

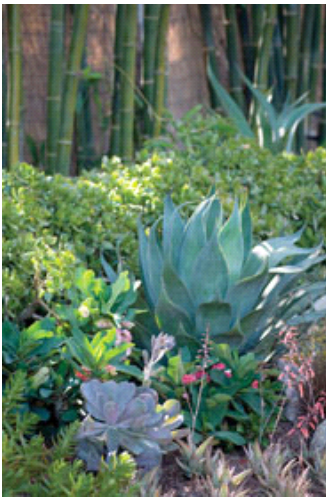
GROWERTALKS

Columns

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Growing With Griffin: Succulents 101: A Grower's Guide

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Succulents certainly aren't new, but their surging popularity has shown some real staying power. Designers and home gardeners alike have rediscovered these low-maintenance beauties for everything from container gardens, windowsill displays and table centerpieces. The trend is truly universal, drawing consumers in every region of the country.

Succulents are big business. Adding them to your production is simpler than you may think and an opportunity to capitalize on a category that continues to grow. In addition to the range of color, texture and form that inspires consumers, succulents offer some unique benefits to growers. They're suited to quick turns with minimal input costs and their niche status commands premium prices.

What's not to love?

Pictured: EuroAmerican Propagators' Savvy Succulents collection in a landscape. Photo courtesy of EuroAmerican Propagators.

Echeveria, crassula and kalanchoe are great choices for first-time succulent growers serving frost-free applications. For growers serving warm and cool climates, consider starting with sedum, sempervivum and/or delosperma—all are known to shine at retail. Getting started with succulents is easier than ever. A broad selection of supply is available to the U.S. market from many familiar sources for succulent URCs and liners. URC suppliers include HMA and Northwest Horticulture. Liners are available from both regional and national suppliers, including Mast Young Plants, DGI, Silverleaf Greenhouses and North Carolina Farms.

Today, though, let's dig deeper into several programs that are geared toward succulent rookies.

Vendor programs

The Go & Grow Savvy Succulents Kit from Pleasant View Gardens is perfect for small to mid-size growers, and anyone looking to try a succulents program for the first time. Each kit contains a pre-selected mix of top-selling varieties, enough to yield 64 finished containers (32 each of two grower-suggested recipes). The kits include 8-in. decorative bowls and a full set of tags—everything you need for finishing.

EuroAmerican Propagators offers both Savvy Succulents and sempervivum as Mixed and Mingled grower's choice tray assortments. The assorted Savvy Succulents consists of two 50-cell trays, two 84-cell trays and a premium select 28-cell quick-start tray. The assorted sempervivum is offered in a 28-cell and 84-cell tray.

Also available from EuroAmerican are Savvy Succulents Dish Gardens in three sizes: 8 in., 10 in. and 12 in. Each dish garden is retail-ready, featuring a mix of premium succulents. They're grown in optimal production conditions for several weeks to allow adequate rooting and mingling, ensuring quality and longevity. All Savvy Succulents recipes have been extensively trialed; each dish garden is visually appealing with a variation of color, shape, texture and height.

Botany Lane Greenhouse offers retail-ready succulents in decorative containers in 3-in., 4.5-in., 8-in. and 14-in. sizes. Both assorted and monoculture types are available.

Esbenshades' FlexQ Liners give growers the ability to order a range of succulents in small quantities. The FlexQ trays come in two forms—choose 72-cell trays or half-strip-deep 36-cells. The FlexQ succulents program spans more than 60 varieties. Tags are also available upon request.

Growers seeking a more diverse program should consider Tessera Succulents from Plug Connection. The Tessera assortment includes more than 100 varieties, offering terrific range in color, texture and shape. Choose from monoculture, single-genus mixes or multispecies assortments in 72- or 102-cell trays. The program is easily adaptable to suit production needs, as well as local and regional preferences. Picture tags are available for every variety in the Tessera assortment to jumpstart your merchandising efforts.

Production guidelines

Crop timing: Timing may vary by variety and production container size. Succulents, of course, need not be in flower at the time of sale. Contact your broker sales representative for detailed crop times based on your program needs.

Media: A well-drained, well-aerated (coarse) soil mix is recommended. Many growers use a container mix of peat, coir, composted bark and as much as 30% to 50% of perlite, scoria or similar.

Water: Water management is key. Water regularly, but avoid overwatering. Once established, succulents should be allowed to dry down between irrigations. Water early enough in the day to avoid wet foliage overnight. Good airflow is also important to encourage drying cycles between irrigations.

Temperature: Keep night temperatures above 55F (12C) and daytime temperatures of at least 65 to 70F (18 to 21C). Cold-hardy varieties of sedums, sempervivums and delospermas can be treated as hardy perennials. Extreme high temperatures paired with high humidity should be avoided, as these conditions can promote disease.

Light levels: High light is best for developing strong leaf coloration in succulents. Low light levels can be temporarily offset with dry soil conditions, but only for a short period of time.

Fertilization: 150 ppm N is recommended, though take special care to avoid overfertilizing. Fertilize more once plants are well-established and actively growing. For large-scale production, a granular or slow-release fertilizer can be applied to the soil surface at medium rates when all other production conditions are optimal. Take special care to avoid excessive amounts of feed in the growing points of rosette types.

Growth regulation: PGRs aren't necessary; however, sedums can be pinched to achieve fuller finished plants. Minimal irrigation and high light levels are encouraged to keep plants compact and deter stretching.

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