

NEWS RELEASE

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Gardening with Succulents

Looking for an easy and interesting gardening project? Try your hand at composing a container full of succulents. Local nurseries and garden centers have numerous varieties of these fascinating plants available.

Succulents store water in stems and leaves as well as roots, a trait which allows them to endure infrequent or minimal watering. Some familiar types of succulents include the jade plant, “hen and chicks” and the famous medicinal plant *Aloe vera* (now *A. barbadensis*).

I first encountered succulents while in Morro Bay over ten years ago. While visiting The Garden Gallery nursery, I happened upon an attractive display. I felt a twinge of envy, thinking only coastal gardeners could grow them, but a nursery person quickly convinced me that many succulents could grow inland. I purchased several varieties and put together an eye-catching container of my own.

Many of the original plants I bought are still alive. Since then, succulents have held my interest and continue to intrigue me. They come in so many different shapes and colors; it’s easy to see why groups of people have formed official societies of succulent lovers.

When shopping for succulents, it’s important to note that plants are described by two Latin words. The first word found on a plant tag is the genus, and the second word is the species. Latin is the universal language used to describe plants. In English, *Crassula ovata* is the jade plant.

Some of my favorite succulents belong to the genus *Echeveria*. This group of plants has several species known as “hen and chicks”. The reason for the name is the tendency of the “mother” plant to have numerous offsets growing alongside. These “chicks” are easily removed and planted elsewhere.

Another really neat genus is the *Aeonium*. These plants have a tall stem that bears a “flower” of green to reddish black. *Aeoniums* are stunning and make a great addition to any container.

Plants in the *Sedum* genus come in varying shades. Two exceptionally attractive species are golden sedum (*S. nussbaumerianum*) and donkey’s tail (*S. morganianum*). Golden sedum grows prostrate and has yellowish orange leaves. Donkey or burro’s tail has light green tail-like stems that can trail over a container.

The genus *Sempervivum* contains numerous plants with a rosette shape. One remarkable species is the Cobweb houseleek (*S. arachnoideum*). This plant has rosettes that appear

to be connected by spider webs. *Sempervivum* also make offsets that can be removed from the original plant.

Kalanchoe is a familiar genus, with bright pink, orange or yellow flowers that last for many months. Kalanchoes are a good choice for adding color and height to a container.

Succulents are simple to propagate, making them easy to share with friends. For plants that don't produce offsets, simply cut a stem, remove several leaves below it and let this piece dry for a few days. Then, when the bottom of the stem has hardened, insert it into a container of cactus and succulent growing media. Within a few weeks, the stem will begin to show signs of new growth.

When creating a succulent container, the only limit is your imagination. Place plants close together to make an instant and appealing display. Adding cactus specimens (also a type of succulent) can create interest.

Although succulents are known for storing water, plants can easily dry out when grown in small containers. However, it is important to note that succulents that are over-watered will rot. Keep an even balance between moisture and dryness by letting pots dry out in between watering. In spring, water pots every few days, checking the soil for moisture. When Central Valley temperatures reach the 90's and higher, check containers daily.

In winter, temperatures can reach low points that cause succulents to freeze. Keep them in a shielded space, preferably in a corner area or near other plants that can provide protection. Ensure water drains from the containers, otherwise plants will rot. If plants freeze and turn dark colors, do not remove them immediately. Wait until spring to see if they will resprout.

After plants have been in their containers for one year, they may begin to look leggy and need to be transplanted. Tall plants can be cut and shortened through propagation, while offsets can be removed and replanted. Arrange cuttings and offsets into new containers, or share extra plants with friends.

Succulent plants grown in containers can add appeal to an entry way, accent a corner of the garden and add interest overall to a landscape. They are also easy to grow and make great conversation pieces. Now is the time to start planting your own container garden.