



BRIAN KEMBLE/RUTH BANCROFT GARDEN

Aloe brevifolia, left, is frost-hardy. At right, Aloe maculata is good for beginning succulent gardeners. Below, Echeveria x imbricata is among the easiest to grow.

Start your own succulent garden

Walnut Creek's Ruth Bancroft is a national authority on drought-resistant gardening. Twice a month, she and her staff share their knowledge with readers.

Q: I would like to put in a small garden of succulents at my home, but do not know much about them. Do you have a list of easy-to-grow plants suitable for a beginner?



RUTH'S TIPS
RUTH BANCROFT

A: What plants are suitable is very much influenced by where your garden is, the light level, whether you have deer or other uninvited visitors and so forth. However, we can provide a list of adaptable plants that succeed in most places.

For gardens large enough to accommodate them, the more common agaves (such as Agave americana) are easy to please and can be grown even in heavier clay soils than would be tolerated by many other succulents. They can be grown in full sun or in shade as long as it is not too dense. Yuccas are also quite adaptable.

Both of these plants are too tough to be targeted by deer, but they can be attacked from below by gophers.

Among the aloes, Aloe arborescens is a good choice where a bulky plant is called for. It makes a fine display of red flowers in winter, although extreme cold spells of 27 degrees or below can

damage the blossoms.

Aloe striatula, while still shrubby, is a smaller summer-blooming plant that will not be harmed by even the oldest of winters.

For stemless kinds, Aloe maculata and A. brevifolia are easy to grow and are frost-hardy. The former has

well coast-side or inland.

Another adaptable, deer-proof plant is Cotyledon orbiculata, which has many forms. The leaves may be spoon-shaped, rounded or fingerlike, and plants may be powdery-white, green or gray-green.

The clusters of coral or orange flowers may come in spring or summer.

Sedums are also good choices for beginners. Many are small and ground-hugging, such as the red and orange-tinged Sedum x rubrotinctum (pork and beans). Others are more shrubby, such as S. praealtum and S. dendroideum, with yellow flowers and bright green leaves that often are edged in red.

Prickly pears are among the easiest of cactuses, although care should be taken in working with them because of their tiny and easily dislodged irritating spines.

Of the columnar cactuses, the San Pedro cactus (Echinopsis pachanoi) and its spinier relative Echinopsis spachianus are good choices, both with large white flowers.

Less common, but also quite trouble-free, are the dyckias with their orange or yellow flowers. Their leaves may be green, silvery or purple.



spotted leaves and coral flowers, while the latter has spikes of orange flowers.

Perhaps the easiest to grow of the hens-and-chicks is Echeveria x imbricata, an old hybrid with neat rosettes of blue-green leaves and small arching stalks of red-orange flowers. Both it and the waxy-leaved Echeveria agavoides are cold-tolerant and do

If you have a question for the Ruth Bancroft Garden, email info@ruthbancroftgarden.org. For tour and event information, visit www.ruthbancroftgarden.org.