



Success with Succulents

Succulent plants are the ultimate in low-maintenance, the epitome of toughness and durability with a huge variety in form, pattern and color. In fact, because 'succulent' is a descriptive term and not a botanical classification, it covers over 10,000 species world-wide. In the horticulture trade, the term succulent refers to tropical plants from eight or nine plant families. In the arid areas of the tropics and sub-tropics, high temperatures and low precipitation necessitate the storage of water in leaves, stems and roots in order for these plants to survive. The most visible succulent adaptation is a swollen, fleshy, or "fat" appearance to their leaves and stems. These same traits that have enabled succulent plants to survive in the wild make them easygoing houseplants.

Cultivating Success

Succulents are easy to maintain in optimum health with only a few simple rules to follow:

- Most succulents love direct sunlight year-round: a south-facing window is ideal. A few succulents prefer indirect light: soft-leaf *Aloe*, *Bryophyllum*, *Gasteria*, *Haworthia* and the jungle cactus *Rhipsalis* and *Schlumbergera*.
- Turn your plants regularly so they develop evenly.
- From spring through fall, succulents should be treated as ordinary house plants – watering thoroughly when the soil begins to dry out. Pick it up – if the pot feels light, add water until it appears at the drainage holes.
- During the winter months, most succulents are dormant and need less water. Over-watering in winter is the most common cause of plant decline.
- Most succulents are fine with normal indoor temperatures of 65° - 75°.
- Dormant succulents prefer cooler temperatures around 60° - 68°. In order to set buds and flower, some types will need winter temperatures of 55° - 60°, or a manipulation of temperatures from a cool night to a warmer day.
- They will appreciate the fresh air outdoors during the summer. Move them gradually into the more intense outdoor light to prevent sunscald. Remember to protect smaller, more delicate plants from heavy summer rains.
- Succulents like to grow in tight quarters and are happy in small pots or mixed in a shallow trough. Most have very fine, shallow roots and somewhat delicate foliage that can bruise, crack or snap. Transplant in the spring into a slightly larger pot only if necessary. If you just need something decorative, use a cachepot instead of transplanting.
- Whether making a mixed pot or transplanting, always use a coarse soil mix designed for cactus and succulents in order to provide good drainage which is essential for plant health and growth.
- Succulents do not need a lot of fertilization. Use *Bonide Liquid Cactus Plant Food 2-7-7* (or a water-soluble houseplant fertilizer at ¼ strength) every time you water during the active growing season. For most succulents this is usually from March to October – simply taper off to none when your plants are dormant.