

Photo of  
Boots by  
Erie County  
Master  
Gardener  
Rita Ippolito

## Growing Succulents Successfully

by Carol Ann Harlos (based in part on information in December *Grower Talks* by Amanda Flint & Alison Strate)

Succulents are becoming a national gardening trend although many have been with us for years. The author smiles as she thinks about the rather large pot of aloe that she neglected to bring inside this past autumn. It turned to mush...near the front door as well!

Success with succulents depends on our realizing that they are basically desert survivors. Usually they grow in dry warm (often hot) environments in places where other plants wither and die. Succulents do this by storing water and nutrients not only in roots but also in leaves and stems. They carry on their respiration (changing food into carbon dioxide and water and releasing energy) only at night. They also take in the water they need for survival at night time as well. These characteristics not only make succulents different from other types of plants but can be used by us to raise healthy successful plants.

So what should we do to be successful with our succulents? It begins with the soil. A well- drained soilless medium containing perlite is recommended in a 70-30 ratio. Products made especially for succulents are widely available.



Pay attention to the shallow root systems of most succulents. If you are transplanting a jade tree (*Crassula*) for example into a larger container be mindful. It needs more room horizontally than vertically. In other words too deep a pot may lead to root rot and/or sour soil. Too deep a pot will also lead to a slowdown in the growth of the entire plant.

**Don't over water.** Allow the soil to dry out completely before watering. Water only at night when the plant will absorb the water!

**Be patient!** Many succulents are slow growers.

**Don't neglect fertilization of your potted succulents.**

Small amounts of nitrogen (N) and potassium (K) will help your succulents thrive. Be careful not to add too much potassium (P) because it can cause plant damage. You can simplify all this by simply buying a fertilizer especially made for succulents and following the directions!

Pay attention to the light needs of your succulents. Most need full sun. But some such as *Nematanthus*, bromeliads, and even some aloes do better in partial shade. Read the directions that come with your plant or do some research. 



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