Stop 110 Kid’s Tour – Succulent House Overview, Cactus

Deserts are some of the driest places on earth – that’s why they have names like “Death Valley” or “Dead Man’s Gulch.” (sfx: vulture) Even the wettest desert gets less than 10 inches of water during the whole year! (sfx: slow drips of water) So I guess that makes for some pretty thirsty plants in the desert… or does it?

All the plants you see in this greenhouse have the ability to collect and store water for use during a drought. (sfx: water faucet) They’re called succulents. The reason they look so different from other plants is that nature has given them a variety of strategies to adapt to dry winds or soils, extreme temperatures, and intense sunlight.

Look around and you’ll see what I’m talking about. Silver plants use their coloring like a pair of sunglasses to reflect the sun so they can stay cool. Others grow lots of spines and thorns to protect them from being some lizard’s lunch. Many succulents have waxy coatings on their leaves to seal in moisture just like a Ziploc baggie. Those with cup-shaped leaves trap little pools of water when it rains. And long underground roots can suck up water just like a straw so the plants can store it in their broad leaves or thick trunks. It’s not surprising that this garden is commonly called the cactus house. Cacti are perhaps the best-known family of the succulents. But there are succulents in more than twenty other plant families. Maybe that’s why it seems crowded in here! As you’ll discover today, for a plant that’s such a lean, mean water-storing machine, succulents sure do come in a lot of shapes and sizes!