

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month April 2001 - *Dudleya*

Dudleya are members of the *Crassulaceae* family, and along with *Echeveria*, *Pachyphytum*, and *Sedum* form the principal members of the succulent New World *Crassulaceae*. *Dudleya* range along the west coast of Mexico, North to Oregon, and inland to Arizona and Nevada.



Dudleya hassei

In spite of their close appearance to the other New World members of the *Crassulaceae* family, they are distant relatives to all of the other genera. Hybrids between *Dudleya* and *Echeveria* and *Pachyphytum* are unknown.

The most interesting theory on why *Dudleya* are so different from the rest of the American *Crassulaceae* was presented by Charles Uhl of Cornell University. In his article in the CSSA Journal, he showed that the center of *Dudleya* is on the Pacific plate, while the center of the rest of the *Crassulaceae* is on the North American plate. Millions of years ago, *Dudleya* came from the same ancestral *Crassulaceae* as *Echeveria*. The intervening period of separation as the Pacific plate moved away and back into the North American Plate was long enough for the

genetic changes and mutations to accumulate so that the two genera are no longer able to hybridize.

Dudleya grow naturally in Southern California, and are ideally suited to casual culture. They can be planted in any garden soil, and as long as they are kept reasonably dry during the summer, will grow well. They are winter growers, coming out of dormancy in October or November, when the summer heat finally breaks. They pump up with the first rains, but do most of their growth in March and April. Flowering starts in February, and runs through August, depending on the species and how it's grown. When the summer heat arrives, the plants go back into dormancy.

Most of the *Dudleya* are low growing, branching shrubs. Propagation of these species is easy. A cutting of a branch is simply taken, allowed to dry for a few days, and then planted. Rooting is easy and quick. Best results are obtained either at the start of the growing season, or in mid spring, when active growth is again strong. The single headed species are a bit more risky to propagate. A stem cutting is again taken, and propagated. Usually, the stem still in the pot will send up at least one head. These can then be separated and grown on, or the multiheaded specimen can be grown.

Some of the species, and particularly *Dudleya brittonii*, are very common, available even in Discount Chain stores. Many cultivars are also available, and can be found in garden shops everywhere. Rarer species occasionally appear at many of the local plant sales.

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Dudleya to do right

Dudleya brittonii from Coastal Baja California, not far south of the border and easily seen from the road is the most spectacular of all the *Dudleya*. This species is a brilliant white, when properly grown and protected from fingermarks of the curious.

Dudleya densiflora from San Gabriel Canyon, and other local canyons in the San Gabriel foothills. This species is certainly one of the best succulents with a native habitat within sight of our meeting hall.

Dudleya farinosa from Coastal Northern and Central California is another brilliant white species, with a short shrubby base. This species is the basis of many cultivars.

Dudleya hassei, a California native from Santa Catalina, and ranging to Baja California and Guadalupe Island is a medium sized shrub, branching while young, It has farinose (glaucous or floury) leaves, and appears pale blue in morning light. The plant shown on the previous page is a propagation from an old collection by Peter Sharp.

Dudleya viscida from Orange and San Diego counties, now rare and endangered in both, is a unique species. The leaves stay green, but are coated with a slightly sticky substance that traps blowing sand, giving the plants a unique texture and appearance.



Dudleya pachyphytum

Dudleya pachyphytum from Cedros Island is one of the more challenging species to grow well. It has thick leaves, covered with a white wax. It, along with *Dudleya brittonii* are the two classic *Dudleya*, always in the competition for an award in any show.

C. Uhl, *Intergeneric Hybrids in the Mexican Crassulaceae: II Dudleya (and Plate Tectonics)*
CSSA Journal Vol. 66 p74

A. Sajeve and M. Costanzo, **Succulents, The Illustrated Dictionary**

H. Jacobsen, **A Handbook of Succulent Plants**
Tom Glavich March 2001