

Tom's Garden

Blog *March 2021*

March

Named for the Roman god of war; Mars. This was the time of year to resume military campaigns that had stopped for winter.

St. Patrick's Day Facts and Folklore

*Blue was the color originally associated with St. Patrick, but green is now the color.

*St. Patrick's Day is the traditional day for planting peas. (Not in my garden! It's too cold yet in most years).

*Cabbage seeds are often planted today, too. Old time farmers believed that to make them grow well, you needed to plant them while wearing your nightclothes! BRRR!

What is Daylight Saving Time?

The general idea is that this allows us all to make better use of natural daylight. DST has many detractors. The idea started in Europe and spread to the U.S.A during World War I as a fuel saving measure. This lasted until 1920, when the law was repealed due to opposition from dairy farmers (cows don't pay attention to clocks).

During World War II, Daylight Saving Time was imposed again to save fuel. It's been with us ever since then with different start and end dates.

Source: *The Old Farmer's Almanac*

What Are Succulents?

Succulents are plants that store water in their leaves, stems or roots. There are an estimated 20,000 species of succulents in the world. All cacti are succulents, but not all succulents are cacti.

Succulents originate mostly from Mexico, South America, Central America, Africa, Madagascar and India.

Succulents grow well outdoors in California and Arizona because the climate is favorable.

Stem Succulents: Cacti

Cacti store large amounts of water in round or column-shaped fleshy stems. They rarely have leaves and keep water loss to a minimum by the small surface area in proportion to their volume.



Saguaro (pronounced "sah-wah-ro") Saguaro, a native of the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and Mexico, is North America's tallest cactus, reaching up to 45 feet tall with trunks up to 25 inches in diameter. They can store up to 780 gallons of water. They are slow growing—about 8 inches per year. Saguaro is often used as scenery in movies and on television.

Leaf Succulents

Leaves can vary in size and form depending on water availability. The leaves contain water storage cells and are thick and fleshy with lots of water. In drought conditions or when lacking water as a houseplant, they will shrivel and sometimes fall off.



Echeveria

Root Succulents

Root succulents store water underground in tuberous swollen roots. They can survive long droughts because moisture loss happens very slowly.



Kleinia Fulgens

Succulent Myths

- *They'll grow anywhere= you don't need to worry about soil.
- *You can neglect succulents= they rarely need water.
- *They all like full sun.
- *Cold weather won't hurt them.
- *Pests and disease don't attack succulents.
- *You can't kill a succulent. (I know people that can kill an artificial plant!).

Growing Succulents Indoors

Most succulents are successful as indoor plants. Most just need bright, indirect light. Most succulent "deaths" are caused by overwatering. Notice the word "most".

There are always exceptions.

Let the soil dry completely between waterings. Succulents that you buy are in a poor soil mix when they are sold. You will want to repot them in a cactus and succulent soil mix and perhaps a nice looking container. Be sure the pot has a drain hole. Don't be afraid to remove all the old soil and start over.

March Birth Flower

This month is synonymous with the onset of spring. The flower associated with this month is Daffodil, also known as Jonquil or Narcissus. The colors of the bloom include white, yellow, pink, blue and orange. A gift of these flowers conveys the hidden meaning of friendship and happiness.

Starting Parsley Seeds

Growing parsley from seed can be frustrating, especially for beginners. There are just a few tricks you need to know to have success.

Parsley is a biennial, which means it will flower and bolt the second year. That parsley plant that you over-wintered will go to seed this spring. Therefore, new plants should be started each year.

Parsley is slow to sprout, so it needs a little different treatment to get good germination. Before planting parsley seeds, soak them in warm water for 24 hours to speed up germination. Fill your trays or cell packs with good quality seed starting medium. Plant 2-3 seeds per cell or about 1 inch apart in trays. Lightly press the seeds into the soil and cover with a little soil or vermiculite to get good soil contact. Water the seeds with a spray bottle so you don't displace them. Cover the tray with a clear plastic dome or kitchen wrap. Keep the soil moist and warm. A heat mat or top of the fridge will work for that. It takes from 14 to 28 days for germination, so be patient. They can also be sporadic, so don't give up on them! Repot them when the second set of leaves appear. Water from the bottom to promote deep rooting. Place containers in a tray of water and allow the medium to soak up moisture. Remove from the water and allow excess water to drain. Overhead watering is okay after the seedlings grow larger.

This method also works well for lettuce and spinach seeds.



What Does Candytuft (Iberus) Have To Do With Candy?

Candytuft is one of those early spring-flowering perennials that is very easy to grow, but how did it get its name?

The botanical name *Iberus* tells us that this plant is native to Iberia, the European peninsula that includes Spain and Portugal, as well as Greece and the island of Crete. The ancient name for Crete was "Candia." When it was imported to England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the term "candiatuft" became candytuft. So much for the history lesson.

Many species and cultivars are available to the gardener. One of the annual species is rocket candytuft, *I. amara*. Plants are upright and flower in white or lavender. The perennial candytuft, *I. sempervirens*, usually flowers in white but also lavender. These plants are cold hardy to about USDA zone 3.



