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Succulent pumpkins will dress up your holiday table

By SONOMA COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT



An arrangement of living succulents inside a pumpkin makes for a unique Thanksgiving table centerpiece. Photo: Sonoma County Master Gardeners

Question: I will be hosting a large gathering for Thanksgiving this year. While the traditional Thanksgiving menu is set, I'm looking for some creative (and easy!) ways to make the holiday my own. A cut flower arrangement for the table can be expensive and lasts for such a short period of time. Any suggestions?

Answer: Succulent-topped pumpkins are a great alternative to a traditional flower arrangement and fulfill all your requirements.

One large succulent-topped pumpkin could serve as your table centerpiece.

Alternatively, a decorated mini pumpkin at each place setting would be a lovely gift for your guests to take home as a remembrance of your fabulous Thanksgiving.



Dress your pumpkin centerpiece with succulents, pine cones, acorns and other things found in the fall landscape. Photo: Sonoma County Master Gardeners

What you'll need

Supplies: The materials you'll need are readily available, the construction method is straightforward, and you'll have tons of options to make your it uniquely yours. Since you won't cut into the pumpkin, it can, with proper care, last for months.

Pumpkin: Each year, growers produce an ever-increasing assortment of pumpkins, gourds and squashes that lend themselves to this craft. No longer limited to traditional orange pumpkins, you can select from a wide variety of shapes, colors and sizes. They're available at local farmstands, pumpkin patches and neighborhood supermarkets. Choose a sturdy, unblemished specimen without any soft spots. If your selection has a flat top, it will provide a better surface to hold your succulent cuttings.

Moss: An even layer of dried or sphagnum moss on top of your pumpkin provides an excellent base for the succulent cuttings.

Spray Adhesive: Spray adhesive applied to the top of the pumpkin is the most effective method of attaching the moss to the top of the pumpkin. Craft glue evenly spread over the surface is an acceptable alternative.

Succulent Cuttings: Succulents are drought resistant plants that store water in their thick leaves and stems. Found in 60 plant families, they vary widely in size and shape. Some of the best specimens for this project include Echeverias, Graptopetalums, Sempervivums, Aeoniums, Senecios and Sedums. While the final selection is up to you, an assortment of large, medium and small varieties that include different colors and shapes will keep your composition interesting. Online outlets, big box stores, supermarkets and even some hardware stores sell these easy-to-grow plants.

Embellishments: Dried or preserved seasonal elements can also be included. Acorns, pine cones, dried flowers, dried berries and dried seed pods are all good candidates for your design.

Hot Glue: Using hot glue to adhere your succulents and embellishments to the moss is the fastest and most effective option. Any craft glue that dries clear is an acceptable alternative.

Directions for a masterpiece

First, wipe the pumpkin clean.

Remove the pumpkin stem. (In some cases, however, keeping the stem in place may be preferable if it has an interesting shape.)

Spray the top of the pumpkin with adhesive and press on an even layer of moss.

This is where the fun begins. The potential combinations of succulents and embellishments are endless. If you find an inordinate number of choices intimidating, follow a basic container design rule – “thriller, filler, spiller.” Place the larger specimens (“thrillers”) at the center, then build out with medium cuttings (“fillers”) and embellishments. Add smaller specimens and trailing succulents (“spillers”) to finish the arrangement.

Regardless of your design choice, experiment with layout first. Once you’re satisfied, glue the elements to the pumpkin.

Keep in mind that the cuttings will shrink slightly. Nestle them snugly in place to keep a gap from emerging later on.

Your succulent-topped pumpkins can be displayed outside or inside. If you choose an outdoor location, position it in bright shade protected from rain and frost. Porches are perfect. With proper care, it'll last for months.

For the best results, display your pumpkin on a trivet. Keep the sides and bottom of the pumpkin dry. You may also lightly mist the arrangement every 2 to 4 weeks, but do not over mist; that will encourage rot.

Finished with your arrangement? Plant your succulent cuttings in a pot of well-draining soil or directly into the ground to add to a waterwise garden. (The succulents will have started to root through the hot glue.) Compost your pumpkin.

For more information about succulents, go to <https://bit.ly/3A67BbC>.

Contributors to this week's column were Pamela Vana-Paxhia, Anne Lowings, Diane Judd and Joy Lanzendorfer. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County <https://sonomamg.ucanr.edu/> provides environmentally sustainable, science-based horticultural information to Sonoma County home gardeners. Send your gardening questions to scmgpd@gmail.com. You will receive answers to your questions either in this newspaper or from our Information Desk. You can contact the Information Desk directly at 707-565-2608 or mgsonoma@ucanr.edu.