

Beyond Hens and Chicks

Succulents bring kitsch to Portland gardens

I've been toying with hens and chicks. And donkey tails. And all kinds of fun succulents. Sedums are those plants you might have seen in your grandmother's garden, especially Hens and Chicks. They probably lived in a clay pot in the shape of a chicken, perhaps propped on her back steps. If Grandma lived in Palm Springs, you saw succulents nestled in all kinds of places, specifically in gravel. And lucky for you, you can have a little bit of Palm Springs right here in Portland.

I've been eyeing the goods of a company called Sedum Chicks at various area plant sales and farmers markets for a while now. And recently I saw this beauty at its booth: a single, red high-heeled shoe, planted ever-so-delicately with at least five types of sedum. I cooed and cawed and claimed it out loud to my friend "that's mine" when we were still a good eight feet away. Look at that loveliness. She will

grace the perfect setting atop a royal blue powder-coated side table next to a royal blue powder-coated chair on our back patio. I love it when I find the perfect item. And then I looked around at all of the displays of succulents and thought to myself, "I can do this!" So clever people are with sedum, stuffing old tea kettles and metal tins with the succulent. But succulents are great for other areas besides the ultimate kitsch factor.

Pots are notorious for getting hot and dry, and the great thing with succulents is they tend to like it a little dry. And heat? They say, "Brang it!" With such variation of colors, from pink to burgundy to blue green to citrine, they provide a wonderful palette of color to play with. But it doesn't end there. Succulents also come in a variety of textures, leaf sizes and forms. Look carefully and you'll find succulents that look like tiny little seashells cascading on a string, or spiky underwater coral, or even globular shapes covered in webs.

Have you seen the wire forms that are circular shaped and look like wreaths? Succulents are perfect in those wire forms, again because they tolerate the air and low water. Planted tightly and tucked into soil held in place with coconut husks or peat moss, a succulent wreath is lovely to grace an outdoor wall or a front porch or can make a gorgeous outdoor table decoration if you want to take it down for a party and plant a few candles in the middle of it.

Fun combinations of succulents are perfect to mark the corners or edges of a path. Our gravel paths have sedums spilling over



Sassy Gardener
BY LEANN LOCHER

and into them, as they thrive in actually living in the gravel itself. So here are some tricks for doing some fun succulent planting yourself—know your succulents! There are lots of great plants under this general name, including sempervivums, aloe, echeverias: The thing that links them all are

their fleshy leaves. You can plant them in all kinds of containers, small dishes, shoes (!) or even the tops of metal trash cans turned upside down. But if you'd like to stick with concrete shallow dishes, you can do that, too. As for potting soil, mix in a good portion of sand and/or gravel. And you don't need any fertilizer. If you're really feeling crafty, mix in some tumbled glass—I get mine at Pistils Nursery on North Mississippi Avenue—on the surface, or even some shiny marbles or shells. Or keep it clean if you're an insistent modernist.

As for ongoing care? Succulents are easy. They do need water, though, so you'll need to make sure they're on the watering round this summer during our dry months or if you have them housed on your porch or balcony under the eaves. They like it hot, though, so make sure they get plenty of sun. The more sun, the more colors you'll see in their foliage.

Not all succulents are hardy here in Portland, but with their strange and fun combinations, you should be able to put together amazing companions that are sure to make your grandmother proud. Would you believe me if I told you I have them cascading out of a clay pot shaped like a pig on my back steps? Shh. Don't tell anyone. 10

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How did those get in there? Succulents can grow in all kinds of containers.

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