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SEDUMS

The Perfect Plant

BY PEGGY RICCIO



Recently I was talking with a nursery employee about plants for containers. She was recommending Sedum 'Angelica' as a year-round container plant. Because gardeners often forget to water container plants during the winter, plants die of desiccation, not cold temperatures. Sedums, she said, are cold hardy, drought resistant, and the foliage changes color with cooler temperatures.

I have several sedums in my own garden but hearing her made me realize that sedums may be the long sought after "perfect" plant. Sedums are succulents so they are drought, pest, and disease resistant. They are low maintenance

(i.e., no spraying or fertilizing), easy to propagate, and relatively cheap to buy at the local nurseries. Bees and butterflies love the flowers while rabbits and woodchuck are not interested in the plants. Deer are especially uninterested in sedums with blue foliage.

The great thing about sedums is the great variety of sizes and color. Native to the rocky, mountainous regions of the Northern Hemisphere, thus called "stonecrop" because they grow among the rocks, sedums can be anywhere from a few inches to a few feet tall. Usually the tall types are grown for domes of star shaped flowers but the foliage can be just as dramatic—anything from blue,

purple, chartreuse, red, to green and white variegated. Most of the small sedums will have foliage that changes to shades of red and orange in the fall and then back to green in the spring. In some species, the plants are considered evergreen, and the foliage changes color and remains above ground during the winter.

LOW GROWING GROUNDCOVERS

The most common sedum groundcover on the market is *Sedum spurium*, also known as two-row stonecrop. The plants grow to about 4 to 6 inches tall and can spread up to 12 to 18 inches per year thus forming a dense mat. They are grown for the foliage but they do have clusters of small, star-like pink to red flowers in the summer. The leaves are small and scalloped. At the apex of the branches, they are in such a tight cluster that they form a whorl, similar to a rosebud. Many cultivars are available including 'Tricolor' (green leaves edged with white and pink), 'Voodoo' (dark red leaves), 'Red Carpet' (red leaves), 'Fulvenglut' (orange red tinges in the green), 'Bronze Carpet' (orange tinges in the green), 'Dragon's Blood' (deep purple), and 'Fuldaglut' (green with red changing to blood red in the winter). 'John Creech' has green foliage that tolerates light shade making it an ideal groundcover under trees. *S. spurium* is also evergreen.

Sedum rupestre is another low growing groundcover whose foliage remains above ground in the winter. Unlike *S. spurium*, the yellow flowers are borne on tall stalks, making them useful as cut flowers. 'Angelina' has become very popular both as a container plant and in the garden bed. Its needle-like leaves are

THIS PAGE: Alternanthera 'Red Threads' and Sedum 'Bertram Anderson.' Courtesy of Itsau! Plants.

OPPOSITE PAGE: (Top) Sedum 'Black Jack.' (Bottom left to right) Sedum 'Matrona' and Sedum 'Frosty Mo'n.' Photos courtesy of Bailey Nurseries.

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| IN THE GARDEN |



Sedum 'Angelina.' Courtesy of Garden Splendor Nurseries.

chartreuse turning to orange in the fall. 'Blue Spruce' has blue needle-like leaves similar to a real blue spruce.

For more gray blue foliage, try *S. caucicola* which has round, flattened gray green leaves and red/pink flowers in the late summer to early fall. Like the species above, these sedums grow to 4 to 5 inches tall and remain above ground over winter. 'Lidakense' has blue-gray foliage that grows so densely it covers the soil whereas 'Bertram Anderson' has a more upright growth habit, with more branched stems.

MEDIUM HEIGHT

For taller perennials, try *Sedum sieboldii*, also known as October Daphne because of the small pink flowers that appear in October. This species grows in a clumping, mounding fashion, about 6 to 10 inches tall. Its long arching stems have blue-gray, round leaves that are progressively smaller the closer they are to the tip of the branch. The leaves may become pink with the cold weather and the foliage will remain above ground for winter color.

