

# Cactus Fungal Issues


Rot, spots and lesions — how to tell a fungus from simple overwatering, where to cut, and when to save the plant versus save the rest of your collection. The cult's #2 pick (18%).

Fungal problems came in second (18%), and they're the scary ones — because by the time you see rot, the fungus has usually been working for a while underneath. The good news: most cactus fungal issues follow predictable patterns, and the response is almost always the same shape — **cut to clean tissue, dry it out, improve the conditions that let it start.**

## 1. Is It Even a Fungus?

Half of what growers call "fungus" is really **overwatering damage**, and the fix is different. Sort it out first:

What you see	Most likely	First move
Soft, mushy, dark base; foul smell	<b>Rot</b> (fungal/bacterial, started by too much water)	Stop watering, unpot, cut — see surgery below
Dry, sunken black or brown spots with defined edges	<b>Dry rot / fungal lesion</b> (Diplodia, Phyllosticta)	Cut out, dust, improve airflow
Small superficial dark spots, plant otherwise firm	<b>Leaf/stem spot</b> (often Phyllosticta)	Often self-limiting — remove worst parts
Tough brown corky skin only at the very base	<b>Corking</b> — normal aging, NOT disease	Leave it alone
Pale, stretched, leaning growth	<b>Etiolation</b> — too little light, not fungus	More light; no treatment needed

 **The tell:** Press it. **Soft and wet = rot, act today. Dry and firm with a defined spot = a lesion you can cut out calmly. Hard, brown, only at the base = corking, do nothing.**

## 2. The Common Fungal Problems

### Black rot / dry rot

Caused by fungi like **Diplodia** and **Phyllosticta concava**, this shows as discolored, water-soaked patches that dry into sunken brown or black spots. It can spread inward. Caught early it's cut-and-treat; advanced, the plant is usually a loss.

### Basal / root rot

Starts at the roots or soil line, almost always from **soil that stays wet**. The base goes soft and brown and the rot climbs up the core. This is the most common killer and the most preventable.

### Leaf / stem spot (Phyllosticta)

Superficial dark spots on the skin. Notably, **experts often do NOT recommend fungicide for Phyllosticta** — it tends to be short-acting and clears up once conditions improve. Remove the worst-affected parts and fix airflow/humidity.

### Cotton root rot & charcoal spot

Aggressive soil-borne fungal diseases. There's no reliable home cure — affected plants should be **removed and destroyed** to protect the rest of the collection.

## 3. Treatment by Severity

### 1 Superficial spots — minimal intervention

For small surface spots on a firm plant (classic *Phyllosticta*), you often don't need a fungicide.

**Remove the worst-affected tissue, increase air circulation, lower humidity, and stop overhead watering.** Improving the conditions usually deactivates it.

### 2 Defined lesion caught early — cut + treat

Carefully cut out the infected tissue with a **sterilized blade**, cutting back into clean, healthy green flesh. Dispose of the removed material safely. If caught early enough, **spray or paint the cuts with a copper fungicide** per the label. Let everything dry hard.

### 3 Advanced rot — triage the collection

If the rot is deep, soft, and spreading, the realistic goal shifts from "save the plant" to **"save everything around it."** Isolate it immediately. Salvage only clearly clean tissue as a cutting (next section); destroy the rest. Dry rot, cotton root rot and charcoal spot generally warrant removing and destroying the plant.

## 4. The Rot Surgery

When the base is rotting but the top still has healthy tissue, you can often **behead the cactus and re-root the clean top.**

1. **Sterilize your blade** (alcohol or flame) — this is the whole game. A dirty cut spreads the fungus.
2. **Cut above the rot.** Slice across and check the cross-section. Any brown, orange, or ring discoloration means keep going up until the cut is **solid clean green.** Sterilize between cuts.
3. **Bevel the edges** slightly so the cut surface dries inward rather than holding water.
4. **Dust the wound** with sulfur powder (or cinnamon as a mild option) to discourage re-infection.
5. **Callus, then re-root.** Set the cutting somewhere dry and airy for 1–3 weeks until the cut hardens over, then root it in dry, gritty mix.

⚠️ **Never reuse the soil or pot** from a rotted plant without sterilizing. The fungus lives in there. Fresh dry mix, clean pot.

## 5. Try It in Gritty Mix

🎮 **Practice the call without losing a real cactus.** [Gritty Mix](#) now throws rot and fungal events at your collection — and overwatering makes them far more likely, just like real life. When one hits, you choose the response: cut and dry it, treat it, or isolate it. Get it right and the plant pulls through; ignore it and it spreads. [Open Gritty Mix →](#)

## 6. Quick Self-Triage

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## 7. Prevention — Fungus Hates These

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- **Fast-draining mix.** Gritty, mineral-heavy soil that dries quickly is your single best defense — see the [grower guide](#) for the 80/20 mix.
- **Water the soil, not the plant.** Avoid overhead watering that leaves moisture sitting in crevices and on the crown.
- **Airflow.** Moving air dries surfaces and is the condition fungi most dislike. A small fan in an indoor grow space changes everything.
- **Lower humidity** in cool/dark months, and water far less in winter — cold + wet is when rot wins.
- **Sterilize tools** between plants. One contaminated blade can seed rot across a whole bench.
- **Quarantine new plants** and inspect the base and roots before they join the collection.

## 8. Keep Going

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### Pests Guide

Mealybugs & more



### Grower Guide

Soil, water, light



### Play Gritty Mix

Rot & fungus scenario



### Cactus Codex

Species reference

## Sources

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Disease identification and treatment cross-checked against [Gardening Know How — Fungal Lesions on Cactus](#) and [Phyllosticta in Cactus](#). When in doubt, isolate the plant and follow any fungicide product label.

Part of [Cactus Codex](#) · [Gritty Mix game](#) · [revolutionarydesigns.io](#)