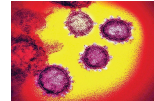




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The plant and sip class is capped at 40 people, with about 35 participating in the most recent event.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY BECCA WEBBER

Party for planters at Whitney's 'Plant and Sip'

Participants get their hands dirty at a night out for garden lovers

Posted Friday, August 2, 2019 3:06 pm

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By Nicolas Davidoff, The Berkshire Eagle

CHESHIRE — You've heard of paint and sip, but what about plant and sip?

Six times a year, Whitney's Farm Market & Garden Center hosts its popular "Plant and Sip." On a recent Thursday, the farm held the event's last iteration of the summer season — this time featuring succulents. Horticulturalists and amateurs alike enjoy an evening of learning and relaxation and then leave with a

IF YOU GO ...

What: "Plant and Sip"

Where: Whitney's Farm Market & Garden Center, 1775 S. State Road, Rt.8, Cheshire

When: Next one will be held 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 29

Cost: \$50 per person with wine sampling; \$35 per person without wine sampling

Information: Tickets can be purchased in the store. Space is limited, so tickets will sell out. Or call 413-442-4749 for tickets.

pot of their own for the fees of \$35 and \$50. The more expensive of the two includes food and beverage.

"This is the second year," said Martha Tanner, whose shirt read "Enjoy life in your own backyard." Tanner is the greenhouse retail manager and one of the event coordinators at Whitney's Farm. "Originally, we started up with a wreath and cork event in the winter. It moved along better than I thought it would, everyone really loved it, so we kind of kept it going into other seasons."

Tanner's inspiration for the event came from a post she found on Facebook.

"It seemed like a fun thing to do. People get to come, enjoy the weather, and experience being outside with us. And since we have so many plants in our greenhouse here at the farm I thought it would be an entertaining and easy way to sell them," said Tanner.

But succulents, which are normally found in more arid climates such as the Australian outback, were the first plants that Tanner had to purchase from another greenhouse. Previous iterations of "Plant and Sip"

featured annuals such as Petunias and a herb garden, all grown on Whitney's Farm. The next event will be held Thursday, Aug. 29.

"For all the other events that didn't focus on succulents, we sold the plants that we grow here," said Tanner. "But succulents have become really popular nowadays. A bunch of people asked us to get some for our next 'Plant and Sip' when we did one earlier this summer. These succulents come from a greenhouse in upstate New York."

The event started at 6 p.m., but the summer sun was still hot. Groups hurriedly marched from the parking lot toward the tent for some much needed shade. The queue at the bar grew quickly as the patrons helped themselves to cold refreshments. The buffet style table was filled from one end to another. Local cheeses and cold-cuts were neatly spread on cutting boards next to trays of hors d'oeuvres and pizza. But the queue was mostly for the wine. Five over-sized planters housed bags of red and white wine. Each one was labeled with the wine's variety and discretely covered with a pot of neatly arranged succulents. As the patrons moved along, they hoped to emulate the model arrangements at the buffet in their own pots.

A few of the groups lining up were loyal customers who had attended every event since "Plant and Sip's" inception.

"We definitely get repeat customers," said Amanda Dunnells, the greenhouse supervisor who lends a helping hand to Tanner for the events. "We've gotten really big since our first event. I think we had 20 or so back then. Now we have 35, but I think we would have much more if we didn't cap it at 40."

The group eventually made their way back to their respective tables and started engaging in lively conversation — momentarily forgetting the event's true purpose. Tanner walked toward the middle of the tent, between the rows of tables. She picked up one of the clay pots and held it over her head to get everyone's attention. Slowly but surely, the conversations came to a close and Tanner began giving out instructions.

"I know that people come here to socialize, but sometimes I have to interrupt them and say 'Please put the wine down! I'm trying to help you,'" Tanner joked.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER THESE ADS

While Tanner explained the best ways to care for succulents, Dunnells went from table to table distributing nylon gloves and handouts with more information on the origin of the plant, its ideal habitat, and detailed instructions on how to help it survive.

"We like to give everyone a little bit of information about what they're planting and how to take care of it. It's important to know how it grows and how to take care of it when they leave," Tanner said.

The presentation was short and sweet, with a few interruptions that kept everyone in a good mood.

"[The succulents] don't like when it's under 55 degrees," Tanner said.

"Me neither!" someone in the crowd yelled.

After Tanner's five-minute presentation, the group left their tables and rushed to the planting section. Shovels, pots, dirt, sand and succulents were neatly stacked just outside the tent. Another queue formed as the patrons had a hard time choosing the perfect combination of succulents to fill their pots. It was hard to choose from the overwhelming variety of shapes and sizes. Some succulents were small and stubby, other looked like clovers, and some were lined with bright streak of red.

"There's no limit on how many plants you can choose," Tanner said. "I love how creative everyone gets with their arrangements."

The customers made their way back to their table to make some final touches and enjoy the final product. But Karen Kruszyna and Lisa Greenbush kept going back to the depleted rows of succulents. Replacing plants in their pots until they were satisfied with the arrangement.

"There's way too many to pick from," Kruszyna said.

"We haven't missed one [class]," Greenbush said. "I think our favorite one was the herb garden, but I like how every one is so different."

Gigi Fusini came with her daughter, Kayla Kroboth.

"We haven't spent much time together, so this was a great thing to do," Fusini said. "I think planting is like chips, once you start you can't stop."



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Rank	Trend	Driver
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2	-	Joey Logano (https://racing.ap.org/berkshireeagle/driver/joey-logano)
3	3	Chase Elliott (https://racing.ap.org/berkshireeagle/driver/chase-elliott)
4	-1	Alex Bowman (https://racing.ap.org/berkshireeagle/driver/alex-bowman)