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Succulents grow on you

Water-wise and good-looking plants are social media darlings

BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON



The black aeonium is a popular flower-like succulent.

PHOTO BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON

“They’re green—or purple or blue—flower-like things but not a flower,” said Allen, who grows about 500 cacti, agave and succulents. “People are crazy about them.”

Such interest has made the Carmichael society one of the Sacramento area’s largest garden clubs with 140 members. While many clubs are shrinking, the cactus and succulent society picks up several new members every show or sale.

“For the last year and a half, we’ve been growing a lot,” Allen said. “We have so many men in our club now; that’s fantastic.” While garden clubs tend to be mostly women, she said men may be attracted to cacti and succulents because “they’re tough plants.”

Older gardeners are learning to love succulents, too, Allen noted. Transforming former lawns into low-water landscapes, the group created five pocket gardens for the Sun City retirement community in Roseville.

Attracted by the selection, beginners as well as longtime gardeners flock to the Carmichael sale, Allen said. “The first thing people look at is what they’re familiar with,” she said. “Hen and chicks, sempervivums, echeverias. Then, they start looking around and they become so intrigued.”

The most requested plant? Aloe vera. Its medicinal reputation keeps it in demand; aloe’s fleshy leaves are used to treat burns.

“Everybody wants an aloe,” Allen said. “They say they want ‘the aloe that saves your burn.’ Then, they realize there are 50 aloes. They’re amazed.” □

More gardeners, young and old, are getting into fleshy water-wise plants known as succulents. They’re drawn by succulents’ sculptural good looks and ability to survive with little care.

“We see a lot of younger people, age 25 and up—a lot!” said Pat Allen of the Carmichael Cactus and Succulent Society. “They’re not hitting the cactus; they want the succulents.”

This weekend, the club hosts its 43rd annual show and sale at the Carmichael Park Clubhouse. In addition to displays of prized plants, hundreds of succulents and cacti will be offered for sale.

There will be six vendors, “including the best succulent vendor anywhere, David Calibo from San Francisco,” Allen said. Cactus man Bill Munkacsy of Plant Seca and Merlyn Lenear and his container gardens are back.

Interest in succulents has never been stronger; sales more than doubled in the past five years. Easy to grow and propagate and with their low-water needs, succulents are a natural pick for drought-tolerant gardens. Darlings of Instagram and social media, succulents also have gained huge popularity for many non-garden uses.

Succulents can replace fresh flowers in bouquets and centerpieces for weddings and other special occasions. Able to grow sideways, they’re used to create vertical wall plantings and as topiary garden art. They can hang from baskets or get cozy in containers. Their foliage can be made into wreaths and table decorations. They’ll even tolerate glue guns and low indoor light.

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EVENT DETAILS



43rd annual Carmichael Cactus and Succulent Show and Sale

When: 9 a.m.–4 p.m. Saturday, May 18;
9 a.m.–2:30 p.m. Sunday, May 19

Where: Carmichael Park clubhouse,
5750 Grant Ave.

Details: Free admission and parking,
ccandss.com

Debbie Arrington, an award-winning garden writer and lifelong gardener, is co-creator of the Sacramento Digs Gardening blog and website.