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APPETITE FOR SUCCULENTS

These tender and hardy varieties offer great beauty at low cost, and with little demand for water

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Cover: Hardy and tender succulents are increasing in popularity, and why not? They don't need much water and they supply beauty and character at a low cost. One example would be this *Sedum spurius* 'Dr. John Creech'. Read more in our feature on Succulents, starting on Page 34. Photo by Elizabeth Petersen.

This page: Oregon-grown plants take advantage of a robust dormancy period to get ready for strong spring growth — even when the weather gets a little colder than usual. But what can growers be doing to prepare their plants for this important time in the growth cycle? Read our article starting on Page 33. Photo courtesy of Carson Lent.



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A healthy appetite for succulents

Both tender and hardy varieties offer exotic beauty at a low cost, while demanding little in the way of water

By Elizabeth Petersen

Interest in succulent plants, both hardy and tender, continues apace as consumers discover their aesthetic and practical uses.

Breeders and explorers continue to identify and introduce better selections, and tissue culture labs are gearing up to supply growers with consistent, affordable starts.

Hardy succulents are easy, adaptable and tough in the garden. They contribute drama, dimension, texture and color, which probably accounts for their exotic good looks and growing appeal with consumers.

"They are colorful, put on a big show and don't cost much," said Roy Foss, owner of Yaquina Nursery and Greenhouses near Yachats, Ore.

The 'secret source'

An OAN member for 43 years, Foss raises tender succulents for the floral market. Every week, he loads his truck with thousands of cacti and striking indoor succulent plants – some of them in bloom – hauls them to Portland and lines them out on tables at the Portland Flower Market.

He regularly sells out of the mostly 2-inch and 4-inch indoor succulents.

"This is the best year for succulents I can remember," Foss said. "Usually things slow down in winter when poinsettias come out, but we sold more last winter than we have in 50 years."

Foss attributed demand to the "green" nature of succulent plants, which take little water. "People are noticing how pretty they are," he said.

Martha Stewart and garden magazines that feature the plants have helped demand too. In fact, succulents

It isn't hard to get growers to talk about plants. The tough part is getting them to narrow down their list of favorites to just a handful. Here are some of the varieties our sources recommended:

Roy Foss

Yaquina Nursery & Greenhouses
Yachats, Ore.

Haemanthus albiflos – This evergreen plant, native to the South Africa coast, is commonly known as shaving brush due to the unique, bristly shape of its flowers. It needs partial shade. Hardy to zone 10a, and can be grown potted indoors if it's too tender for the region.



Echeveria gibbiflora var. carunculata – This cultivar, hardy to zones 8-10, has rosettes of between 15-20 gray-green leaves flushed with red, and pink flowers. It can grow to 3 feet across.



Aeonium kiwi – This drought-tolerant succulent works well in containers, in rock gardens and along walls. Its green rosettes are edged in a fiery red, and it puts forth single flower stalks topped by bright yellow blossoms. It likes afternoon shade and needs good drainage. Grows to 3 feet tall by 2 feet wide. Hardy to zones 9-11.



Maurice Horn

Joy Creek Nursery
Scappoose, Ore.

Hydrangea 'Preziosa' – This hydrangea has three seasons of interest. In the spring the young leaves are crisp and textured with a hint of burgundy. As the summer approaches, the sterile florets that make up the mid-sized mop heads open white-green, pink or pale blue and redden in color as they mature. Day by day, the intensity of the flowers and foliage deepens until the autumn, when the entire shrub is transformed to dark red. Grows to 5 by 4 feet.



Miscanthus 'Gold Breeze' PPAF

– This one has been in our gardens for 11 years and has come to symbolize the beauty of the late summer to autumn garden. Its tall blades are densely barred, with broad lateral stripes that glow in the sun. In September, showy reddish inflorescences rise above the grass blades, adding a dramatic accent. Grows to 4-5 feet by 20 inches.



Aster 'Purple Dome' It's a popular favorite for the autumn garden because of its low height and its mounding habit. Deep purple, daisy-like flowers cover the entire plant from late August to early October, just as the cultivar name describes. This is easy-of-care and can tolerate light shade and limited water. Grows to 18 by 30 inches.



