

The GreenNest Succulent Care Handbook

A plain-English, beginner-to-confident guide to growing fat, happy succulents.

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Welcome

Succulents are the most forgiving houseplants you can grow - once you understand the three things they actually care about: **light, water, and soil**. This handbook walks you through each, step by step, with printable schedules and a 20-plant directory you can keep by your windowsill.

What's Inside

- Chapter 1 - What Makes Succulents Special
- Chapter 2 - Light & Placement
- Chapter 3 - Watering: The Soak-and-Dry Method
- Chapter 4 - Soil & Pots (DIY Gritty Recipe)
- Chapter 5 - Temperature & Air
- Chapter 6 - Propagation: Leaves & Offshoots
- Chapter 7 - Pests & Problems ID Chart
- Chapter 8 - 20-Plant Species Directory
- Chapter 9 - 12-Month Seasonal Calendar
- Chapter 10 - Frequently Asked Questions

Chapter 1 - What Makes Succulents Special

Succulents are plants that store water in their leaves, stems, or roots. That single adaptation is why they shrug off the neglect that kills most houseplants. A missed watering barely registers; a forgotten cactus can go a month dry and look better for it.

But the trade-off is real: because they hate sitting in moisture, **too much** water is the number-one cause of succulent death. Rotten roots, soft stems, and collapsed rosettes almost always trace back to overwatering or the wrong soil. Get water and soil right and you are 80% of the way to a thriving collection.

Remember the rule of three: bright light, infrequent deep water, fast-draining soil. Everything else in this book is detail on those three pillars.

Chapter 2 - Light & Placement

Most succulents want the brightest spot you have - a south or west window in the northern hemisphere. Without enough light they "etiolate": they stretch tall and pale, reaching for the sun, and lose their compact shape.

Window directions at a glance

- South / north-facing (depends on hemisphere): brightest, best for Echeveria, Aloes, Jade.
- West: strong afternoon sun - great, but watch for scorching in summer.
- East: gentle morning sun - good for most soft-leaved succulents.
- North: too dim for true desert succulents; keep Haworthia or Gasteria here.

No bright window? A full-spectrum LED grow light 6-12 inches above the plants, on for 12-14 hours a day, replaces sunlight almost perfectly. Look for a "full spectrum" or 6000-6500K label.

Chapter 3 - Watering: The Soak-and-Dry Method

Forget "a little water every few days." Succulents want the opposite: **soak the soil completely, then let it dry out fully before watering again.** The top inch being dry is not enough - the whole pot should be light and dry.

How to tell it's time

- The lift test: pick up the pot. Dry soil is dramatically lighter than wet. When it feels weightless, water.
- The leaf test: a thirsty succulent's leaves wrinkle slightly and lose plumpness. Water the same day.
- The finger test: push a finger 2 inches down. If any moisture, wait.

Watering schedule by season (indoor, average home)

Use these as starting points, then adjust with the tests above:

- Spring (active growth): every 7-10 days.
- Summer (hot / bright): every 5-7 days; some small pots daily in heat.
- Autumn: every 14-21 days as growth slows.
- Winter (dormancy for most): every 21-35 days - and keep them dry and cool.

Watering by pot size

- Small pots (under 3"): dry fastest - check weekly, water when fully dry.
- Medium pots (3-6"): the sweet spot; roughly the seasonal schedule above.
- Large pots (over 6"): hold moisture for weeks; water far less often to avoid rot.

Always water at the soil, not over the leaves. Trapped water in the rosette invites rot and fungus. Early morning is best so any splash dries fast.

Chapter 4 - Soil & Pots (DIY Gritty Recipe)

Bagged "potting soil" is designed to hold water - exactly what kills succulents. You need a **gritty, fast-draining mix** where water runs through in seconds.

The basic DIY succulent mix

- 2 parts coarse horticultural sand or poultry grit (sharp sand, not beach sand).
- 2 parts perlite or pumice (the white / brown lava bits that hold air, not water).
- 1 part regular potting soil or coco coir as the nutrient base.

For desert cacti, go even grittier: **3 parts mineral (sand + pumice) to 1 part soil.** For Haworthia and Gasteria, a slightly richer 1:1:1 mix is fine.

Terracotta vs plastic

- Terracotta (unglazed clay): breathes and wicks moisture from the soil - the safest choice for beginners.
- Plastic / glazed: holds moisture longer; fine once you cut back watering.

