



Caring for Succulents

General Principles for the Gold Coast:

Caring for succulents in Queensland presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities due to the state's varied climate. While succulents are famously drought-tolerant, Queensland's high humidity and intense summer heat require specific considerations.

Here's a comprehensive guide to keeping your succulents happy and thriving in Queensland:

1. The Queensland Climate and Succulents:

- **Humidity:** This is the biggest challenge. High humidity means the soil takes longer to dry out, and plants retain moisture in their leaves, increasing the risk of rot.
- **Heat:** Intense summer sun can scorch leaves, especially for less sun-tolerant varieties or those not gradually acclimatised.
- **Wet Season (Summer):** Expect heavy rainfall, which can lead to overwatering and fungal issues.
- **Dry Season (Winter/Spring):** Generally drier, but Gold Coast still experiences some rain. Cooler temperatures can encourage vibrant colours in some varieties.

2. Soil is Paramount: Drainage, Drainage, Drainage!

This is the most critical factor for succulents in a humid climate.

- **Specialised Mix:** Always use a well-draining potting mix specifically designed for cacti and succulents. These mixes typically contain a higher percentage of inorganic materials like perlite, pumice, coarse sand (like builder's sand, not fine play sand), or decomposed granite.
- **DIY Mix:** If you can't find a specialised mix, modify a regular potting mix by adding a large proportion of inorganic material (e.g., 50-70% inorganic matter to 30-50% potting mix).
- **Avoid Compost:** Minimize the amount of compost in your succulent mix, especially for desert succulents, as it retains too much moisture.
- **No Garden Soil:** Never use garden soil for potted succulents, as it will compact and retain too much water.

3. Watering Wisely (Less is More):

Overwatering is the number one killer of succulents. Your watering schedule will vary significantly with the seasons and local rainfall in Gold Coast.

- **Feel the Soil:** This is your best guide. Only water when the soil is completely dry several inches down or even bone dry. You can use your finger or a moisture meter.
- **Drench and Drain:** When you do water, water thoroughly until water drains from the bottom of the pot. Do not let the pot sit in standing water.
- **Wet Season (Summer/Wet Months - Dec-Feb):** Reduce watering significantly. If you get consistent rain, you might not need to water at all for weeks. Protect outdoor potted succulents from excessive rain by moving them under eaves or temporary shelter.
 - *Gold Coast Specific:* With consistent summer rain, your watering frequency might drop to once every 2-4 weeks, or even less if there's significant rainfall. Always check the soil first.
- **Dry Season (Winter/Cooler Months - Jun-Aug):** Succulents are often dormant or semi-dormant. Water even less frequently, perhaps once every 3-5 weeks, or only when leaves show signs of thirst (wrinkling, softness).
- **Spring/Autumn (Transition Seasons):** Water more frequently than winter, but still allow the soil to dry completely between waterings (e.g., once a week to every two weeks).
- **Signs of Overwatering:** Mushy, yellowing, or translucent leaves, black spots, or a foul smell.
- **Signs of Underwatering:** Wrinkly, deflated, or crispy leaves. Succulents are more forgiving of underwatering than overwatering.

4. Light Requirements:

Most succulents love bright light, but Queensland's sun can be intense.

- **Full Sun:** Many succulents thrive in full sun (6+ hours of direct sun daily). However, in the peak of a Queensland summer, some varieties may benefit from afternoon shade to prevent scorching.
- **Morning Sun, Afternoon Shade:** This is often ideal in hot climates. An east-facing position that gets morning sun is usually perfect.
- **Signs of Too Much Sun (Sunburn):** Brown or reddish spots, pale or bleached appearance.
- **Signs of Not Enough Light (Etiolation):** Stretched, leggy growth with widely spaced leaves as the plant "stretches" for light.
- **Acclimatization:** If you're moving a succulent from a less sunny spot to a sunnier one, do it gradually over a week or two to prevent shock and sunburn.

5. Pot Selection and Placement:

- **Drainage Holes:** Absolutely essential. Never use pots without drainage holes.
- **Material:** Terracotta pots are excellent for succulents in humid climates because they are porous and allow the soil to dry out faster than plastic or glazed ceramic pots.
- **Size:** Don't put a tiny succulent in a huge pot, as the excess soil will hold too much moisture. Go for a pot only slightly larger than the root ball.
- **Air Circulation:** Space your plants out to allow for good airflow, especially during humid periods. This helps prevent fungal issues.
- **Under Eaves/Shelter:** Consider placing potted succulents under eaves or other shelter during heavy rain periods to control their water intake.
- **Ground Planting:** If planting directly into the garden, choose a raised bed or a sloped area to ensure excellent drainage. Amend the soil heavily with grit and sand.

6. Fertilising:

- Succulents are not heavy feeders.
- Apply a balanced liquid fertiliser diluted to half strength, or a slow-release fertiliser, once or twice a year during their active growing season (spring and early summer).
- Avoid fertilising in winter or during dormancy.

7. Pests and Diseases:

High humidity can increase the risk of certain issues.

- **Overwatering is the Root Cause:** Many succulent problems stem from too much water and poor drainage.
- **Mealybugs:** These fuzzy white insects are a common pest. Isolate infested plants immediately. Treat with rubbing alcohol on a cotton swab or insecticidal soap. Ensure good air circulation.
- **Aphids:** Can appear on new growth or flower buds. Blast them off with a strong stream of water or use insecticidal soap.
- **Fungal Diseases (Root Rot, Stem Rot, Sooty Mould):** These are prevalent in humid conditions. Ensure excellent drainage and avoid overwatering. Remove affected parts and propagate healthy cuttings if possible. Good air circulation is crucial.
- **Monitoring:** Regularly inspect your plants for any signs of pests or disease.

8. Propagation:

Succulents are remarkably easy to propagate in Gold Coast's climate.

- **Cuttings:** Allow cuttings to callous over for a few days to a week before planting in dry succulent mix.
- **Leaves:** Place individual leaves on top of dry succulent mix; new plants will often emerge from the base of the leaf.
- **Avoid watering** freshly propagated cuttings/leaves until roots have formed to prevent rot.

Recommended Succulents for Queensland:

Many succulents do well in Queensland, especially if given good drainage and protection from excessive wet. Some popular and robust choices include:

- **Agave species:** (e.g., *Agave attenuata* 'Century Plant') - very hardy, tolerates heat and some humidity.
- **Aloe species:** (e.g., *Aloe vera*, *Aloe 'Big Red'*) - generally tough and adaptable.
- **Crassula ovata** (Jade Plant): Very resilient, can handle varied conditions once established.
- **Echeveria:** Many varieties are popular, but some can be more sensitive to humidity. Look for hardier types and ensure excellent drainage. Their colours can intensify in cooler winter months.
- **Sansevieria** (Mother-in-Law's Tongue): Extremely tolerant and almost impossible to kill.
- **Carprobrutus** (Pigface): A native succulent groundcover that thrives in sun and sandy soil, including coastal conditions.
- **Rhipsalis** (Mistletoe Cactus): Epiphytic cacti that do well in hanging baskets, appreciating indirect light and some humidity, as long as they have good drainage.
- **Kalanchoe:** Many varieties are well-suited to the climate.

By being mindful of Queensland's high humidity and intense sun, and prioritizing excellent drainage, you can successfully grow a beautiful collection of succulents in Gold Coast.