Burl Mostul

Rare Plant Research
Oregon City, Ore.

Aereococcus flagiliformis – This grass-like bromeliad turns a red-orange in full sun and makes a great container plant. It has blue flowers followed by white egg-like fruit nestled in the foliage. Hardy to zone 10.



Eucomis pole-evansii – This hardy pineapple lily is the largest in the genus, growing to 6 feet high. It has green foliage and yellow flowers. It blooms in July and looks good until October. Hardy to zones 6-7.



Agave parryi – This is the hardest of the agaves. It can take temperatures as low as minus 20. It has gray-green stiff leaves and sharp points and grows to 2 1/2 feet wide.



Colocasia gigantea – This species grows huge leaves that end up 4 feet long and three feet wide, providing a tropical look. Hardy to zone 7-8.



Dan Heims

Terra Nova Nurseries
Canby, Ore.

Penstemon 'Grape Taffy' – Part of the Penstemon 'Taffy Series', which is a group of heavily blooming plants for full sun and lean soils. These plants are quite tolerant of normal garden conditions. Good drainage is essential.



Echinacea 'Secret Passion' – The Echinacea 'Secret Series' is a collection of compact, double anemone-shaped coneflowers. 'Secret Passion' is just one of the selections. All are fragrant, well-branched, and bloom summer until fall.



Coreopsis 'Ruby Frost' Part of the 'Hardy Jewel Series'. This grouping offers hardy flower power in gem-like colors. All are easy-care plants which will bloom until the first frost.



Heucherella 'Redstone Falls' – It is revolutionary, like all the plants in the Heucherella 'Falls Series'. Growing in a container or hanging basket, they can be the thriller, the spiller, and the filler! As hardy and tough as Heuchera, this is a crop that could supplant Ipomea selections, and be hardy as well.





Sedum 'Autumn Joy' is a well-known favorite among sedums, though some feel it has been superseded by newer cultivars with superior attributes, such as *Sedum* 'Carl'.

have become very popular for weddings as table decorations and favors. "Brides are very particular about the plants matching their colors," Foss said.

Succulents, however, come in many foliage and flower colors, so Foss can accommodate their needs.

"I specialize in variety and quality," Foss said. "I have a lot of plants that nobody has ever seen."

For years, Foss was the only source for these plants, and customers, mostly wholesalers and "jobbers" or re-wholesalers, called him their "secret source."

Business is mostly word of mouth. Foss has no catalog, no availability list and no online presence, but his renown keeps him busy.

Several years ago, winter storms that devastated many Oregon operations destroyed his nursery in the Newport area. After the roof blew off, the freezing temperatures turned the tender plants to mush.

"It was very sad; they just melted away," he said.

Since then, Foss has rebuilt the business in a warmer location, 10 miles up the Yachats River, where his 200-foot greenhouse is again filled with fascinating succulents.

Unusual exotics

At the Farwest Show in August, succulent plants decorated towers at the New Varieties Showcase; nearby exotic plants drew show attendees to Burl Mostul's small booth.

"I'm always looking for something new," said Mostul, who first brought *Echeveria* plants to Pacific Northwest gardeners. At local and regional garden shows and the occasional open nursery at Rare Plant Research, Mostul can be spotted surrounded by customers who are fascinated by the unusual plants.

"The market for *Echeveria* is still strong," Mostul said, even though he keeps expecting things to change. His *E. gibbiflora* hybrids, popular succulent rosettes with multicolored leaves, are not available from tissue culture yet.

Mostul sells his specialty succulents in 6-inch or 8-inch pots. "Bigger plants have a bigger impact and are worth more," he said.

For the last three years, the wholesale market for his plants has "tanked," but he said, "retail is as good as it has ever been. Customers want these plants."



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Sempervivum "Ruby Hearts" is a vibrant, low-growing succulent that tolerates low water conditions. Photo taken at Little Prince of Oregon Nursery.

Aloe dorotheae 'Orange Ice' is "really hot, the biggest item right now," Mostul said. It has upright, spiky, translucent succulent leaves that turn orange in full sun.

