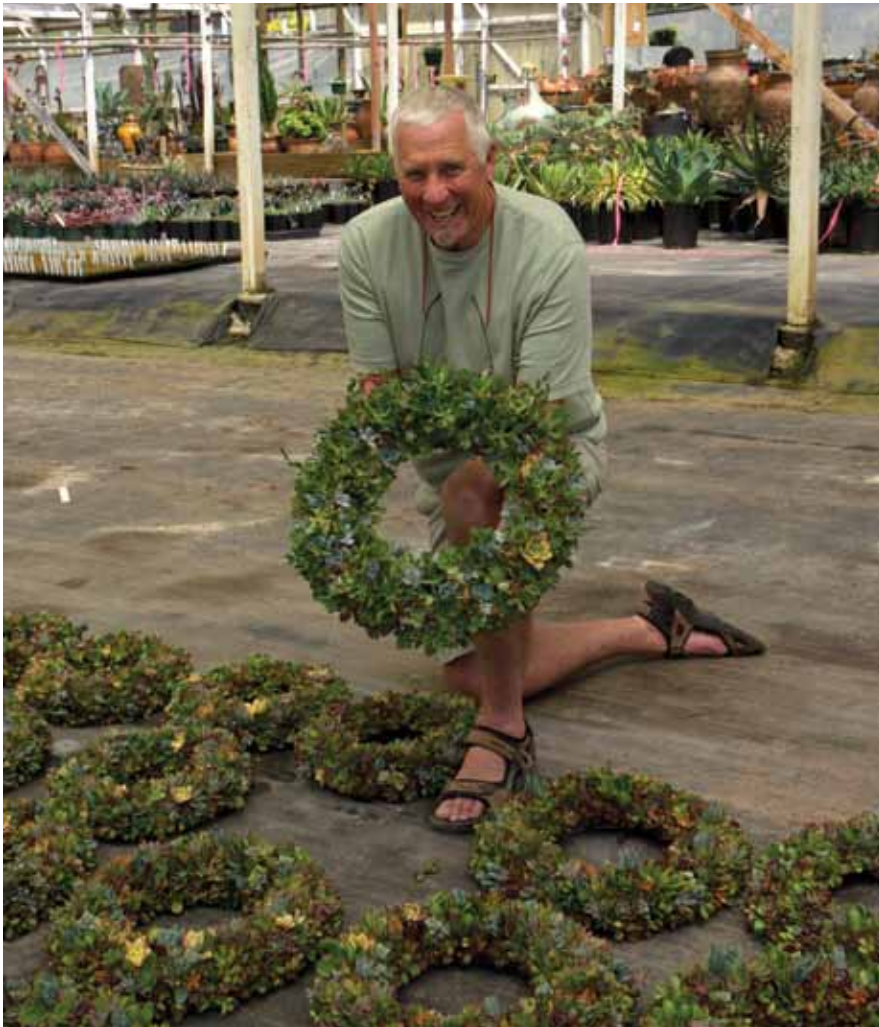


SUCCULENTS ARE HOT: KEEP THEM IN TOP SHAPE



CIRCLE OF LIFE Succulent wreaths are known for their longevity, said author Robin Stockwell (pictured), who sells them at his California nursery, Succulent Gardens. Most wreaths last between two and five years, though one of his customers “reported success for 10.”

➤ Succulents are more popular than ever, and they offer a broad opportunity for sales — from themed plantings (arranged with pumpkins for Halloween, used in wreaths for Christmas) to bouquets and boutonnières (with cuttings) for weddings and social gatherings — that has added a new dimension to the world of floral design. An added benefit to using succulents in bouquets is that the cuttings will develop roots and grow. What better way to capture the memory of a special day years after the event?

Succulent Shopping

There are numerous wholesale nurseries that sell succulents, mostly in 4-inch and 6-inch containers, or as

2-inch or larger specimens. Most growers have a limited number of varieties (about 15 to 20 different species) in their inventory. At my company, Succulent Gardens, we grow more than 400 varieties. Read more about them at sgplants.com.

Succulent foliage is known for producing unique color and texture when properly grown. To ensure you buy succulent plants that show off color to their maximum potential, ask about a potential supplier’s growing conditions. To accentuate succulents’ red, pink, purple or blue undertones and to avoid compromising their form and texture, they should be grown in a cactus mix: potting soil amended with coarse

perlite, crushed lava or pumice at a 4:1 ratio. Growers should also keep greenhouse temperatures mild (between 35 and 65 F in the winter, between 55 and 85 F in the summer) and keep succulents in a shaded environment during hot, summer days.

Ship Time Is Critical

Make sure, too, that your supplier doesn’t delay shipping, as the longer a succulent sits in a box, the more it will lose color, and leaves and stems will begin to stretch for light. Succulents with darker, more vivid colors are the quickest to fade. Varieties with tiny leaves, like *Sedums*, stretch most quickly. Refrigerated shipping will help delay loss of color and form. Arrange shipping that is as quick as possible, and when you receive your order, get them out of the box and into a good environment (see below) without delay.

Nurture Perfection

Maintaining a healthy and colorful display requires a proper environment: two to three hours of direct sunlight without exposure to extreme, mid-day heat. If it’s not feasible to display succulents near a window, or if your shop does not get much natural light, you can use growing lights in your display area for a similar effect.

You do not want excessively wet succulents, but you do want to keep them hydrated. You should water them when they feel dried out. At Succulent Gardens, we water most of our varieties about once a week.

To encourage quick turnover and show that you are a succulent-savvy florist, use succulent groupings in dish garden arrangements for your display area. You could then take cuttings from these arrangements for floral designs. 🌿

Robin Stockwell is the owner of Succulent Gardens, a wholesale and retail nursery in Castroville, Calif. He has been working with succulent plants since 1972. robin@sgplants.com