

LIFESTYLE

Contact Lifestyle Editor Caitlin Herrington at cherrington@upstatetoday.com or call (864) 973-6686
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Saturday, March 23, 2019

Succulents

Whether it's the garden center, the grocery store, or even the local craft store giant, over the past few years, there has been a significant increase in the popularity of succulents.

I have seen images of succulent plants on T-shirts, notebooks, wall hangings and even on cellphone cases. Providing a fun way to incorporate plants into most any situation, succulents are considered cute, easy and fun to grow. So why not add one or two to your home or office?

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Short answer — many people find they are actually one of the hardest houseplants to grow.

Too much water, not enough light, too little light, no fertility, plants in combination that have different requirements, mice that find your office plants to be a sweet little snack — there are so many reasons that succulents fail.

The most common problem with succulents is lack of knowledge. Most succulents come in cute little containers that have no drainage, little fertility and even less information about how to care for it. So, if you are in the market for a succulent planter, or you received one recently as a gift, keep reading for a few hints to a long life of succulent success.

Do your research first. If you are buying your own succulents, make sure you are purchasing them from a reputable nursery with plants that are properly named.

Utilize your smart phone, computer or one of those old-fashioned books to learn the name and requirements for that specific plant. Most nurseries will group their succulents by light requirements, which can help when you are designing your planter.

Make sure you are putting plants that have similar light and water needs together. If you have been gifted a succulent planter, you may need to separate some plants into new containers, because requirements are not always kept in mind when planting.

Utilize good quality, coarse potting material specifically designed for succulents. Covering the top with small pebbles can help reduce soil moisture loss and keep the soil in the container.

Make sure the container has drainage — if not, add some pebbles in the bottom to allow room for excess water without damaging plant roots. Overwatering is the No. 1 killer of any kind of houseplant!

While succulents can be difficult to grow, with a little knowledge you can have some of the trendiest containers in your home or office and be the talk of the local garden club.

Just remember, everyone loses plants at one time or another. So, if a mouse carries your succulent away and you find pieces in your desk drawer or you leave for a few weeks and the sun bakes your poor plants into oblivion — call it a learning experience, support the local nursery industry, and go buy some new plants!

IF YOU have any questions or comments, contact Kerrie Roach at kwalker@clmson.edu or at (864) 638-5889.

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Saturday, January 4, 2020

Southern staple

The South has many staple flowering plants of the garden, but none put on a show like that of the camellia when the rest of the garden is



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bleak and dreary. Sometimes referred to as the “rose of winter,” the *Camellia japonica*, or Japanese camellia, can be found in most established Southern landscapes. With the popularity of the plant, and the vast variety of different types, the cultivation and care of a Japanese camellia can sometimes be confounding.

First things first, which camellia is which? The easiest way to decide if you have a *Camellia japonica* or a *Camellia sasanqua* is by bloom time. Think “J” for January matches with “J” for *japonica*, and “S” for September matches with “S” for *sasanqua*. *Camellia japonica* blooms in early spring/winter, usually around January. *Camellia sasanqua* is the fall blooming camellia, typically starting around September. So, if you have a camellia that is just now starting to bloom, you most likely are dealing with a Japanese camellia.

Camellia japonica has color variations from deep reds to pure whites, and along with speckled and striped varieties, there is a hue for everyone’s taste. Most varieties prefer part-shade to shade locations with well-drained soils — there may be a few exceptions. Camellias will typically tolerate our native acidic soils, but can occasionally suffer cold damage if temperatures dip into single digits. They are very slow-growing plants, and can take years to really establish in the soil, so a large hole at planting (two to three times the root ball) and limiting stress for the first few years (water during drought periods) are key to long-term survival.

When caring for your camellias, make sure all pruning is completed just after flowering finishes. If you prune later in the season, you may remove your flower buds for the next year. Disease and insect concerns are not often deadly, with the most common problems being flower blight and scale.

Flower blight causes spots, then the rapid browning and drop of entire flowers. It is best controlled by sanitation measures — keep all leaf and spent flower debris underneath the shrub picked up and disposed. A fungicide spray of macozeb or captan can be used as a soil drench every two weeks from mid-December through January, and can potentially lower the severity of the disease. Follow the label’s directions.

Scales are piercing-sucking insects that feed on the vascular layer of the plant, causing yellowing and dieback. Most scales can be found on the underside of the leaves. After the danger of cold weather has passed in late winter, a horticultural oil can be used and should be applied according to the label. A mix of soapy water (insecticidal soap) can also be used during the growing season when crawlers (think baby scales) are present.

Camellia japonica flowers are one of my favorite. When everything else in the garden is sleeping, the camellia is proudly showing off her multitude and color of blooms. If you do not already have one in your landscape, this is one plant I definitely suggest adding. If it does nothing more than draw a smile on a cold, rainy, dreary January day, it has served its purpose well.

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