Drainage is non-negotiable. Every pot needs a drainage hole. A "decorative" pot with no hole is a rot trap - use it only as a cachepot (outer pot) with a drained nursery pot inside.

Chapter 5 - Temperature & Air

Most succulents are happy between **60-85 degF (15-29 degC)**. They tolerate brief heat waves and cool nights, but two things hurt them:

- Wet + cold: a cold, soggy plant rots fast. In winter, keep soil dry and temperatures above 45 degF (7 degC) for tender types.
- Stagnant air: still, humid air encourages fungus. A little airflow (not a direct draft) keeps leaves healthy.

Many succulents actually *need* a cool, dry winter rest to bloom the next year. Let them sit at 50-60 degF with minimal water from late autumn to early spring.

Chapter 6 - Propagation: Leaves & Offshoots

One plant becomes many. Propagation is the cheapest hobby upgrade there is.

From a leaf (Echeveria, Graptopetalum, Sedum)

- Remove: twist a healthy leaf off cleanly at the stem - no torn bits.
- Callus: leave it on a dry tray, out of sun, for 2-4 days until the cut end forms a scab.
- Rest: set on top of gritty soil. Do not bury. Mist lightly every few days.
- Wait: in 3-6 weeks a tiny rosette and roots appear. Then water as a normal plant.

From an offshoot / pup (Haworthia, Aloe, Jade)

- Gently separate the pup with a little root attached.
- Let it callus a day, then pot in gritty mix.
- Water sparingly for the first two weeks while roots establish.

Patience pays. Leaf props fail often - that's normal. Try 10 leaves at once and expect 4-6 to succeed. The failures teach you the signs of a healthy cutting.

Chapter 7 - Pests & Problems ID Chart

Catch problems early and they are trivial. Ignore them and they spread. Here is the quick ID chart.

Mealybugs

Sign: white, cottony clumps in leaf axils and under leaves. Plants look sticky.

Fix: dab with a cotton swab dipped in 70% isopropyl alcohol; follow with a neem-oil or insecticidal-soap spray every 5-7 days for three weeks. Isolate the plant.

Fungus gnats

Sign: tiny black flies hovering over the soil; larvae eat fine roots.

Fix: let the top 1-2" of soil dry out, use yellow sticky traps, and drench soil with a 1:4 hydrogen peroxide-to-water mix to kill larvae. Bottom-water to keep the surface dry.

Spider mites

Sign: fine webbing, stippled / bronzed leaves, tiny moving specks. Love dry, hot air.

Fix: spray the whole plant (undersides too) with water to knock them off, then neem oil; raise humidity briefly; isolate. Repeat weekly.

Root rot

Sign: mushy, blackened stem base; yellow leaves; soil smells sour; plant collapses.

Fix: unpot immediately, cut away all black/soft roots with a clean blade, dust with cinnamon or

sulphur, and repot into dry gritty soil in a terracotta pot. Do not water for a week.

Prevention beats treatment. Most pests arrive on new plants. Quarantine anything new in a separate room for two weeks before mixing it with your collection.

Chapter 8 - 20-Plant Species Directory

A quick cheat-sheet for common, easy succulents. "Light" assumes a bright indoor window; adjust with a grow light if needed.

1. Echeveria

- Light: bright, direct sun for tight color.
- Water: every 7-14 days, fully dry between.
- Note: the poster child of rosette succulents; colors up with sun.

2. Haworthia (Zebra Plant)

- Light: bright indirect; tolerates low light.
- Water: every 2-3 weeks.
- Note: perfect desk or bathroom plant.

3. Aloe Vera

- Light: bright, indirect to direct.
- Water: every 2-3 weeks; less in winter.
- Note: burns gel; pet-toxic if eaten in quantity.

4. Jade Plant (Crassula)

- Light: bright for compact bonsai shape.
- Water: every 2-3 weeks.
- Note: long-lived; easy leaf props; mildly toxic.

5. Sedum (Stonecrop)

- Light: bright sun.
- Water: sparingly, every 10-14 days.
- Note: sprawling and mat-forming; great in shallow pots.

6. Sempervivum (Hens & Chicks)

- Light: full sun.
- Water: every 2 weeks in summer, monthly in winter.
- Note: cold-hardy; the mother rosette dies after flowering but leaves chicks.

