Under the Spell of Succulents
A Sampler of the Diversity of Succulents in Cultivation

JEFF MOORE
DESERT GARDENS

Desert gardens can have the look of a true natural habitat, albeit one that is spartan and dry. This aesthetic may appeal more to an amateur naturalist or desert traveler than a homeowner looking for a colorful and softer yard. These plants do lend themselves well to gardening in the desert Southwest, where many of the softer succulents have a tough time with the extremes of hot and cold. The Mojave desert of the southwest U.S. also offers a wonderful array of succulents and cacti, such as the ocotillo, ferocactus, opuntias, etc. If you’ve experienced the deserts of the U.S. and northern Mexico, this is a nice way to represent a piece of them in your yard. They are also a great display area for the rock hounds among you. If you are lucky enough to have petrified wood, this is the place to show it off.

The images seen on the two pages here are of the Mojave Rock Ranch (http://mojavrockranch.net/), an extraordinary ‘rock and bottle’ house in the Joshua Tree region of the Mojave Desert in California. Owners and designers, Gino Dreese and Troy Williams, work with the cactus and succulent options available to them in the high desert. The incorporation of glass bottles into walls made of native rock, combined with rusty tools, tile, and driftwood is a wonder of architecture in itself, but for our purposes, the plants are the thing. Out of necessity, this garden lacks the softer succulents we use closer to the coast. But they would likely look inappropriate in this context anyway. These are the sharp and sculptural backlit beauties of the desert. Golden barrels and chollas, even some agaves can have a glowing halo of spines in the low winter sun. Ideally suited for desert extremes, many of these plants will live along the coast as well. Other American Southwest desert gardens to visit include The Living Desert in Palm Desert, CA, the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, AZ, and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson, AZ.