

# Why Do We Defoliate Adenium Desert Roses?

Defoliating desert roses is when we cut off the branches with young leaves on our growing plants.

There is a number of practical reasons why we do this, including: to clearly see the plant structure, to toughen up our plants, and to make a dense canopy.

Join us now. Let's see more about the defoliation process and how and when can we do it to make our adenium strong & beautiful.

## 3 Reasons Why We Defoliate Adenium Desert Roses

### 1. To See Our Baby's Structure More Clearly

[https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20\(07\)/see-desert-rose-structure.jpg](https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20(07)/see-desert-rose-structure.jpg)

Some gardeners grow adenium from seeds while others are gifted the plants by their friends or neighbors when they are several months or years old. While we can get a good view of our babies' shapes when they are young, the growing leaves sometimes get in the way.

The leaves on our growing plants make it slightly harder for growers to see the branches below and the overall layout of our plants. This is important for growers who love those clean, neat bonsai shapes and want to shape up their adenium bonsai plants for the best aesthetics.

That is why we defoliate the plants. Cutting off the leaves, we'll be able to see a nice, clear—kind of like “bald headed”—structure of the tree and we can decide then how to shape or wire it to our liking.

### 2. To Strengthen Our Plants

[https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20\(07\)/toughen-adenium-plants.jpg](https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20(07)/toughen-adenium-plants.jpg)

You know what they say, “They sleep on victory”. But we don't want our plants to sleep in victory because of all the nice food and good care we give them. We want to strengthen them.

By giving them a little bit of a stress or a little damage now and then, the plants will need to adapt and “wake up” to fight for their survival. Defoliating is one way to toughen up our little guys and girls.

When you cut off the leaves, the plant instantly oozes out a kind of sap or latex to prevent insects or fungi from infecting it. In other words, the plants “think” they are being attacked and that puts them in “fight” mode.

Many growers worry that when we cut off the branches and leaves, the foliage won't grow back. Fortunately, you don't have to worry about this. Plants are not fragile things like a wine glass. They *will* fight back and grow.

You can think of it like Hydra, the serpentine monster with 7 or 9 heads in some Greek stories. When you cut off one of its heads, it will grow back two. Kind of like that. But in actuality, it's really like that as we will see next:

### 3. To Make a Dense Canopy

[https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20\(07\)/make-dense-desert-rose-bonsai-canopy.jpg](https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20(07)/make-dense-desert-rose-bonsai-canopy.jpg)

When we cut off the branches, adenium will develop even more branches back. Now with more branches, it makes sense for our babies to distribute the overall assets—nutrients like food, sunlight, water—a bit less for everyone in the more crowded family.

That means the leaves are now smaller. They cluster up closer together to receive all the good bits. This is what many bonsai enthusiasts love and want for the adenium desert rose—that is a nice dense canopy.

It looks very pleasing when every branch or foliage is not scattered in this and that place. Everyone is happily grouped and close together. You can get a dense canopy with this nice, sort of uniform umbrella shape by defoliating.

### 4. To Stop Water Loss (Caudex Softening)

Another practical reason why people defoliate their desert roses is to stop them from losing more water. Leaves are the main water outlets of the adenium plant.

Although adenium is a type of succulent, deciduous plant that doesn't require a lot of water, sometimes without adequate hydration, the leaves will turn brown or yellow.

Growers cut the leaves off in this case to stop the plants from using up more water. It's like turning off the water faucet temporarily. They often do this to rescue a dehydrated desert rose or to force it to go dormant in the winter (cut down the use use of water & reduce watering).

If your plant is experiencing soft caudex, you may want to check out this post later:

>> Link Blog post: [How to Save Soft Caudex Adenium](#)

The next thing many people ask is:

## When Do We Defoliate Adenium?

[https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20\(07\)/when-to-defoliate-desert-roses.jpg](https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20(07)/when-to-defoliate-desert-roses.jpg)

Generally, we'd want to defoliate *when our desert roses have quite a lot of branches already*. When they have a good amount of branches, we can then begin to set the structure for our trees and start playing with them.

You don't really need to defoliate when there are only 3 or 4 branches. At the initial stages, let it grow out naturally. After that, you can do the initial cuttings. Chop off the branches and let them heal and grow out again.

When the leaders, or the main pillars of the adenium, start to grow, you can set the angle of your cut to lead the way for them to grow up to and set your bonsai structure.

Usually, the cut is like this "\\" or this "/" –this is the secret (see why: [How to trim desert roses](#)). When the branches grow, you can start trimming them back. When they grow out again, you can give them another hair cut.

After a year of doing so, you will have set a nice structure for the plant and also have the first and second layers of branches. This is a good point to start defoliating our babies.

You could use these shears for the job:

Sharp Pruning Shears

<https://amzn.to/2TXzmM0>

If your branches are a bit bigger, defoliating can be done with a super [Japanese garden knife like this one](#).

## How Often Should We Defoliate?

[https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20\(07\)/how-often-to-defoliate-adenium.jpg](https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20(07)/how-often-to-defoliate-adenium.jpg)

For deciduous tropical plants like adenium, defoliating about *2 or 3 times a year is good enough*.

Although we want to give our trees some stress, we don't want to stress them too much that we may accidentally kill them.

You can also look into the development stages of your plants. If you have only a few branches and want a denser canopy, then you may want to defoliate a bit more often.

If there are a lot of branches already, you can adjust the frequency to two or three times a year and the plants will do fine.

## What to Do After Defoliation?

[https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20\(07\)/after-defoliating.jpg](https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20(07)/after-defoliating.jpg)

After defoliation, some gardeners just leave the adenium outside under good heat and sun for the new cuts to dry out. The process may take about a week or two.

Other folks apply some fungicide, garden lime powder, or cinnamon grounds on the cuts to make sure no fungi or bacteria can affect the open wounds. You should keep an eye out for weird stuff on the branches that may potentially cause infection.

After that, we can begin watering our plants. Once a week at this point is good. Then, when you see some green leaves growing out, you can water the plants every three days. When flowers are blooming, water them every day.

Check out this quick table with some ideas for the to-dos:

<b>Development Stage</b>	<b>What to do</b>
After defoliation	Sun dry & protect newly cut wounds
About 1-2 weeks later	Water our plants once a week
Green leaves growing	Water every 3 days
Beautiful flowers blooming	Water every single day

Ever seen a 100-year-old Adenium defoliated? Here it is:

>> Link YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bH6GKAmRaw> (Why defoliate? 100+ years old Adenium Bonsai)

Wear gloves folks if you don't want to be yelled at by your loved ones. It's the sap—it's sticky like chewing gum.

And that brings us to the end of our:

## **Defoliating Desert Roses**

[https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20\(07\)/time-for-hair-cut.jpg](https://files.zenyrgarden.com/Images/Adenium%20Desert%20Rose%20Blog/Post%20(07)/time-for-hair-cut.jpg)

Now you know a few reasons why people cut the leaves off their plants and when and how often we should do so. Allow the tree to grow the main branches and the secondary branches first. Then, we can begin setting the overall structure and defoliating our babies.

Every year, one or three cuttings will be good enough. You may want to make sure the wounds won't get any serious infections by letting them dry out under the sun or protecting them with fungicide or garden lime powder. When leaves and flowers begin to grow, give your babies more water.

And that's about it for this process. Although there is a lot more to play around with, we hope this was helpful to you! Have fun growing adenium & peace all around.