

Last month, the SCHS was treated to a delightful and informative presentation on succulents by long-time member Sandy Masuo, Associate Editor for the Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association Publications. Her talk was held in the Witherbee Auditorium at the L.A. Zoo, and was punctuated with entertaining visuals that included images relating to her personal journey as a self-professed “plant nerd”, as well as examples from the world of succulents. With a background in journalism and a master’s degree in education, Sandy’s slide show was well-organized and included anecdotal material as well as horticultural research data.

Relating her childhood exposure to the abundant wonders of an elderly neighbor’s subsistence garden as an early inspiration and introduction into the world of plants, Sandy went on to cite Carl Sagan, JRR Tolkien, David Attenborough and others as influences leading her to pursue personal horticultural studies. She posited that we, as the human race, suffer from “plant blindness”, even though we depend on them every day for our basic living needs and that they are the basis of every living ecosystem. And while there are over 390,000 plant species on the planet, with 70 species per every mammal, she maintained that everyone could do their part to protect endangered species by fostering native plant communities in their neighborhoods. This general data about the natural world was Sandy’s prelude into the very specific realm of succulents.

With section titles such as “Succulents are Cool!”, “Succulents are Charismatic!” and “Succulents are Hot!”, the horticultural content of her presentation was both amusing as well as satisfying for plant enthusiasts. Since most succulents come from deserts, where plant life is less dense and more fragile than it is for the two-thirds of plant species coming from tropical rainforests, these plants have evolved unique adaptations and survival strategies.

Sandy then shared photographic examples of these characteristics, including cloning (the ability to grow a new plant from a leaf cutting); creeping, a self-propagation method in which plants extend



**SHARING SECRETS
RESPONSES:**

*Do you have a favorite succulent?
Tell us which one and send a picture!*

There are many weird, wonderful succulents - and some of my own favorites include “Starfish Flowers”; from the *Stapelia* and the *Huernia* genera. And, as a bonus to their otherworldly-looking flowers, they smell like carrion to attract flies as pollinators! (Pictured: *Stapelia grandiflora*)



- Anonymous

self-rooting stems in attempts to colonize new terrain, like *Stapelia*; cryptic coloration, where a plant will “match” the colors of the surrounding environment, like the *Conophytum* genus; hide and seek, wherein a plant will appear to be something else, such as *Lithops*; water storage parts, including *Aloe* (leaves), *Euphorbia* (stems) and caudiciform plants (swollen roots); sunscreen properties, like *Dudleya* (white waxy coating) and *Crassula tecta* (bumpy surface); sunburn protection through changes in chlorophyll based on light exposure; insulation by being covered in fibers (*Senecio haworthii*); or the ability to minimize exposure using contractile roots which pull a plant further underground during the hottest seasons (*Haworthia* genus), exposing only the minimum amount of surface area needed for photosynthesis; minimizing water loss by opening stomata at night to “exhale”; and the development of spines, like the cholla.

It is often these characteristics and the many varied forms of succulents that make them so interesting and appealing to gardeners. Different forms include: trailing, like *Senecio rowleyanus*; rosettes, such as *Echeveria* and *Aeonium*, which can be mat-forming or tree-like; columnar forms like many cactus and *Euphorbia*; and arborescent (ex: *Portulacaria afra*) which can often be confined in a container or planter. The variety of forms, multitude of available colors, and their natural drought-

tolerance, have greatly increased the popularity of succulents in recent years. Sandy then shared a numbers of trends (often horticulturally frowned upon), including confining too many tiny specimens in containers such as wreaths, frames and pumpkins, that do not accommodate the eventual size of the plants.

These examples led her into talking about the proper care of succulents, which typically only require adherence to a few simple rules:

- Light - typically bright, indirect light is best
 - Water- needs are infrequent (more for pots)
 - Soil- all require good drainage (amending with pumice is an option)
 - Temperature - knowing a plant’s origins may determine success rates in a home garden
- While succulents are in the category of “low maintenance” plants, they are not “no maintenance” and should not be neglected.

To conclude her talk, Sandy highlighted venues that successfully showcase succulents, including Lotusland in Montecito, Santa Barbara Mission (container displays), Sherman Library and Gardens in Corona Del Mar, and the rock wall display at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. For DIYers, she recommended going to plant shows for research and unusual specimens, searching in thrift shops for interesting containers, or using local resources including: Cactus Ranch nursery in Reseda, the Los Angeles Arboretum and the Huntington Gardens, as well as visiting www.lacactus.com and www.sgvcss.com online.



In summary, Sandy’s message to continue educating ourselves as well as encouraging the next generations to learn about (and love) plants was well-received and thought-provoking. The mantra of “conservation, education and imagination”, specifically with regard to the horticultural world, was expressed early in the presentation, yet left a lasting impression afterward.

🌿 Sabine Steinmetz

Southern California Horticultural Society 2016 Annual Award Banquet
Thursday, September 8, 2016

Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden · 301 N Baldwin Ave, Arcadia, CA 91007

Social hour & silent auction at the Peacock Cafe at 6pm. Dinner & presentation at 7pm.
(Reminder: We are unable to accept credit cards at the auction. Cash and checks only please.)

STILL NEED A TICKET?

On-line registration is closed, but you may contact Steve Gerischer at (323) 257-3629 to check availability.