Why Are Succulents So Groovy?

Because they are:

· Strange and beautiful
· Very low maintenance
· Most tolerate poor soils and don't require much fertilization
· Great in planters and small spaces
· Can be grown both indoors and out, or both seasonally
· Succulents have an artistic quality, add beauty and interest in the garden, and stand out in creative arrangements.

Because they are environmentally wise:

· Fire-resistant because of water filled tissues and succulent leaves
· Water-wise and drought tolerant
· Can be used as green roof plants because of shallow roots
· Most succulents are not invasive because of their shallow root systems

Photo courtesy of Debra Baldwin

Hardy Outdoor Succulents to Try in Kittitas County

In general, try choosing succulents that are one zone below your current zonation. Upper County is 5b, and Lower County is 6a, so try choosing either zone 4 or 5 respectively. One consideration for succulents and cacti is snow cover. Most hens & chicks and sedums will take snow, but cacti and ice plants are less tolerant. Maybe consider removing snow cover if the blanket is prolonged, or plant them under some shelter.

***Sedum* (Stonecrop):** Use as groundcovers, in rock gardens, on terraces and in hanging baskets. Most act as perennials and produce lovely star-shaped blooms. Some are tender, so make sure to check zone tolerance.

***Sempervivum* (Hens and Chicks, or Houseleek):** One of the most well-known garden succulents, these beauties send out "chicks or pups" attached by stolons. They form tight clumps and only require a few inches of planting medium. Most species are cold hardy.

***Jovibarba*:** This Russian relative to Hens and Chicks, but forms a long tap root. They are harder to divide, but extremely cold tolerant.

***Cactus and Yucca*:** These are both worthy additions to a succulent garden. There are hardy species of hedgehog and prickly pear cactuses in Washington, along with cold tolerant varieties of Yucca. All make striking focal points for the garden. Consider potting more expensive cactuses and acclimating to outdoors in the summer/indoors in the winter, enjoying them year-round.

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***Delosperma* (Ice Plant):** Ice plants have mixed success in our area, even with appropriate zonation remarks. Master Gardeners from Upper County have had a hard time getting them to return after winter, likely from snow cover. That having been said, you can choose the yellow ice plant which is a bit more cold tolerant then the purple, and as stated above, protect from snow blanketing. Just be willing to experiment a little. Ice plants are gorgeous, with their little pickle like leaves, and prolific daisy like flowers, so they might be worth a try in the right area.

For more information
visit the Master Gardener
Diagnostic Clinic
May through September
Tuesdays 11:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

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Succulent Success

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What are succulents?

Succulents are extremely diverse, and are not a strict botanical classification. Instead they are just a lot of different plants grouped together by the similar qualities of having juicy leaves, stems, or roots. In fact they come from at least 30 different plant families, and there are over a thousand different varieties, including cacti.

...So, what's the big picture here?

Because of their diversity, all general guidelines given for growing succulents, are just that, general! *Always check the growth requirements for your specific plant.* That having been said…

How can you be successful with succulents?

Water:

Succulents are extremely prone to root rot, for which there is no effective treatment. Therefore, overwatering is the biggest problem! Allow to dry out completely between watering. Don't let plants sit in water, no saucers holding water either. Water less during winter "rest period" when plants are less actively growing. Most succulents come from more arid environments, so they don't need a humid environment like most houseplants do, consider a more ventilated area.

Light:

Most succulents like good sun exposure and bright light for 3-4 hours a day. Don't automatically think scorching sun though; for example, *Harworhtias* can sunburn easily. When they are in full sun outside, plant them nestled among rocks and shaded by other plants to provide dappled shade. (Expose to sun gradually after purchasing greenhouse plants.)

Soil:

Use well drained soil with good aeration. Mulch with gravel, turkey grit, or decorative media like crushed rock or aquarium stone, this keeps their leaves dryer. You can augment potting soil or native soils with 1:1 ratio of course sand, perlite or pumice. Think not too much organic matter (think light, not too rich soil). Consider raised areas when planting outdoors to increase drainage.

Fertilizer:

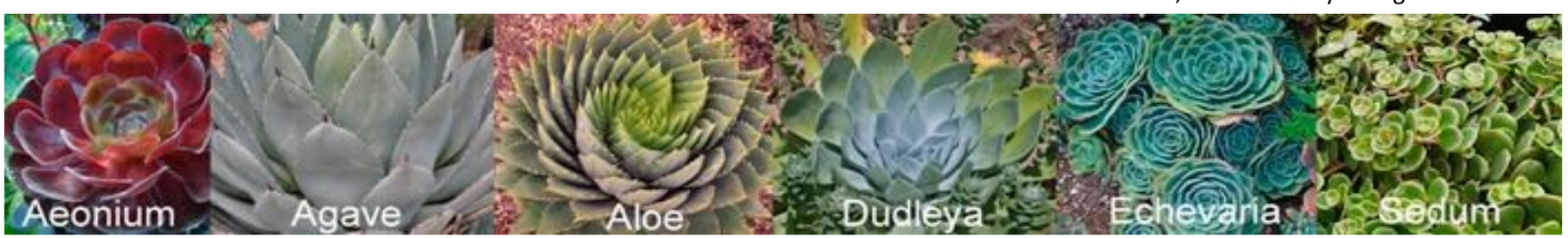
Always follow label instructions! Succulents have modest nutrient needs, and for the most part, you can get away without fertilizing at all. If they need some fertilizer, only supplement them during their strength. Look for fertilizers specifically designed for succulents.

Acclimation:

Indoor succulents enjoy being placed outdoors in summer, but acclimate them slowly when moving from indoors to outside, because indoor lighting is softer. Place in shade for 1 to 2 weeks, then part shade for 1 to 2 weeks before moving into full sunlight. Wait until night time temperatures are around 50°F before moving succulents indoors or visa versa.

Propagation:

The simplest way to propagate most succulents is by division. Leaf or stem cutting can also be successful for some types. (In fact, sometimes in the garden you can just stick a piece of broken succulent in the ground or pot, and it will grow; what the heck, might as well try it!) To propagate by cutting, chose an actively growing portion of the plant for cutting, dip in rooting hormone, root in approximately 90% coarse sand and 10% potting soil. Then, after roots have formed, transplant. Seeding and grafting (mostly for cacti) are more difficult and time consuming for slow growing succulents, but the hobbyist might like the more information on propagating different species, see the WSU publication: *Propagating Herbaceous Plants from Cuttings.*



Pests:

Succulents rarely get pests, but occasionally mealybugs or aphids can be a problem. They can be controlled by dabbing them with cotton swabs dipped in rubbing alcohol.

Containers:

Preparing living arrangements with succulents is fun! Their strange shapes, growth patterns, and foliage colors give them great architectural interest in containers. Here are some pros and cons of different containers: Terracotta and wood have better air circulation, and dry out faster. Metal and plastic hold water longer, and are easier to sterilize (just don't ever plant in galvanized metal directly, use an inserted pot instead).