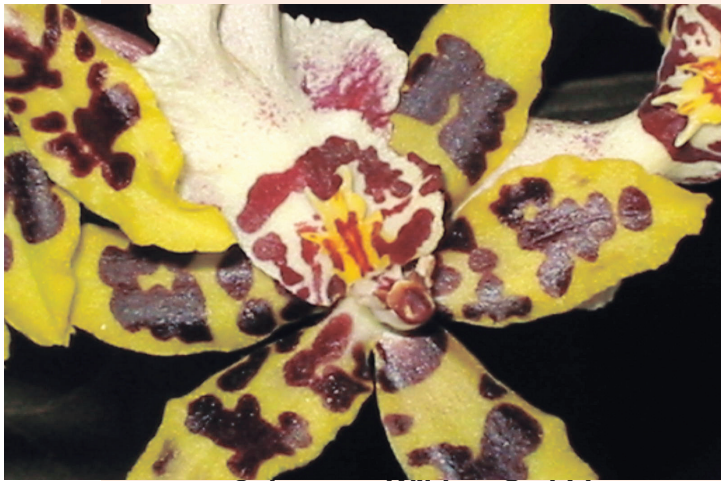


From the garden

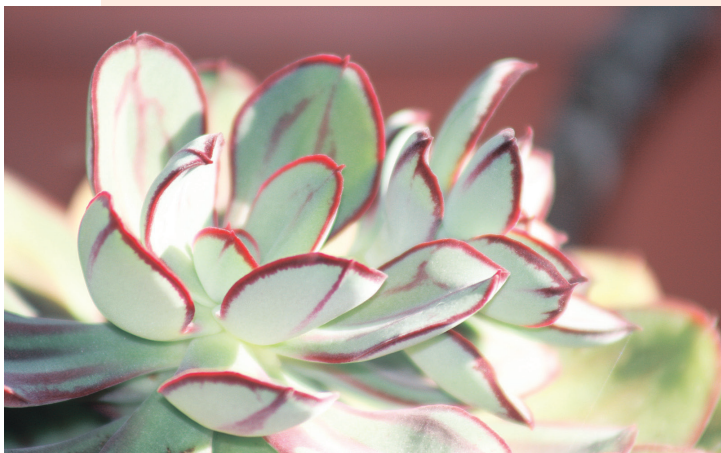
Story and photos
By Belinda Gallagher



Scrumptious succulents



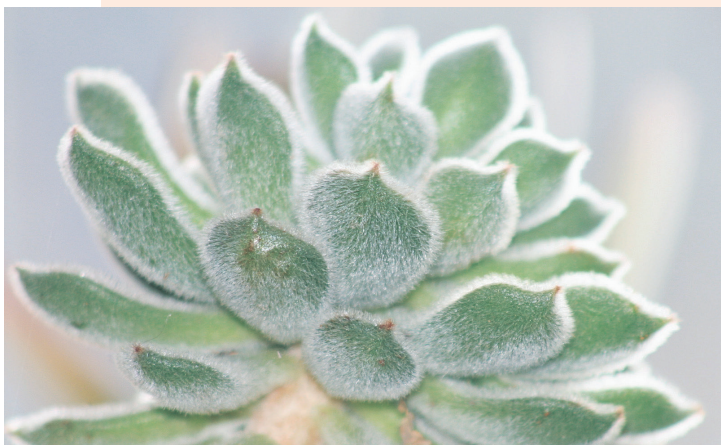
Colmanara Wildcat Orchid



Echeveria 1



Echeveria 2



Echeveria 4

It is a changeable time of the year, perched as it is between the last of the late winter storms and the first early spring rains.

These longer days are perfect for spending a little extra time admiring the new growth on the houseplants. But there is a downside—the strong sunshine necessitates a much-needed plant-cleaning flurry of domestic activity which is never at the top of my 'to do' list! It is this warm, but bright, light that underlines just how much dust can land on the surface of everything over the winter.

I gathered up a bowl of warm water and a soft cloth and started with an orchid. Its broad strap-like leaves are easy to wipe and would get me started in a positive mood as the flowers were spectacular and could be admired while cleaning.