Interest in agaves, both hardy and non-hardy, is high, too. "We are finding that more are hardy than we thought," Mostul said.

Agave americana variegata, a popular, yellow striped container plant, is a good filler. *Agave filimentosa*, which has leaves edged with decorative filaments and *A. geminiflora*, "a sculptural plant that looks like a sea urchin" are "cool collector plants," Mostul said.

Aeonium plants are big, too. "They are so popular, it amazes me," Mostul said. Black-leaved *A. 'Zwarzkop'* is available in tissue culture now, but other selections, including 'Salad Bowl,' a sculptural plant with rosettes to 14 inches wide and 'Sunburst', a heavily variegated selection with rosettes to 12 inches wide, are in demand.

Handsome and hardy groundcover sedums

Sedums continue to be among the most popular succulents on the market. A widely diverse genus, the many species of flowering *Sedum* satisfy needs

for low, dense mats of foliage and for upright garden perennials. No wonder they are so popular.

Low-growing *Sedum* plants effortlessly blanket perennial and shrub beds or lend appeal to arrangements in containers. They produce masses of flowers over long periods, out-compete weeds, attract beneficial insects and tolerate dry conditions.

Maurice Horn, co-owner of Joy Creek Nursery in Scappoose, Ore., has been collecting hardy sedums for years. The nursery offers nearly 100 different varieties. "Sedums are one of the better selling sections right now," Horn said. "Almost everybody who comes to the nursery goes home with a sedum, especially the low growing types."

Horn is particularly impressed with *Sedum kamtschaticum*, which he considers, in its many forms, to be "surely one of the great gifts to gardeners." The mounding plant (4 by 10 inches) displays bright, starry, golden-yellow flowers in summer and often repeats blooms.

"*Sedum kamtschaticum* is incredibly versatile in the garden," Horn said. "It looks good all the time, tolerates both drought and regular water, and does well in sun or part shade."

Horn participates in Seattle-based Great Plant Picks, which identifies and recommends plants for gardens in the Pacific Northwest. A recent three-year, no-water trial of sedums at the Closed Loop Garden near Olympia, Wash., demonstrated the appeal of *S. kamtschaticum*. They maintained their good looks without summer water.

One selection listed by Joy Creek Nursery is *Sedum kamtschaticum* (Closed Loop Form). Compared to the species planted next to it, it had more vigor, flowered more freely and the foliage turned brilliant red in fall.

Sedum kamtschaticum var. *floriferum* 'Weißenstephaner Gold' stood out at the Closed Loop Garden trials for its dense habit and short-stemmed clusters of yellow, star-shaped flowers that turn orange with age.

Sedum spurium is another versatile, no-water species that makes a great groundcover. The mat-forming perennial (4 by 12 inches) has rounded foliage and red stems. Masses of pink flowers cover plants in summer. In winter, bare stems provide a fascinating "snaky action," Horn said.

Joy Creek offers eight *Sedum spurium* cultivars, including one named for the former director of the U.S. National Arboretum. 'Dr. John Creech' is a low, vigorous plant that mounds more than other forms and produces a confetti-like, random mix of pink and red-pink flowers on bloom spikes up to 6 inches.

Sedum spurium 'Fuldaglut' displayed "dusky beauty" at the Closed Loop Garden. A fool-proof groundcover, it thrives in the no-water border at Joy Creek, where its round, red-brown leaves stand out against nearby silver foliaged perennials. Rosy flowers appear in late summer.

Sedum spurium 'Purpurteppich' produces a plum purple carpet of foliage, as its name asserts, and red purple flowers decorate the plant from early to late summer. *Sedum spurium* 'Schorbuser Blut' ("dragon's blood")



Sedum 'Carl' is a favorite choice of grower Maurice Horn of Joy Creek Nursery in Scappoose, Ore. Its pink blooms appear from September into October.

grows more slowly than the species, but foliage changes as the seasons do: green with red margins early, they turn totally red by autumn.

Mounding and upright sedums

In addition to groundcover sedums, some are mid-height or taller.

"Lots of people grow sedums too wet," Horn said. One that tolerates wetter conditions is *Sedum senanense*, which forms a dense pool of jade-green leaves with 9-inch stems topped with star-shaped yellow flower clusters in June. It covers a patch of ground about 3 feet wide.

