

Drought-Tolerant Plant Selection

Succulents

Succulents are a wonderful and extremely eco-friendly addition to any garden or planter and are booming in popularity for two simple reasons: they are beautiful and they are nearly indestructible.

Technically, a succulent is any plant with thick, fleshy (succulent) water storage organs. Succulents store water in their leaves, their stems or their roots. These plants have adapted to survive arid conditions throughout the world, from Africa to the deserts of North America. Fortunately for us, this adaptive mechanism has resulted in an incredible variety of interesting leaf forms and plant shapes, including paddle leaves, tight rosettes, and bushy or trailing columns of teardrop leaves.

As a group, succulents include some of the most well known plants, such as the aloe and agave, and many almost unknown plants. Cacti are a unique subset of the succulent group. Succulents make excellent display plants in dish gardens.

A Colorful Answer To Going Green

While ripping out a lawn and planting succulents does require a certain up-front expense, in the long run you can save thousands of dollars in water bills, many man-hours of tending, as well as tens of thousands of gallons of water – a great savings for both your pocketbook and our environment.

And, remember, as water becomes more and more of a commodity, the cost of keeping your grass green will soar! So why not do something positive for your bank account and our planet and consider replacing your lawn, or at least a portion of it, with succulents? They have the power to turn an ordinary view into a rich and colorful landscape!

Light

Succulents prefer bright light, such as found on a south-facing window. Watch the leaves for indications that the light level is correct. An under lit succulent will begin to stretch, with an elongated stem and widely spaced leaves. This condition is known as etiolation. The solution is to provide better light and prune the plant back to its original shape. Many kinds of succulents will thrive outdoors in the summer.

Temperature

Succulents are much more cold-tolerant than many people assume, down to even 40°F. Ideally, succulents prefer daytime temperatures between 70°F and about 85°F and nighttime temperatures between 50°F and 55°F.

Water

Succulents should be watered generously in the summer. The potting mix should be allowed to dry between waterings, but do not underwater. During the winter, when the plants go dormant, cut watering back to once every other month. Overwatering and ensuing plant rot is the single most common cause of plant failure. A succulent should never be allowed to sit in water. The following are signs of under- or overwatering:

Potting Soils

Succulents should be potted in a fast-draining mixture that's designed for cacti and succulents. If you don't have access to a specialized mix, considering modifying a normal potting mix with an inorganic agent like perlite to increase aeration and drainage. These plants generally have shallow roots that form a dense mat just under the soil surface.

Fertilizer

During the summer growing season, fertilizer as you would with other houseplants. Use a low-balanced soluble fertilizer, such as an 8-8-8 or 10-10-10 formula, in 1 gallon of water, Use half the amount of fertilizer recommended on the package for most succulents. Stop fertilizing entirely during the winter.

Resources

For more information on Succulents please check out the website, About.com, which is the resource for this material or the Los Angeles Cactus & Succulent Society.

Recommended Native & Drought-Tolerant Plants

Here is a list compiled by the LA Department of Public Works of the top ten native and drought-tolerant plants and shrubs recommended for use in residential landscapes. These plants are not only attractive by serve as an effective way to conserve water, reduce pesticide use, lower maintenance cost and save valuable landfill space. In addition, the use of native plants help support the local ecology (<http://ladpw.org/epd/sg/plants.cfm>).

Evening Primrose – (Oenothera californica)

Herbaceous perennial. Grows flat on the ground. Flowers Spring through Fall with 2-inch pink-white flowers Needs occasional water. Nothing seems to eat it. Flowers are fragrant.

Mature Size: 1-2' h x 1-25' w

Minimum Temp: 20° F

Hummingbird Sage – (*Salvia spathacea*)

Herbaceous perennial. Blooms March to May with dark rose-lilac colored flowers with a fruity scent. Full sun or partial shade. An extremely drought and frost tolerant plant. Easy to grow.

Mature size: 2' h x 2' w

Minimum Temp: 10-15° F

Desert Willow – (*Chilopsis linearis*)

Deciduous tree or shrub. Fragrant trumpet-shaped flowers in Spring in a variety of colors that attract hummingbirds. Drops seed pods in winter; trim to keep shapely.

Mature size: 15-30' h x 20 w

Minimum Temp: 32° F

Island Bush Poppy – (*Dendromecon rigida*)

Evergreen shrub with yellow flowers in spring, early summer. Prefers full sun, good drainage, tolerates cold temperatures and benefits from pruning after blooms.

Mature size: 10' h x 8' w

Minimum Temp: 32° F

California Wild Rose – (*Rosa californica*)

Deciduous shrub. Blooms Spring and Summer and does best with some occasional water. Prune to maintain size. It is also an excellent plant for security, as it's thorns are hooked.

Mature size: 1-25' h x 1-25' w

Minimum Temp: 20° F

Purple Sage – (*Salvia leucophylla*)

Evergreen shrub. Blooms late Spring, flowers are light purple. Has fuzzy, white/green leaves. Prefers direct sun, drought-tolerant and no water after established. Attracts many types of butterflies.

Mature size: 5' h x 6' w

Minimum Temp: 10° F

Big Berry Manzanita – (*Arctostaphylos glauca*)

Large shrub or small tree, generally with several major crooked stems. Shiny deep green leaves with attractive deep red twisted bark. Abundant light pink flowers during winter and spring.

Mature size: 25' h x 25' w

Minimum Temp: 10-15° F

Desert or Apricot Mallow – (*Sphaeralcea ambigua*)

Very hardy evergreen perennial. Clusters of coral flowers on stems spring to fall, depending on temperatures. Prefers dry winters and benefits from pruning after blooming.

Mature size: 3' h x 3' w

Minimum Temp: 32° F

White Bark California Lilac – (*Ceanothus leucodermis*)

Evergreen shrub. White bark and azure blue flowers in the Spring. Native to dry rocky chaparral slopes in the coast ranges and the Sierra Nevada. Its extensive root system is excellent for soil stabilization.

Mature size: 8' h x 8' w

Minimum Temp: 32° F

Evergreen Currant – (*Ribes viburnifolium*)

Evergreen shrub. Fragrant dark green leaves; light pink to purplish flowers in winter and spring. Prefers partial shade, does not tolerate full sun. Excellent ground cover under other plants.

Mature size: 4' h x 6' w

Minimum Temp.: 20° F

Additional Resources

A California-Friendly Guide to Native and Drought Tolerant Gardens:

www.lvmwd.com/home/showdocument?id=711

Great California Native Plants

www.bewaterwise.com/great_native.html

Nifty 50 Plant List - Water Conservation Garden

www.thegarden.org/siteDocs/resources/Nifty50_2009_illustrated.pdf

Drought Tolerant Plants - California Sea Grant

www-csgc.ucsd.edu/BOOKSTORE/Resources/GS2%20Drought%20Tolerant%20Plants_8-7-09.pdf

Drought Tolerant Plants

<http://dpw.lacounty.gov/wwd/web/Documents/DroughtTolerantPlants.pdf>

Drought Tolerant - Southern California Nurseries

www.socalnurseryplants.com/tag/drought-tolerant/