



Green Gazette

Succulents

by Roberta Gannon

What are succulents? According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, they are defined as “full of juice” or “juicy”. In Latin the word for succulents is “succos”, which means juice or sap.

Succulents are a group of plants with one or more diverse forms, colors, and blooms. Any busy gardener would like growing these because of their ease of care - whether indoors or out. They are pleasing to the eye, minimal care, and delightful little surprises during their life cycles. These plants store their water in their leaves or stems. Shallow roots are another adaptation shared. A few varieties have deeper tap roots, but the majority have wide surface root zones that allow maximum moisture to capture any available water. There are varieties that require warm temperatures, moderately dry, well-draining soil, and sunlight, and there are others that can withstand cooler or even brief freezing temperatures. Any cold snap will force the plant into dormancy, and then it will spring back as the weather permits. They are remarkably adept to practically any harsh climate where water is scarce or comes sporadically. This unique adaptation allows the plant to survive in low moisture regions of the world.

Some botanists and horticultural experts differ on which plants are technically succulents. That is why “The Succulent vs. the Cactus” is often debated even among professional growers. I feel that the cactus is a succulent because of its ability to store water. There are over 50 families that are classed as succulents. There are both xerophytic succulents that thrive in dry areas and halophytic types which live in boggy saline soil. The xerophytic succulents are the best known form and widely available as house or garden plants. The main characteristics are the thickened or swollen leaves or pads, and thick stems and roots adapting to arid climates. They can grow in deserts, forests, high alpine regions, coasts, and dry tropical areas. That’s why Florida is a haven for such plants.

Propagation is a must if we are going to preserve these species. They can be grown from seeds or from cuttings. The cutting can be a stem or a leaf and they will propagate. Grafting can also be used.

Some of the succulent plant types commonly available are *Agaves*, *Yucca*, *Aloe*, *Cacti*, *Bromeliad*, *Sedum*, *Sempervivum*, and *Echeveria*.

In order for a succulent to thrive in a garden, it must have at least 8 hours of light, warm daytime temperatures, consistent water during its growing season, and well-drained soil. Smaller succulents make beautiful container displays for indoors.

No matter what your favorite garden is, succulents might provide you with a new adventure.

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