

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulents of the Month January 2002 - *Senecio* and *Othonna*

Othonna and *Senecio* are two genera in the *Compositae* family, a distinction that they share with such common plants as Sunflowers, Asters and dandelions.



Senecio fulgens entered in 2001 CSSA Show by Marylyn Henderson

Othonna is confined to Southern Africa, with most all species native to South Africa, while *Senecio* is a very large and cosmopolitan genus, with species in most of the tropical and subtropical regions of the world. Both genera have succulent and non-succulent members.

All of the *Compositae* are distinguished by a flower head that appears to be a single large flower, but is really a cluster of many smaller flowers (florets) protected (and advertised to passing pollinators) by colorful bracts. The flowers of both *Othonna* and *Senecio* show obvious resemblance to dandelions and sunflowers. The seeds are held in loose clusters, and scattered by the wind, just as with dandelions.

Both genera are generally easy to grow, requiring only modest attention to growing periods, and tolerant of some out of season

watering, within reason. Most species are winter growers, losing their leaves in the heat of summer, and leafing out again in early autumn.

Seed is occasionally available, and germinates readily. It's best planted in mid autumn, with maximum growth and development of water storage tissue possible before the first summer. Propagation from cuttings is also easy, particularly for *Senecio*. Production of a typical caudex for species with long, thin branches is best done by burying and rooting a branch while still attached to the mother plant.

Show-worthy *Senecios*

Senecio cedrorum is a species from Madagascar. It has vertical leaves, looking somewhat like the pads of a small *Opuntia*. The leaves are a glabrous blue, with darker green veins.

Senecio fulgens, shown at left is from South Africa, near Durban. It has sprawling stems, perfectly groomed above on a tuberous root.

Senecio rowleyanus has the common name, "String of Pearls", and is a well known house plant. The leaves are globose, hanging on long prostrate stems. It's often used as a hanging plant.

Senecio saginata is one of several *Senecio* that were once in the genus *Kleinia*, which has since been absorbed into *Senecio*. This species shows convergent evolution, with a body form similar to some of the cylindrical *Opuntia*. The body is a medium green, with darker green patterns that look as if they were spines drawn on with ink. *Senecio saginata* is native to

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Oman, Most of the similar species (*S. pendulus*, *S. desflersii*) are native to Western Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

Senecio scaposus, shown above, is from Cape Province, South Africa, and has long cylindrical leaves, with patterned patches of a waxy light blue on a light green background.

Senecio sempervivus, has leaves that resemble a *Sempervivum*, as its name implies, but the stems holding the *Sempervivum*-like leaves come from a knobby white caudex. A red shaving brush flower, rises above the leaves on a long stem.

Senecio tropaeolifolius quickly forms a medium sized caudex (really a rhizome, or fleshy root). The vine like stems can be kept trimmed back to show the caudex. It has interesting pentagonal leaves, with sharp corners. It's one of the most sculptural of all the *Senecios*.

Outstanding *Othonnas*

Othonna carnosa is an easily grown species, occasionally available from seed. It has nice blue leaves, resembling many *Senecios*.

Othonna euphorbioides has leaves the shape and color of *Euphorbia bupleurifolia*, and a body shape that is also similar. It is one of several *Othonna* that have species names identifying the genus that they most closely resemble.



Othonna carnosa

Othonna herrei is probably the best of the species, with the caudex covered with knobby protrusions resulting from persistent leaf bases.

Othonna retrorsa comes from Cape Province, SA. It is a small species, with caudex two to three inches in tall and an inch in diameter. It can reach half that size in a year from seed.

References

Gordon Rowley, **Caudiciform and Pachycaul Succulents**

Hermann Jacobsen, **A Handbook of Succulent Plants**

Tom Glavich December 2001

Senecio Photo by Tim Nomer from the 2001 CSSA Show