stones lying on the surface of the ground. Their scientific name, *Lithops*, comes from a word in the language of Ancient Greece meaning 'stone'. These interesting plants are common in the wild in South Africa, but they are sold in garden centres all over the world.

So what does a living stone plant look like? It has two thick leaves in the shape of an oval with a gap between them, which creates the impression of a couple of stones lying closely together. This part of the plant is called the head. The leaves store a large amount of water, which make them potentially useful for a variety of wildlife. A fat layer of outer skin prevents insect attacks, however. Also, the grey or green colour of the leaves helps to emphasise their stone-like appearance, which reduces the chances of them being eaten by small animals.

They are popular houseplants as they grow fairly easily indoors and are quite unusual. Although they sometimes grow in grass in their natural habitat, these tiny plants are generally found in deserts, so it is best to grow them in sandy soil. They are also often found growing naturally on and around different types of rocks, which provide shade for part of the day. It is therefore important to protect the plants from strong sunlight when they are not in their native environment.

The majority of living stone plants use a long root, called a tap root, to reach down into the ground to locate water. There are also some types of living stone plants which don't have a tap root and these plants rely on absorbing mist through their leaves to get the majority of the water they need. Although the tap roots can be up to 15 centimetres in length, the section of plant that is visible generally grows to a height of only two centimetres. It's crucial for home gardeners to use a container of sufficient depth, as most of the plant is located under the ground.

Living stone plants grow incredibly slowly both in the wild and at home, so it is essential to be patient. The good news is that healthy plants can live for up to fifty years. The plants flower annually, producing seeds which, in their natural environment, survive in the ground for months while they wait for suitable growing conditions. As soon as rain begins to fall, new plants start to grow.

Question 1

In which country can you find living stone plants growing naturally?

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