

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulents of the Month - March 2002

Aeonium, *Sempervivum* and *Sedum*

These three genera are members of the *Crassulaceae* family. *Aeonium* comes from the general Mediterranean area. It is endemic to the Canary Islands, and a majority of the species come from these small islands. There is also a cluster of species from the Cape Verde Islands, and additional species are spread throughout the Mediterranean from Spain and Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula. *Sempervivum* are more widespread, native to a good part of Europe and Northern Africa, and spreading into Asia. *Sedum* are more widespread, growing throughout the old and new worlds.



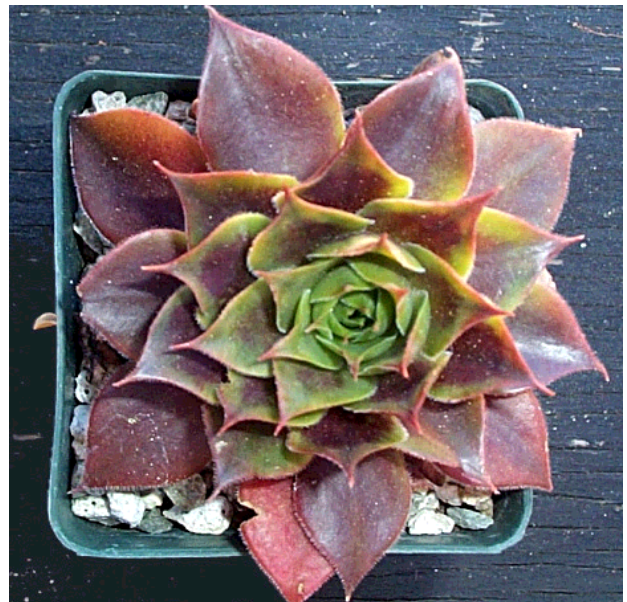
Aeonium urbicum

Aeonium and *Sempervivum* are closely related (indistinguishable according to some authors) and share most of the same growth and floral characteristics. In general, *Sempervivum* are hardy and *Aeonium* are not, but not always.

The distinguishing characteristics of both are rosettes, often quite large in the case of

Aeonium and sometimes tiny in the case of *Sempervivum*. Foliage varies in color from yellow green to purple, with many hybrids and cultivars available.

Aeonium and *Sempervivum* are among the easiest of all succulents to grow. They are winter growers, perfectly suited to the California climate. They look their best from fall, shortly after the first real rain through late spring.



Sempervivum 'Rubellum Mahogany'

Most *Sedum* are also easy to grow, although the genus is so large, with plants coming from so many varying climates that some will prove quite a challenge. The most difficult ones to keep looking good are the ones from Japan and the higher damper mountain regions. These often have trouble making it through our hot summer nights.

Pot culture is simple for all three. Leave the plants in the garden for the winter rains, and then maintain them through the summer with

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partial shade and more frequent watering. When weather gets really hot (over 100), and particularly when nights are hot, avoid watering them at all. The plants will be dormant, and water will only encourage rot. They are tolerant of most potting soils, and require no special treatment. Show plants benefit from frequent repotting, and generally do best without long stems.



***Sedum rubrotictum* grown by Virginia Martin**

Propagation by cuttings is simple. Cuttings can be taken during the growing period, (March is ideal) left overnight to dry slightly, and simply stuck in the ground or fresh potting soil. The cut stem often sets new heads, and the cuttings almost always root quickly. Propagation by seed is also easy, with seed planted in October.

Admirable Aeonium:

Aeonium lindleyi, from the Canary Islands tends to be a small shrub with rosettes two or three inches across. The leaves have been reported to provide a relief from burns and pain produced by *Euphorbia latex*.

Aeonium tabulaeforme from the Canary Islands is a nearly perfectly flat growing. Growers frequently restart it from cuttings in late spring to be ready for early summer shows. In contrast to the way it is normally seen in shows and gardens, this plant grows nearly vertically in rock clefts in habitat.

Seductive Sempervivum:

Sempervivum arachnoideum has hair leaves, with the hairs resembling thin webs.

Sempervivum 'Twilight Blues' a cultivar has blue-purple leaves, the name perfectly capturing the last clouds of the day.

Select Sedum:

Sedum oxypetalum, a tree sedum from Mexico has succulent branches and peeling bark. A great addition to any collection.

Sedum rubrotictum, shown at left, common, easy to grow poorly, hard to grow well. Beautiful colors as shown.

References:

Jacobsen, H., A Handbook of Succulent Plants
Sajeva, M. and Costanzo, M., Succulents The Illustrated Dictionary
Stephenson, Sedum Cultivated Stonecrops