This orchid, **Colmanara 'Wildcat'**, is an intergeneric hybrid that I purchased a couple of years ago at the Royal Botanical Gardens Orchid Society show and it is a favourite. It is one of those orchids that is easy care for the first time orchidist (not sure this is a real word but you know what I mean). Available in many places, including big-box stores, this plant tolerates a wide temperature, low to medium light and with a little humidity reliably re-blooms as it is doing on my kitchen table right now.

What, you may ask, does this have to do with the 'Scrumptious Succulents' of the title? Well, it just happens that many orchids are considered succulents.

Succulent plants have the ability to retain water in some part of the plant—usually in leaves, stems or roots. The word succulent comes from the Latin succulentus meaning juice and if you have ever broken a leaf or stem of a succulent plant you know why this is an apt definition. The frugal water retention of these plants is the characteristic that makes them so popular with new gardeners and for indoor growing. And you might say more sustainable plants to be politically correct! If we go back to the orchid, you can see the pseudo bulb at the base of the leaves, which holds water or moisture for times of drought. The wrinkling you see in this pseudopod is my fault. I let the plant get too dry. Whoops!

As I moved to the next room, I set about cleaning the next group of succulents in the house. Sandwiched between several jade plants (succulents that need no picture as you all probably have one already) are my **Echeverias**.

This group of plants has been available since the 1950s according to my favourite cactus expert, David Naylor of Georgetown, however, it has been only in the last five years or so that they have become mainstream container plants like petunias

and geraniums. I actually recall the first time I saw a large bluish gray echeveria at Crawford's Garden Center in Milton—I almost cried out in delight! The plants look very like hen and chickens, but are funkier. They come in unusual shapes, colours, sizes and are just plain artistic.

There are two downsides to the plants. One, they are rarely labeled with the proper botanical name which is why they are called Echeveria 1, 2, 3 and 4 in this article. I do think the one with the lovely reddish edges is *E. nodulosa* 'Painted Beauty', but despite the unknown names, they are all worth a try. The second problem and it is a biggie, they are NOT winter hardy here in southern Ontario, and hence the reason they are inside getting dusty.

Echeverias are members of the Crassulaceae family that includes their cousins sedums, sempervivums—those hen and chickens mentioned above, aeoniums and kalanchoes among others. Some of the species are used in traditional medicine including anti-inflammatory procedures.

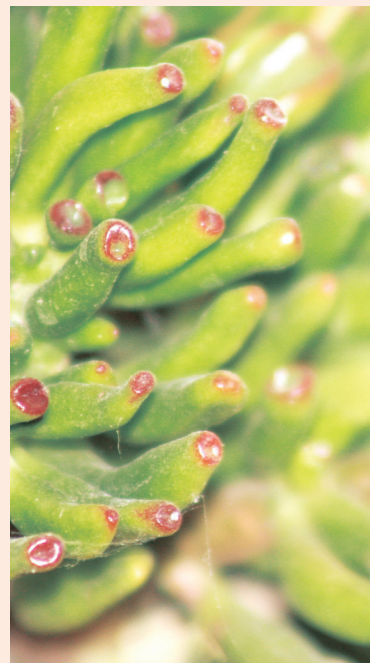
Echeverias are widely distributed throughout Mexico and Central America and are fairly easy to propagate by leaf and head cuttings. I just break off a leaf, or chunk of the stem, let it dry for a week or two to form a callus, then lightly push the callused end into a light sandy growing medium. With luck, a new plantlet appears in a few weeks.

You do not need to fuss over the echeverias for the winter. You can keep them growing in front of a window or just let them go dormant until the spring. Either way, once they are back outdoors, they provide that tropical/desert look that is all the rage right now.

Three other common houseplants that are succulents are the **Haworthia**, the **Aloe** and the **Euphorbia**.

Haworthia attenuata (pictured) is native to South Africa and is named after the botanist Adrian Hardy Haworth who was the author of one of the earliest authoritative books on British butterflies and moths in the early 1800's. This plant is often seen in dish gardens with cactus and other succulents, as it remains quite small. Grown for its shape and wart-like markings you might be surprised to know that it is a cousin to some wonderful perennials including the torch lily (*Kniphofia*) and foxtail lily (*Eremurus*) two of my top choices for a summer wow factor.

Most homes have the succulent *Aloe vera* in a pot somewhere. It is a cousin of *Haworthia* but grows much larger. Although there is some question about the medical efficacy of the plant, I have always used the gel from a snapped leaf on a burn per my mother's instructions. Of course, as with



Echeveria 3

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