7. Graptopetalum / Ghost Plant

- Light: bright; colors pink-grey in sun.
- Water: every 7-14 days.
- Note: fragile leaves - easy to prop, handle gently.

8. Crassula 'String of Buttons'

- Light: bright indirect.
- Water: every 2 weeks.
- Note: stacked triangular leaves; trailing form.

9. Gasteria

- Light: low to bright indirect.

- Water: every 2-3 weeks.
- Note: tongue-like spotted leaves; very forgiving.

10. Lithops (Living Stones)

- Light: intense direct sun.
- Water: only in autumn/spring; almost none in summer & winter.
- Note: advanced; overwatering is fatal. Research before buying.

11. Kalanchoe

- Light: bright, some direct.
- Water: every 7-10 days.
- Note: blooms in winter; pinch spent flowers.

12. Aeonium

- Light: bright; afternoon shade in heat.
- Water: more often than desert types, every 7-10 days.
- Note: winter-growers; rosettes on bare stems.

13. Agave

- Light: full sun.
- Water: monthly in season, dry in winter.
- Note: architectural; spines are sharp - keep from kids/pets.

14. Aloe 'Crosby's Prolific'

- Light: bright indirect.
- Water: every 2-3 weeks.
- Note: a pupping aloe that fills a pot fast.

15. Pachyphytum

- Light: bright; colors chalky-blue.
- Water: every 10-14 days.
- Note: chubby leaves; pretty dangling flowers.

16. Senecio 'String of Pearls'

- Light: bright indirect, some morning sun.
- Water: every 7-10 days; pearls wrinkle when thirsty.
- Note: trailing; pet-toxic.

17. Euphorbia tirucalli (Pencil Cactus)

- Light: full sun.
- Water: every 2-3 weeks.
- Note: milky sap is a skin/eye irritant - wear gloves.

18. Cotyledon 'Bear's Paw'

- Light: bright with some direct sun.
- Water: every 7-14 days.
- Note: fuzzy green leaves with red "claws"; sought-after.

19. Adromischus (Crinkle Leaf)

- Light: bright indirect.
- Water: every 2-3 weeks.

- Note: tiny spotted leaves; leaf props from a single leaf.

20. Opuntia (Bunny Ears / Prickly Pear)

- Light: full sun.
- Water: every 2-4 weeks in season.
- Note: glochids (tiny barbed hairs) are irritating - handle with tongs.

Chapter 9 - 12-Month Seasonal Calendar

- January-February: deepest dormancy. Water barely (every 3-5 weeks), keep cool and bright.
- March-April: growth wakes. Resume regular watering; start a half-strength feed monthly.
- May-June: peak growth. Water often; move outdoor plants to morning sun only; watch for aphids.
- July-August: heat. Small pots may need water every few days; shade from harsh midday sun.
- September-October: slow down. Reduce water; stop feeding; bring outdoor plants in before frost.
- November-December: rest. Minimal water; bright light; no fertilizer.

One feeding rule: use a cactus/succulent fertilizer at half the label strength, once a month, only during the active growing season (spring-early autumn). Never feed a dormant or stressed plant.

Chapter 10 - Frequently Asked Questions

How often should I really water succulents?

Until the soil is fully dry, then soak. That's roughly every 1-3 weeks in season and every 3-5 weeks in winter for most indoor plants. The lift test beats any calendar.

Why are my leaves turning yellow and mushy?

Almost always overwatering / rot. Stop watering, check the roots, and repot into dry gritty soil if they are black or soft.

My succulent is stretching tall and pale - what's wrong?

Etiolation from too little light. Move it to a brighter window or add a grow light. The stretched part won't revert, but new growth will be compact; you can also behead and re-root the top.

Can succulents live in a bathroom or office with no window?

Not long without a grow light. Haworthia and Gasteria tolerate low light best, but all succulents need some brightness or a full-spectrum LED.

Do I need special fertilizer?

A standard cactus/succulent fertilizer at half strength, monthly in the growing season, is plenty. Less is safer than more.

Is it okay to use tap water?

Usually fine. If your water is very hard, let it sit overnight or use rainwater to avoid mineral buildup on the soil surface.

You've got this. Succulents forgive more than they punish. Water less than you think, give them the brightest window you have, and use gritty soil - and you'll be the person friends ask for cuttings from.