
Rose For Death

Since time is scarce having to balance family, work, 3 summer classes, and maintaining my household, I only have time to do what absolutely, has to be done in the garden. Which is harvesting the ripened herbs, and veggies, since they too, are time sensitive. Thank goodness, I rarely have to check on my succulent garden. Succulents are like a cactus requiring very little water or attention. They practically take care of themselves which helps a lot; one less thing I've had to worry about. On the left-hand side of my backyard, is a rectangular wooden deck with a covered pergola that sits atop. Also present on the deck, is organized chaos; countless pots of succulents, and bonsai trees that I keep arranged by species, and age.

Although I have various types of succulents, a large majority are monocarpic. Meaning they live for about 3 years and flowers only once, right before it dies of old age. But there is a caveat. If it was not properly nurtured, or if it dies prematurely, it will not flower; sadly, it just shrivels up and dies. It is almost as if the succulent is gifting death with a beautiful bouquet as thanks for a full life well lived. Aside from coloration, these succulents look like fully bloomed roses that fell and landed face-side up into my Asiatic-style pots. They are rosette shaped plants that range in size, and hues of green, with plump, flesh textured petals. The young ones are dime-sized, glossy, and a vibrant shade of lime green. The old ones are fist-sized, dull, and a dark, hunter green shade.

Even though I had a specific mission (to check on my succulents) it was only out of habit that as I entered the oversized wooden gate last week, I would scan over my backyard starting from my right and ending to my left. After all these years, when I looked to my right this time, I finally noticed how the tall, aged redwood privacy fence complimented the life of my garden. The dull tone of the fence seemed to emphasize the sporadic, splashes of color presented by the freshly bloomed roses. I was delighted as my eyes followed the trailing row of assorted rose bushes along the side of the fence. Once reaching the back corner, my eyes slowly veered leftward, at the vegetables and herbs that traced the back of the fence. As my eyes neared the center, I became briefly distracted by the whimsical fluttering and flittering of butterflies in the circular garden positioned in the middle of the yard and tailor-made for their pleasure. During the entertainment, I saw a black swallowtail butterfly floating toward the deck. I took it as an omen; a friendly reminder to focus on my objective: check my recently overlooked succulents.

To the deck, I followed. But before I even placed my foot on to the first step, I noticed that in one of the pot of offsets (the babies produced by the adult succulents) there was a new, ominous shade residing specifically where a lime-green used to be. As I belted up the stairs, I couldn't help but focus on the sounds of my feet clunking on the wood. I gazed pitifully, and helplessly, at the now, walnut-brown succulent. The fact it was young should have been proof enough for me. However, it was the absence of flowers that confirmed that the cause of death was sinister; not seniority like I hoped. I slowly reached down and with the slightest pinch, a brittle crackling sound confirmed. As I removed the shriveled succulent, my heart stopped and I fell into a trance.

Somehow, I was 15 again and in my bedroom. I am tightly gripping my pillow and smashing it into my face as I belt out blood-curdling screams. Although I'm trying to drown out the local

news anchor, I couldn't help but focus on how she delivered her report like a clock; aware of, and accounting for, every second. Even though my friend has been missing for over 4 days, I refuse to believe he is dead despite the news anchor chiming in to say that his body was just found dumped in Chesapeake woods. "She can't be right", I thought. She robotically describes in explicit detail, the manner in which he was murdered. Through the specifics, I realize it's true and my screams stop because my lungs stopped. My lungs stopped because my heart stopped. But, within seconds everything winds up and ticks again. My heart starts racing, my lungs start working, and my screams return even louder as she announces his murderers are in custody and reveals two names. With each passing second, I push my face harder into my pillow. This time, to avoid my picture-covered walls of memories that mock my pain. He is in most of the pictures but, so were his murderers; we all grew up together. We all loved and trusted each other; or so we thought. I realize I just lost three friends in a four-minute news report.

Suddenly, a loud bark snapped me out of my trance. It was Gretchen, my neighbor's dog and I was right where I left off; on my deck heartbroken, with the young, withered succulent in hand. I looked at the older succulents and to my surprise, two of them had flowered. I knew just what this meant and I gladly welcomed it. Even though I knew they were dying was sad to lose them, I couldn't help but also be happy. The little flowers protruding from the succulent signified maturity; it meant the succulent had been properly cared for and had time to reproduce. The flowers were validation that the succulent was old, ready, and happily welcomed death. It reminded me of my grandfather, who kept a fresh roses by his bedside so when grandma came down from Heaven to get him, she would be greeted by a bouquet of her favorite flowers. I miss them. As I stood on my deck envying the flowered, dying succulents, a thought came to me: if people were monocarpic succulents, all we can really hope for is when it is our time, we will have flowered.