

succulents



ALOE MITRIFORMIS
PURPLE CROWN



SUCCULENTS

DESCRIPTION

Succulents are a wide-ranging group of plants that cross a number of families and genera and are noted for their thick, fleshy leaves or stems designed to store water. While generally slow-growing, succulents have interesting forms and often showy blooms, making them among plants prized by collectors. Cacti are classified among the succulents. (*To learn more about desert cacti, see the March 2006 "Foliage Plant of the Month" feature.*) Here we concentrate on others outside the *Cactaceae* family.

DECORATIVE LIFE

With proper care, succulents can live indoors for years.

AVAILABILITY

Succulents are available year-round.

in-store and consumer care

WATER From spring through fall, water these plants as you would other houseplants, when the soil begins to dry. In winter, when the plants are dormant, water less frequently. Though these

plants store water, they can't survive complete drying out. Good drainage also is essential to avoid overwatering and root rot. Sand, pulverized brick or rock can be added to the soil to achieve the proper consistency.

LIGHT Sunshine is vital to these plants, and a location near a south window is ideal. Some suggest bringing these plants outdoors during the summer.

TEMPERATURE Average warm indoor temperatures are appropriate; succulents like a marked difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures. During the winter, keep these plants cooler (from 50 F to 55 F though they can be kept as low as 40 F).

fun facts

FAMILY Succulents are members of many families, including *Aizoaceae*, *Amaryllidaceae*, *Asclepiadaceae*, *Bromeliaceae*, *Compositae*, *Crassulaceae*, *Euphorbiaceae*, *Gesneriaceae*, *Liliaceae*, *Orchidaceae*, *Piperaceae* and *Portulacaceae*.

WHAT'S IN A NAME The word "succulent" comes from the Latin "succos," which means juice or sap.

challenges

PESTS AND PROBLEMS Nematodes (microscopic worms) can attack the roots of succulents. Using sterilized potting soil should prevent this problem.

LEAF PROBLEMS Underwatering will cause dry brown spots or may cause the leaves to fall. Soft brown spots on the leaves are a sign of leaf-spot disease, which can be treated with a fungicide and increased ventilation around the plant. Wilted, discolored leaves signal overwatering.

HUMIDITY There is no need to mist these plants. Fresh air is helpful, so open the windows when possible.

FERTILIZER Feed succulents every several weeks during the growing season. Special cactus and succulent plant foods are available.

PROPAGATION Stem cuttings, offsets or leaf cuttings should root easily, but the cuttings should be left to dry several days before being placed into the compost. Succulents also can be grown from seed.

REPOTTING Ideally, plants should be repotted every year. Many succulents have shallow, fibrous roots, for which shallower pots are suitable.

dish gardens

Succulents of varied forms make great pairings in dish gardens. Create a small landscape by using tall forms, low forms and spreading varieties. Leave adequate room between the plants for them to grow. Rocks can be placed decoratively among the plants and removed, as needed, as the plants grow. A shallow earthenware container or glazed dish filled with peat-based compost makes a proper home. To ensure good drainage, the container should have holes in the base or a thick layer of charcoal at its bottom.

succulents to check out



- *Agave americana* (century plant) - has saw-toothed leaves.
- *A. filifera* (thread Agave) - has leaves that extend upward and are covered with fine filaments (or threads).

◀ AGAVE ATTENUATA



- *Aloe* (For more on Aloe, see the September 2006 "Foliage Plant of the Month.")

◀ ALOE BARBADENSIS BARBADOS ALOE, MEDICINAL ALOE



- *Bryophyllum daigremontianum* syn. *Kalanchoe daigremontianum* (devil's backbone) - has triangular leaves with serrated edges that have small plantlets growing along them.

◀ BRYOPHYLLUM DAIGREMONTIANUM



CRASSULA OVATA (BACK) ▲
JADE PLANT
C. LYCOPODIODES (FRONT)
RATTAIL PLANT

- *Crassula argentea*, syn. *C. ovata* or *C. portulacae* (jade plant) - round-edged, shiny green leaves grown from trunklike stalks.
- *C. lycopodioides* (rattail plant) - has small, scalelike leaves that grow close together on erect branches.
- *C. perforata* (string-of-buttons) - paired leaves are spaced along stems that can grow to 2 feet tall.



- *Euphorbia obesa* (gingham golf-ball, living baseball) - its form is that of a seamed globe, from the top of which small flowers bloom.

◀ EUPHORBIA MILII CROWN-OF-THORNS



- *Graptopetalum paraguayense* (ghost plant) - these gray-leaved, low-growing relatives of *Echeveria* grow rosettelike leaves on small stems.

◀ GRAPTOPETALUM



- *Haworthia* (wart plant, star cactus, cushion Aloe) - similar to *Aloe* plants, these species have thick leaves covered in white warts that often form a horizontal stripe pattern.

◀ HAWORTHIA WART PLANT, STAR CACTUS, CUSHION ALOE



- *Kalanchoe* - grown either for their flowers or for their striking leaves, members of this genus often have velvety leaves, many of which have brown tips.

◀ KALANCHOE BLOSSFELDIA FLAMING KATY



- *Orostachys spinosus* - The spiny-tipped leaves of this plant are packed into a tight saucerlike rosette.

◀ OROSTACHYS IWARENGE



- *Sedum* (stonecrop, orpine) - A variety of species and forms are among the *Sedum* genus, most of which are low growing and have branching stems and either cylindrical or cup-shaped leaves.

- *S. morganianum* (donkey's tail, burro tail) grows trailing stems that are closely covered in cylindrical leaves.

◀ SEDUM MORGANIANUM DONKEY'S TAIL, BURRO TAIL



- *Sempervivum arachnoideum* (cobweb houseleek) - a threadlike covering over the dense-packed plant gives it its name. Red flowers appear in summer. **sfr**

◀ SEMPERVIVUM ARACHNOIDEUM COBWEB HOUSELEEK

Some information provided by:

Cactus and Succulent Society of America, www.cssainc.org
Hortus Third, by Liberty Hyde Bailey and Ethel Zoe Bailey
The House Plant Expert Book Two, by Dr. D.G. Hessayon
The Succulent Plant Page, www.succulent-plant.com
The Houseplant Encyclopedia, by Ingrid Jantra and Ursula Krüger
Stearn's Dictionary of Plant Names for Gardeners, by William T. Stearn

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Reach Foliage Plant of the Month writer Amy Bauer at abauer@superfloralretailing.com or (800) 355-8086.

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