

Care and Handling

SUCCULENT CARE SAVOIR FAIRE

> If you are looking for novel, easy-care for plants that also fit the bill for sustainability, succulents may put an end to your search. While their versatile shapes and textures have designers raving, their clever carbon-dioxide consumption earns praise from conservationists.

Unlike most plants, succulents get their fix of carbon dioxide for photosynthesis overnight. This allows the stomata to remain shut during the day, reducing water loss through evapo-transpiration.

Although known for easy care and long-lasting attributes, succulents do require specific care and handling for optimal performance. Generally, succulents like it bright, warm and dry. How much light, warmth and moisture depends on the species and cultivar, where plants are kept and the time of year — your supplier can give you plant-specific preferences.

Upon Arrival

Unpack plants immediately and place any soil that's fallen out back in the pots. Check for moisture level and, if dry, add water until it drains out of the pot. If displaying outside, place plants in a shady spot or low light area for a few days to allow for shipping-stress recovery.

Go to the Light

Indoors, most succulents like a bright or sunny location, but some should avoid direct sun. In winter, a direct, southern exposure is ideal for most. In the summer, medium to high light is generally required, with a preference for a south or west exposure area. If plants are near the window at length, turn them regularly. Succulents with inadequate light levels tend to stretch toward the light, becoming lanky or lopsided. If interior light is your only option, place plants in the higher light-level areas or add overhead lights to display shelves. Many

succulents thrive under incandescent or fluorescent light.

Outside, the type of succulent will determine its best location. Some, such as *Crassulas* and *Gasterias*, can tolerate a range from full sun to light shade. Sedums, and many *Crassulas*, *Sempervivums*, *Echeverias*, and aloes will change color when in full sun and some succulents, especially variegated types, are prone to sunburn. Overexposure to light can cause brown or yellowish lesions on stems. Underexposure usually leaves many cultivars a greenish, gray color.



END THE BENDS Succulents in interior low-light levels, like the plant on the right, will stretch toward light and become leggy over time, compared to a plant in higher light (left).

Warm and Dry

If you're comfortable, your succulents are likely comfortable. Temperatures in the 70's are adequate. Place them in the warmer parts of your store. Open a window or run a ceiling fan, as succulents thrive with steady air movement. Although some are frost hardy, most cannot tolerate cold temperatures, so bring them inside during the winter.

The most important thing to remember is to not over-water succulents — they can withstand drought better than wet soil, which leads to rot. Use a well-drained soil mix and let it dry out between waterings. Too much or too little water can cause wilting and shriveling of flowers and leaves, stunted growth and flower drop. Use tepid water, as very

cold water can cause soft spots on stems or water-logged lesions.

Push your finger into the soil to check for moisture — if it feels cool or damp, there is enough. Watering frequency depends on size, color, and the material of the pot; plant size, display conditions and, to some extent, soil type. Light, temperature and weather also matter. In cool and cloudy climates, water loss will be minimal; if it's hot and sunny, they'll be thirstier.

For interior displays, water once every two to three weeks or when soil is dry. Check weekly and never let pots sit in

water; always drain saucers immediately after watering. Use pots or containers with drainage holes. If containers do not have holes, pour out or remove excess water.

On a monthly basis, use a balanced cactus and succulent fertilizer as required by species. Do not use regular houseplant fertilizer or over-fertilize, as this could burn plant roots.

Bloom Time

Long-lasting blooms, on the plants and as cut flowers, make succulents an excellent party guest.

There is limited research on cut-flower handling for succulents, so test designs first (See Fresh Choices, p. 18, for more on cut succulents.) For potted plants, remove spent bloom spikes and flowers, or browning leaves with clean, sharp cutters or a careful pinch. Always supply care tags to customers outlining the specific light, watering, nutrient and pruning requirements to ensure their versatility and sustainability continue to impress at home. 🌿

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