



## SUCCULENTS

Succulents are water-retaining plants that are adapted to arid climates and soil conditions. The word succulent is derived from the Latin “succus” (juice); the stored water often gives these plants a swollen and fleshy appearance. Succulents store water in their leaves, stems or roots and come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors. There are more than 10,000 species in the world comprised of more than 60 families and 300 genera. Succulents grow primarily in South Africa and the Americas, with Madagascar having the most species. Southern California has similar climate and seasons as Africa, but the seasons are reversed on the calendar. Succulents are not cacti and do not survive in the same conditions.

### **Location: Right Plant, Right Place**

Not all plants want bright afternoon sun.

**In ground:** Plant in a place that has morning sun and afternoon shade. Bright shade is ideal and essential for low light succulents. Make sure there is good air circulation. Most likely is the east side of a house.

**In containers/pots:** Use a shallow pot with a drainage hole rather than a deep container. Most succulents have shallow roots, so they do not require very large containers. Terracotta pots lose water quicker than glazed pots and may need more frequent watering. Choose containers that complement your plant.

### **Water: Deep but not Often**

**In ground:** Because they store large quantities of water and food in their leaves, stems, or roots, succulents require infrequent, but deep, watering. Allow the soil to dry out between waterings. Do not keep the soil consistently moist. Their fleshy roots and stems will easily rot if they are overwatered. During the summer, the best time of day to water is early morning before the temperatures rise.

**In containers/pots:** Water thoroughly – until water drips out of the bottom of the pot – to soak the roots and flush out salts. The single most cause of death of succulents is overwatering. Let them dry out between waterings but not remain dry for long periods of time. Observe the plants to notice visual cues – if leaves start to look withered, they need water.

### **Light/Temperature/Sun Exposure and Cold Tolerance**

Succulents are drought tolerant yet not necessarily *desert* plants. Most like bright light/full sun. Many will look better if given a little shelter from hot afternoon sun in the summer. Some can even be grown indoors. Too much sun may lead to some plants looking parched and sunburnt. Others, deprived of enough sun, may grow lanky stretching for the light.

**In ground:** Extended periods of high temperatures may cause sunburn. Cover plants with shade cloth, old sheets or screens. White, beige or black patches on succulents indicate sunburn. This means the cells have been damaged. The scars will last as long as the leaf does. Some succulents can tolerate light frosts or even severe freezes. Many are frost-sensitive and will need protection if the temperature dips below freezing.

**In containers/pots:** To prevent succulents from getting sunburn, move them to a shadier location. Bring them indoors for periods of extended freezing temperatures.

### **Soil/Potting: Good drainage needed**

Succulents require soil with good drainage and aeration.

**In ground:** Amending and mounding up the soil will help promote good drainage. Cold, waterlogged soil presents a challenge for succulents. For this reason, it's often helpful to plant succulents on a slope or on top of mounded soil.

**In containers/pots:** Use a cactus palm potting mix. Do not add a layer of gravel at the bottom of a pot; that makes drainage worse, not better. Make sure that plant containers have drainage holes.

### **Nutrition/Fertilizer: Not so much**

Succulent plants in the ground generally do not need extra fertilizer. Plants in pots may deplete the nutrients in the potting mix and need occasional fertilizing to look their best. For succulents, a light dose of fertilizer once or twice during growing season may be all that they need.

### **Maintenance: Easy, occasional**

Succulents need occasional maintenance, such as being deadheaded after flowering, pruning back if becoming overgrown, removing dead leaves, or dividing if getting crowded. Divide and transplant when they are starting their growth period.

### **Pest and Disease Control: Not so much, easy to remedy**

The most common problems for succulents are caused by overwatering or incorrect sun exposure. Although they can have pest problems, there are fewer than most other plants. Pests and diseases include ants, aphids, mealy bugs, powdery mildew, scale, snails/slugs, and spider mites. These may be treated easily by a spray of water, a water and soap solution or an appropriate insecticide or fungicide. Be sure to follow manufacturer's directions.

### **Propagation:**

Succulents are easy to propagate and can be propagated in a variety of ways:

**Division:** Many succulents form clumps of roots that can be divided.

**Offsets:** Look for 'pups' to separate and

**Cuttings:** Cut the stem just below a stem joint. Let the end callous over a day or so to reduce the chance of fungus growth, then plant.

**Leaves:** Remove the leaf, allow it to dry for a few days to callus over. Lay leaves in a shallow dish filled with potting soil and keep the soil moist and watch for roots to develop.

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