



GARDENING KNOWHOW

Simply succulent

By Xena Fox

Succulents are the perfect plants for beginners, or anyone who wishes to add a little charm to a garden or brighten up an indoor area with minimum fuss.

Succulents are often grown as ornamental plants because of their unusual appearance. There is a vast variety to choose from, with the added bonus that the majority of them do not require huge amounts of care. They are perfect plants for Canarian gardens, as most of them live in arid environments. They are particularly good at extracting moisture from limited sources, such as mist and dew, and their fleshy and thickened stems, leaves and roots have been developed to help with water storage.

Are they or aren't they?

Succulents are classified in various ways, mostly depending on the group of people defining them, though all agree on the basic characteristics outlined above. However, botanists



↑ Tall, short, spiky, furry, round or hanging - the choice of succulents is endless

generally include root structures, and some definitions count geophytes that survive adverse conditions by dying back to underground storage systems, such as bulbs, corms and tubers. Other classifications don't include these, and many horticulturalists even exclude cacti, seeing them as a separate category, though strictly speaking all cacti are succulents. A further difficulty is that many genera and families contain plants with ordinary stems and leaves etc., as

well as others with very obviously thickened and fleshy parts. Deciding which plants are succulent or not is often arbitrary, meaning that the same ones may be classified differently according to the source. Nonetheless, there is no need to get too tied up in definitions. For the average gardener, it's enough to recognise succulents by their more than usually thick and fleshy sections and to know that they are particularly drought resistant.

Take your pick

There's certainly a succulent to cater to every taste, with colours ranging from almost black, to blue-green or purple, through red and yellow. On top of that, leaves and stems can be ruffled, spiky, waxy, hairy, thin or rounded! Whichever you choose, succulents can look great displayed on their own or in groups, as companions to other types of plants, or in a pot or terrarium indoors. Though they tend to prefer direct light, many of them can adapt to the lower light levels inside the home, and positively love the humid and warm conditions found there.

And the great news is, as they're designed to live for long periods without water, they will forgive you if you forget about them once in a while. They won't, however, be happy at all if you water them too often.

Top picks

Some of the most popular succulents can be seen in many a

garden centre and home. These include the delightfully named Burro's Tail (*Sedum morganianum*), which is perfect for a hanging basket, allowing its grey-green or grey-blue leaves, which can grow up to a metre long, the chance to hang down gracefully. It likes medium to good light so will need placing near a window if indoors, and sections of the leaves fall off quite easily so it's best located somewhere out of the way of passing traffic.

Pincushion Cacti (*Mammillaria*) are among the most common cacti grown in the home. A grouping that covers around 200 species, pincushions are usually ball-shaped and often quite small when grown indoors. They prefer full sun but can also cope with slightly lower light conditions. But beware the spines – they look delicate but have hooked ends that are difficult to extract once imbedded in flesh.

The jade plant (*Crassula ovata*), with its thick, glossy green leaves, is one of the easiest of all to grow. However, it can get very top heavy so is best placed in the ground or a heavy pot such as terracotta. You could also try the Jade necklace plant (*Crassula marnieriana*) which is another great one for hanging baskets.

Good old Aloe vera cannot be missed out, and is worth growing for its medicinal properties alone. There is also a wide selection of succulents to choose from if you'd like to go native. Try tolda (*Euphorbia aphylla* Brouss. ex Willd), otherwise known as tabaiba salvaje, which is a small bush with tube-like leaves, or any of the Aeoniums - *lindleyi*, *lancero-tense*, *cuneatum*, or *decorum* f. *variegata*. These are some of the typical rosette-shaped plants seen growing out of rooftops and rocks on the Islands, which all make a wonderful addition to any garden.

More than anything, succulents need soil with excellent drainage and plenty of light, generally speaking. Add coarse sand and/or perlite to a regular potting soil, or try a specific mix for cacti where appropriate. Remember to let the soil dry out between waterings, giving them a good soaking when you do water (think of the long dry periods followed by heavy rainfall in deserts). Only fertilise two or three times during summer and not at all in winter, and try not to pack them together too tightly when arranging in a group. And above all - enjoy their quiriness! ■

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