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Garden Patch
By Phyllis Webster

Garden With Succulents

Perhaps no other plant type personifies perseverance quite like succulents. Despite hot summer days, harsh wind, drought or sweltering humidity, these plants stand strong. Their water-harboring leaves allow them to endure in some of the harshest environments.



Succulents come in many forms ranging from ground-hugging to tree-like in stature. Some are winter hardy while others are not. Many have spines — the prickly structures that afford them protection from predators. And numerous succulents bloom. Flowers range from muted and understated to boldly colored and glossy.

Common plants for container gardens include *Crassulas* and *Aloes*. Jade plant, burro's tail, panda plant and hens and chicks are common names for members of the *Crassulaceae* family. Although aloe vera is the plant that comes to mind when the term aloe is used, there are numerous species in this family. Aloe's sisters, the *Haworthias*, are extremely popular as petite potted plants. A pot of succulents uses far less water than a container of annual or tropical plants.

In general, aloe vera has a cold tolerance to the 40s, but needs protection against frost and freezes. It prefers bright light or full sun and poor soil. Good drainage is essential. Grow aloes as stand-alone plants, in groupings or with other succulents.

To ensure that containers do not become water-logged, select a planting medium that will not compact, such as one that contains some grit or gravel along with organic matter. Also, use pots with drainage holes. Most potted succulents require winter protection.

Ice plants afford sparkling flowers and plump foliage. Several species of *Delospermas*, known as hardy ice plants, are sold in nurseries, including the bright pink-flowering *Delosperma cooperi*. Ice plants require full sun. Although hardy to N. Central Texas temperatures, these ice plants often fail in chilly wet winter or spring weather.

Cold hardy sedums are reliable residents in Texas perennial gardens. “Autumn Joy” sedum produces thick, succulent leaves, which enable the plant to be extremely drought tolerant. It forms foliage clumps with large flower heads. Sedums known as “stonecrop” produce spreading green foliage studded with yellow flowers. Sedums tolerate strong sun to part shade conditions.

Large cold-hardy succulents for area gardens include cacti, agaves, red yuccas (*Hesperaloe parviflora*) and euphorbias. Remember, succulents are not fool-proof. This year’s moist, zero-degree days devastated cacti and others. However, consider succulents a sure bet for hot, dry weather.

For answers to your horticulture questions, please call the Texas AgriLife Extension, Hood County at 817-579-3280 or go online to visit lakegranburymastergardeners.org.

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