

Cacti and Succulents in the Garden

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What is a succulent?

Succulents are plants that have the ability to store water within their leaves, stems or roots.

What are cacti?

Cacti are a distinct family in which all species are succulent. On the other hand, over 50 families of plants contain succulent members.

Factors to consider when creating a hardy cactus garden:

Properly siting the garden is important.

Site the garden where it will receive as much direct sunlight as possible.

Most hardy species of cacti come from high elevations and can be treated like alpine. They prefer high temperatures during the day and cool night temperatures below 70°

The best location for your garden may be where many perennials and rock garden plants will fail because of hot dry conditions in summer.

Air Circulation

Good air movement will help keep your plants healthy. Too humid conditions can rot succulents in the garden as well as in the greenhouse or home.

Soil pH

pH should range from slightly acid (6.5) to slightly alkaline (7.5).

Most hardy cacti come from areas with calcareous soils that are presumably more alkaline.

Drainage

The soil needs to be well drained.

When cacti are growing they can use a substantial amount of water.

Problem: Too much water at the wrong time of year, typically when the plants are dormant in winter and the coldest parts of spring and fall.

Elevating the bed will improve drainage.

Soil Preparation

Evaluate the existing soil. Unless you are very lucky to have a sandy or gravelly soil it will need to be amended.

Your formula may depend somewhat on materials available to you.

Following is a general idea of what a good bed mix should consist of:

1 Part Pea Gravel (at least 1/4" in size)

1 part very coarse sand

1 part good garden loam or existing soil with compost added

Do not substitute peat moss for compost.

Mixing large pieces of rock (at least 2-5" in one direction) is much appreciated by cacti.

Be sure to remove all vegetation from the area of the garden. Starting with a clean area will reduce the problem of removing difficult perennial weeds and grasses later.

When creating an elevated bed a good method is to prepare mix in a wheelbarrow and add to existing bed area (one load to 4 sq. ft.) and spading in to existing soil. Add more layers and spading in after each layer will create a blended bed with great drainage.

Top dress with gravel at least 1" deep
(can be up to 3" deep)

Large rocks or boulders will add aesthetics to the garden and provide crevices for plants that need additional drainage.

Some Hardy Species

Cacti

Prickly Pear

Opuntia basilaris

O. fragilis

O. humifusa

O. macrorhiza

O. polycantha

O. phaeacantha

Cholla

O. imbricata

O. tunicata v. *davisii*

O. viridiflora

O. whipplei

Globular Forms of Cacti

Coryphantha missouriensis

C. vivipara

Echinocereus triglochidiatus

E. viridiflorus

Other Succulents

Agavaceae

Agave utahensis
Manfreda (Agave) virginica
Yucca filamentosa & cvs.
Y. glauca

Mesembryanthemaceae

Chamatophyllum muscalinum
Delosperma congestum
 D. cooperi
D. dyeri
 D. echlonis v. latifolia
 D. 'Gold Nugget'
 D. x 'John Proffitt'
 D. nubigenum
 D. 'Oberg'
D. sutherlandii 'Peach Star'

Sources of hardy cacti:

Mesa Garden
P.O. Box 72
Belen, New Mexico 87002
Website: mesagarden.com
(website list only no catalog)
Seeds & plants of both hardy and
non-hardy cacti and succulents

Intermountain Cactus
1478 North 750 East
Kaysville, Utah 84037
e-mail: inermtcactus@aol.com

Additional reading:

Cacti in the Snow
A guide to Growing Hardy Cacti
in Wet and Frozen North
Bruce Brethauer

Crassulaceae

Jovibarba species & cvs.
Orostachys species & cvs.
Rosularia species
Sedum species & cvs.
Sempervivum species & cvs.

Portulacaceae

Lewisia species & cvs.
Talinum species

Mulberry Creek Herb Farm
3312 Bogart Road
Huron, Ohio 44839
Website: mulberrycreek.com
Sedums and Mesembryanthemums

Plantasia Cactus Gardens
867 Filer Ave W
Twin Falls, Idaho 83301
e-mail: lorton@pmt.org

Growing Winter Hardy Cacti
in Cold/Wet Climate Conditions
John N. Spain