

Succulents make ideal houseplants

Thousands of plants fall under the general heading of "succulents" and are notable for their thick, fleshy leaves which store water. Sedums, echeverias and cactus are only three of the thirty plant families that contain succulents. They do not all originate in the hot, sandy desert. In fact they make ideal houseplants even in our cool houses.

The jade tree, *Crassula argentea*, was the first succulent plant I ever grew. It was a good introduction to succulents because it's such a handsome plant that I felt like a very accomplished horticulturist right from the start yet it's very easy to care for, as are all the succulents.

The jade tree is common and popular because it is so attractive — eventually growing to three feet or so. Mine has never bloomed, but I do know people who have had mature plants, kept in cool sunny locations, that have produced airy sprays of tiny white flowers during the winter.

A very different member of the *Crassula* family is *C. falcata*, the propeller plant. It will not grow more than a foot high and the long fleshy leaves account for its popular name. The propeller plant can produce clusters of red flowers during the summer. When mature it will also produce plant offsets that can be removed and potted up separately.

Still smaller is the popularly named toy cypress, *C. lycopodioides*. Its slender stems are covered with little scaly leaves. It rarely gets taller than eight inches and to make an attractive display, three or four plants should be potted together.

There are dwarf crassulas: *C. cooperi* grows so low it's like a succulent ground cover and *C. schmidtii* has pointed dark green leaves and will produce bright pink flowers.

Pat
Leuchtman



Between
The Rows

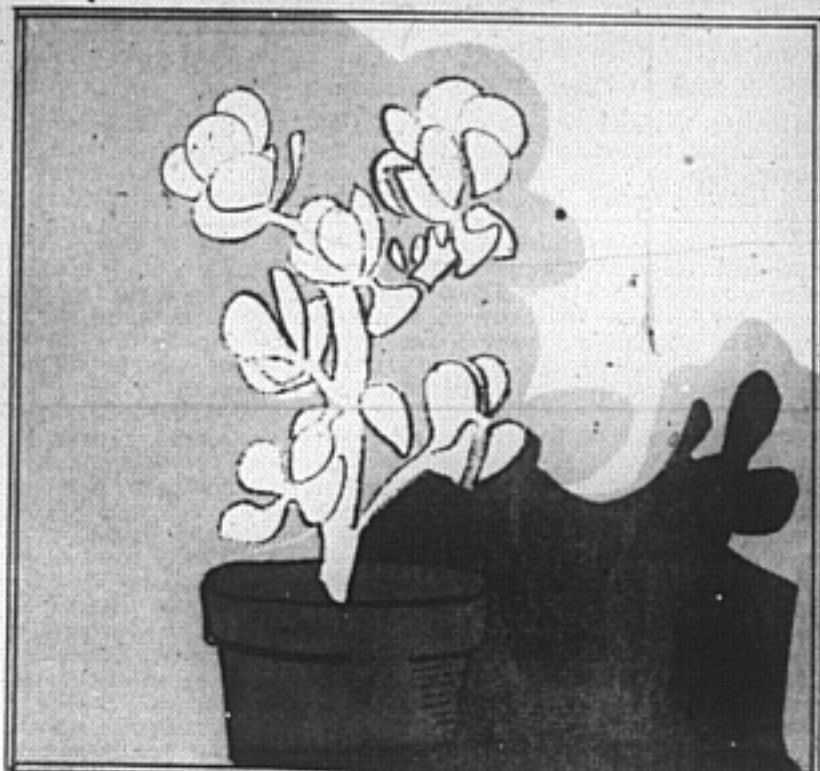
There's even *C. perforata*, string of buttons, that is perfect for a hanging basket because its succulent leaves grow on trailing stems.

All members of the *Crassula* family have the same requirements. They need bright light, preferably with some sun and medium-to-cool temperatures. My jade tree sits in an east window and my house is never hot.

Just about the only way to seriously damage any *Crassula* is by overwatering. They do their most active growing during the spring and summer and should be watered moderately then, letting the soil dry between waterings. During the fall and winter they should be watered less often. Remember, the leaves are succulent. They store their own water supply. If the leaves begin to shrivel you'll know you're being too stingy, but good watering will bring that thirsty plant back to life in no time.

It's also important when you repot not to plant the jade tree or any succulent any deeper than it was. Repotting should be done every two or three years when the plant is pot bound. I always use clay pots, which dry out faster than plastic, for succulent plants. Crock the new pot well to insure good drainage and use a soil mix of two parts potting soil and one part perlite.

You can propagate crassulas by taking leaf or leaf tip cuttings and



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rooting them in the same soil mixture. They root very easily.

I'd also like to mention kalanchoe, another succulent. *Kalanchoe blossfeldiana*, covered with red flowers, is available at many florists during the holidays. No promise is made that it will be a long-lived plant and many people toss it out after it has bloomed. I'm as lackadaisical about throwing out a plant as I am about caring for it sometimes, and I can report that I have kept kalanchoes for two or three years and they have rebloomed.

A very different variety is *K. pumila*, which has silvery leaves and dusty pink flowers, and makes a very attractive show in a hanging basket. All kalanchoes require the same care as the crassula family.

Sources: *The California Epi Center*, P.O. Box 1431, Vista, CA 92083 (catalog \$1); *Cactus Gem Nursery*, 10082 Mann Drive, Cupertino, CA 95014 (catalog \$1); *K&L Cactus and Succulent Nursery*, 12712 Stockton Blvd., Galt, CA 95632; *Logee's Greenhouses*, 55 North Street, Danielson, CT 06239 (catalog \$3)