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GARDEN SPOT

Learning about succulents



MARTY FIGLEY

Last fall I made a wreath of succulents and kept it indoors all winter, then I put it out in the garden in a cement bird bath where it remains. It absorbs the rain that collects in the shallow bowl, so additional watering was minimal.

I used a wire form to hold it all together, set the form on damp sheet moss and put damp potting soil down the middle of the moss, then pulled the moss up and around the frame. I secured this tightly with florists' wire.

I poked holes into the center of the affair and gently set each plant in place, starting at the inner edge. Sedum tricolor, *Crassulaceae*, ringed the inner and outer edges. Other plants I used were Jade, *Crassula arborecens*, Houseleeks, *Sempervivum tectorum*, Haworthia and Sedum, Autumn Joy. The tricolor sedum didn't survive the winter, but I can add more now.

These plants are but a minute number in the genus of succulents, which by definition possess at least one succulent tissue that can store water to be used when the root can't bring water from the soil. It's fun to learn about the unusual names such as *Conophytum*, *Cotyledon*, *Euphorbia*, *Gasteria* and Lithops that have been given to these plants.

There are perennials as well as annuals in the genus. Some of the annual succulents have organs below the soil surface to protect them from stresses of wind and predators. Another interesting fact is that some of the plants, Lithops, for example, have no stem, and the leaves grow hidden in the soil. Many have beautiful blooms.

Photosynthesis is performed by the green stems. The holes in the leaves (stomata) of these plants are usually reduced compared to most other leaves.

The explanation of why and how this occurs is contained in the book "Succulents: The Illustrated Dictionary," Maurizio Sajevo and Mariangela Costanzo (Timber Press, \$39.95). The pages are filled (six per page) with photographs and short descriptions of more than 1,200 species and varieties from 195 different genera. Timber Press books can be ordered by calling (800)

327-5650 or from your favorite book seller.

Many of these plants are well known — Kalanchoe, Aloe and Yucca, for example — while others are very rare. For those of you who want to learn more about these plants, this book will teach you.

If you choose to make a wreath, especially as a gift, it's always nice to include some history about it. Circles or rings have had a mythical potency for mankind throughout history. The circle signifies love, protection, friendship, rebirth, even life itself.

Since early times wreaths were made of plants such as laurel, oak leaves, grasses and crops (corn, barley). Now boxwood, spruce, pine, holly, juniper and herbs such as lavender, thyme, sweet woodruff and other green plants are used. Vinca and pachysandra stay evergreen, and many of the plant may even root.

Keep the wreath on a round tray with low sides. A deli tray is ideal. Stainless, pewter and glass are all fine, too. Water the wreath each week. Don't mist succulents because it encourages shallow rooting. If the wreath is in a sunny spot, it may need water every three days. Don't let it dry out. You can either pour water around the wreath or soak it in a large tub. Don't fertilize the first year, then apply liquid house plant food, 1/4 strength, when you fertilize the other house plants. Prune if necessary.

Congratulations

CONGRATULATIONS to members of the Federated Garden Clubs of Michigan Inc. who have raised more than \$29,000 for the Frederik Meijer Gardens Michigan Botanic Garden, Meijer Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids. This was their special project during the presidency of Nancy Goulette of Northville.

From their newsletter: "The impact of this project will be the establishment of our garden space at the Frederik Meijer Gardens, which will be a visible example of the work of our federation."

Marty Figley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham. You can leave her a message by dialing (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then her mailbox number, 1853. Her fax number is (810) 644-1314.

Succulent wreath: Succulents make attractive arrangements.



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