



Creating a Vertical Garden Using Succulents

Vertical gardens provide an opportunity to use every bit of space available in a small garden. They are also a way to create living artworks in the garden. Vertical gardens can be made using all types of low-growing or cascading plants including herbs, grasses and groundcover perennials. However, the most popular forms of vertical gardens are those using succulents.

The ultimate form of vertical gardening is the living wall. Many large scale living walls are grown in soilless environments using hydroponics, a system that provides a constant nutrient rich water supply. Given their cost and complexity, these are not really suitable for the home gardener. However, a small picture-sized version of a living wall can be easily made with a vertical planter box using cuttings and offsets or “pups” from succulents plants or small herb starts.

Below are directions for creating a living artwork using succulents. However, the same procedures can be followed using small herb, grass and perennial starts. Succulents are easy to use as they possess very shallow root systems and can grow in a meager amount of soil. They also are able to go for long periods of time without water. These properties make succulents ideal plants to use when creating living art.

Step1. Collect your materials and tools

1. Planter box

Boxes can be constructed (there are excellent instructions on the websites listed below) but it is easier to use a box purchased from an antiques/collectibles store or wine boxes or apple crates from a recycle center or a prefabricated wall planting system. Pre-assembled frames or planting bags can be purchased on line. Stick with smaller boxes not larger than 18”x24” and approximately 2” deep as the soil in larger boxes may slump down.

2. Wire hardware cloth – ¼” mesh

3. Cactus planting mix

4. Cuttings or small rooted succulent plants

5. Succulent cuttings are prepared by removing offsets of rosette type plants; stem cuttings can be taken from other succulents. All stems should be ¼” to ½” long. Prepare enough cuttings to fill the entire space to be planted. For example, a 12” x 12” box will require approximately 100 plants. Store the cuttings in a cool shady place for several days until a callus forms over the end; this prevents rot.

6. Wire cutters
7. Old spoon, fork or small trowel
8. Screw driver
9. Hardware for hanging planter

Step 2. Prepare the planter

1. Attach the hardware cloth to the front of the planter box. It can be attached to the front edge or, for a neater appearance, cut and folded to fit inside the box. Secure with screws.
2. Fill the box with planting mix, pouring a small amount of dry mix on top of the mesh and working it through with your fingers or a spoon.
3. Lift the hardware cloth gently using the fork to allow the soil to fall through. Shake the box to distribute soil evenly.

Step 3. Plant your box

1. Arrange plants within the frame, placing larger plants as focal points and gently push the stems through the wire mesh, cutting it to make larger holes if necessary.
2. It is not necessary to water the plants until roots form. This will take 2 to 3 weeks or longer depending on the type of plant. Once roots begin to form, start watering, using sufficient water to dampen soil all the way through, but taking care not to over water.
3. In approximately 8 to 12 weeks, when the plants are well rooted in the planter, it can be hung vertically.

Step 4. Maintenance

1. Hang your living picture where it will receive filtered sun (an eastern exposure is best).
2. Rotate the frame occasional as the plants at the top receive more light and can shade those planted below.
3. Water once a week by removing the planter from the wall and laying it horizontally. Use sufficient water to dampen soil all the way through, taking care to not over water.
4. Fertilize once a month with liquid fertilizer at ¼ strength.
5. Trim and thin plants as needed and replace plants that are not thriving.
6. If the soil becomes compacted or slumps to the bottom of the frame, it is time to replant your living picture.

On-line Resources

Sunset Magazine “Make A Living Picture”

<http://www.sunset.com/garden/backyard-projects/diy-vertical-succulent-garden-project-0040000063442/>

Robin Stockwell from The Growing Grounds Nursery

http://sgplants.com/blog/entry/vertical_gardening_with_succulent_plants