



SUCCULENTS

By Barbara Schuchart

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What is a succulent? Technically, it is any plant with thick, fleshy (succulent) water-storing organs. Succulents can store water in their leaves, their stems, or their roots. They have adapted to survive in arid conditions throughout the world. This has resulted in an incredible variety of interesting leaf forms and plant shapes, including paddle leaves, tight rosettes, and bushy or trailing columns of teardrop leaves. They are increasingly making their way into gardens throughout the west. Succulents can thrive where other plants can't; in poor soil, on slopes and in between paving stones. They are great in rock gardens.

Succulents can really be beautiful, and the great news is they are nearly indestructible. As they are easy to grow in the ground and in containers, they make excellent display plants in dish gardens. And they are the perfect plants for water conservation.

Their colors can be very appealing -- leaves can range from bronze red to various shades of green-yellow, gray, or blue green. Showy, flowering succulents have a bloom period typically lasting from early winter until late spring. Some examples of these are: Aloe (*Asphodelaceae*) with red, orange and yellow colors. The family *Crassulaceae* has many variations -- *C. crassula falcata* with tiny, massed scarlet flowers; *C. echeveria* with rosettes of yellow, pink, orange-red, and red; and *Sedum Autumn Joy* (*S. telephium*) that begins to show rose-colored flowers in the fall, turning to bronze in autumn.

Some general guidelines for growing succulents as houseplants include:

Light: Succulents prefer bright light such as found on a south facing window. The leaves will indicate if the light level is correct: too much direct sunlight and some species will scorch, turning leaves brown or white, as the plant bleaches out and soft tissue is destroyed. If a

succulent does not receive enough light, it will begin to stretch with an elongated stem and widely spaced leaves.

Temperature: Ideally, succulents should have daytime temperatures between 70-80 degrees and nighttime between 50 and 55 degrees. Succulents can be much more cold-tolerant than people assume, though.

Water: Water generously in the summer, but allow plants to dry between watering. During winter, cut water way back. Overwatering and ensuing plant rot is the single most common cause of succulent plant failure, and a succulent should never sit in water. If you overwater, plants can become soft and discolored with leaves that may turn yellow or white. If you underwater, the plant will stop growing and then begin to shed leaves. The plant may also develop brown spots on the leaves.

Potting soil: Pot succulents in a fast-draining mixture designed for cacti and succulents. If you make your own soil, use a normal potting mix with perlite to increase drainage and aeration.

Fertilization: Fertilize during the summer growing season, and do not fertilize during the winter months.

Enjoy your succulents, and bring a little bit of the desert right into your own home.

Join Master Gardeners Bobbie Handon & Joanne Geggatt this Saturday, February 1st at the free public class: The Art of Growing Succulents. Find out what you have wanted to know about growing succulents through this interactive presentation with hands-on activities. Learn how to properly water, grow and feed these water-efficient plants. Strategies to prevent your succulents from freezing, propagation demonstrations, and take-home cuttings will be available. Class will be held from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.