A plant that usually is grown for its flowers is *S. kamtschaticum*. Its leaves are larger, about 2 inches long, and softly toothed. In the summer, masses of yellow, star-like flowers appear, making a bright contrast against the green. Afterwards, red



fruit persist, again a nice contrast against the green foliage. Because it is about 6 to 8 inches high and even higher when you consider the flowers, it is often grown alongside other perennials in the garden. There is a beautiful variegated form called 'Variegatum' that has green leaves edged in white. This particular species does die back in the winter but will return in the spring.

TALL AND SHOWY

The tall species of sedum are grown for their very showy flowers in the fall. Although they die back in the winter, spring brings tiny knobs of green foliage emerging from the ground, much like Brussels sprouts. Showy stonecrop is a common name for several species, *S. telephium*, *S. spectabile*, and *S. alboroseum* and many cultivars. Probably the most well known is 'Autumn Joy' which reaches 2 to 3 feet high with rounded, red flower heads. Planted in clumps, 'Autumn Joy' appears like a russet colored bush. There are many more cultivars such as 'Ruby Glow' (deep red flowers), 'Brilliant' (bright pink flowers), 'Carmen' (rosy pink flowers), and 'Neon' (vibrant pink flowers).

Recently, hybridizers have created sedums with red/purple stems and foliage like 'Matrona,' 'Purple Emperor,' 'Black

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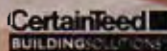
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| IN THE GARDEN |



LEFT: Sedum 'Chocolate Drop.' RIGHT: Sedum 'Crystal Pink.' Courtesy of Terra Nova Nurseries.

NURSERY SOURCES

SQUAW MOUNTAIN GARDENS

Eagle Creek, Oregon
503-637-3585
squawmountaingardens.com

HIGH COUNTRY GARDENS

Santa Fe, New Mexico
1-800-925-9387
highcountrygardens.com

FOREST FARM

Williams, Oregon
541-846-7269
forestfarm.com

SANTA ROSA GARDENS

1-866-681-0856
santarosagardens.com

PLANT DELIGHTS NURSERY, INC.

Raleigh, North Carolina
919-772-4794
plantdelights.com

SISKIYOU RARE PLANT NURSERY

Talent, Oregon
541-535-7103
siskiyourareplantnursery.com

Jack,' and 'Xenox.' Variegated cultivars include 'Frosty Morn' with green and white foliage and pink to white flowers; 'Stardust' with light green foliage and white flowers, and 'Mediovariegatum' with gold variegated foliage.

EASY AND VERSATILE

Sedums are very useful plants. Small sedums can be used in quirky containers such as old boots, or they can be used to make living wreaths, table centerpieces, rock gardens, groundcovers, or as spillers in containers. They can be combined with

other succulents like hens and chicks in troughs or low growing terra cotta dishes on the deck. Taller sedums can be grown in the garden alongside drought tolerant perennials such as blanket flowers, ornamental grasses, and Russian sage.

Sedums are also easy to propagate, making them great gift plants. For the smaller species, just take off a branch and stick it in sterilized potting soil to root. For the taller types, dig up and divide mature plants into several sections. Although they can be propagated by seed, stem cuttings and division are quicker and result in clones (seed will not produce the exact same type of plant). Once you buy one plant, you can propagate it for containers, other places in the garden, or pot them as gifts.

The plants mentioned above are just a sample of what is available. All of these are perennials, cold hardy to the mid-Atlantic area, but there are hundreds of species, even non-hardy, tropical types. Gaining popularity with gardeners, new sedum cultivars are introduced every year by nurseries and hybridizers. Sedums are easy to find at the local nursery but for a wider selection of both color and size, try contacting the nurseries mentioned in the sidebar. ❖

Peggy Riccio is a Contributing Editor for ChesapeakeHome. Visit ChesapeakeHome.com for an archive of her articles about horticulture and gardening.

CONTACTS:

Bailey Nurseries: baileynurseries.com or 800-829-8898

Garden Splendor: gardensplendor.com

ItSaul Plants: itsaulplants.com or 888-448-7285

Terra Nova Nurseries: terranovanurseries.com or 800-215-9450