Sedum lidakense is "an unbelievably beautiful addition to the fall garden," Horn said.

The low, mounding plant (6 by 12 inches) produces a "stunning combination" of smoky blue and amethyst foliage. In late summer, purple gray buds open into clusters of starry, rose-colored flowers.

Cultivars of taller garden-perennial type sedums abound. Many are improvements over the well-known but

somewhat floppy 'Autumn Joy.' These plants have large, fleshy foliage topped in late summer and fall with colorful, flat or dome-shaped clusters.

Horn recommends *Sedum 'Carl'*, a vigorous cultivar with large, vibrant pink flower heads September to October. Unlike others, 'Carl' blooms young and maintains its appearance even in 4-inch pots. Drought tolerant, it also does well in clay soils, Horn said.

A new addition to the Joy Creek lineup is *Sedum 'Queen Bee'*, a rounded mass of purple that stands about 2 feet tall. Adaptable to sun or part shade, it grows well without supplemental water.

In 2004, Joy Creek introduced *Sedum 'Cherry Haze'*. A seedling of 'Little Moor,' it is very upright (24 inches tall by 12-15 inches) and doesn't flop. Unusual flower heads with "countless pin-head-sized, cherry red flowers in flattened heads don't ever open completely," which accounts for a hazy burgundy appearance.

Sedum 'Neon' is showy and tough. A pencil thin trace of burgundy

encircles each gray-green leaf, and in August, wide heads of buds open hot pink with a violet undertone.

Breeding for upstanding plants

Terra Nova Nurseries in Canby, Ore., has been conducting "major work, some of the most advanced *Sedum* breeding in the world," co-owner Dan Heims said. Breeder goals are to develop compact, strongly branched plants with unique flower colors and a complete range of flower and foliage color combinations.

Recently the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) conducted a *Sedum* trial at Wisley garden in Surrey, U.K. The open, invitational event encourages breeders to enter plants in hopes of winning the coveted Award of Garden Merit (AGM).

Out of 85 entries, only three earned the award. Two of them were Terra Nova plants: *Sedum 'Mr. Goodbud'*, a super dense, large flowering form; and *S. 'Class Act'*, a tight, upright form with strong flower color. The third went to *Sedum 'Xenox'*, which Heims said is an

excellent dusky gray plant.

Newer still and "nothing short of a revolution in habit and blooming," Terra Nova's new "Party Hardy" Series of three garden perennial sedums boasts large, tight flower heads in rich colors on remarkably compact plants. Beautiful foliage is followed in fall by outstanding blooms.

'Beach Party,' a prolific bloomer, produces thousands of star-shaped, light rose-pink flowers that look like "mounding dunes" in the garden. "Bees and butterflies will definitely have a party in your garden!" Heims said.

'Birthday Party' has darker, purple-brown tinted foliage and huge, deep rose-pink flower heads in late summer and fall.

'Pool Party' boasts blue foliage and an earlier bloom: showy flowers appear in July and mature to large, flat light-pink heads.

Compared to 'Class Act' and 'Mr. Goodbud,' both of which beat out competitors to win the RHS Award of Garden Merit, 'Pool Party' is shorter with darker foliage.

Garden sedums with dark foliage, cultivars of *S. telepbium*, tend to be floppy, but Terra Nova Nurseries has developed plants with good vigor, a short growth habit and a range of dark foliage colors with different shades of pink flowers.

Cultivars in the "Candy" Series include 'Raspberry Truffle,' which forms upright mounds of large, scalloped, purple-brown leaves and rose-pink flowers. 'Chocolate Drop' offers dark chocolate-brown, glossy with delectable soft rose-pink flowers.

Another new Terra Nova listing for 2010, *Sedum spectabile* 'Crystal Pink' produces large heads of icy pink flowers on plants with strong, sturdy stems that stay upright. ©

Elizabeth Petersen writes for gardeners and garden businesses, coaches students and writers, and tends a one-acre garden in West Linn, Ore. She can be reached at gardenwrite@comcast.net.



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