

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulents of the Month February 2003 – *Cotyledon* and *Tylecodon*

Cotyledon and *Tylecodon* are genera in the *Crassulaceae* Family. Both are winter growers and generally look their best from late fall through early spring. New growth starts as early as October, but really takes off during the first warmer days of spring. By July 4th all of the plants are going dormant.



Cotyledon ladismithiensis

Tylecodon is a relatively new genus first published in 1978. In books published before this date most plants that we know today as *Tylecodon* will appear as *Cotyledon*. Both genera are closely related to *Adromischus* (another South African genus and *Kalanchoe* (which is widespread and centered in tropical Africa). Both genera are full of wonderful and interesting plants. Virtually every species is worth growing.

Cotyledon is a genus of mostly shrubby plants with showy leaves. The genus is centered in Africa, stretching from South Africa to Saudi Arabia. The plants described here, and most available, are all from South Africa.



Tylecodon pearsonii

In habitat, *Tylecodon* are generally deciduous, losing their leaves in summer while *Cotyledon* are usually evergreen. As with all members of the *Crassulaceae* family they are poisonous and farmers in Africa will remove and destroy many *Tylecodon* in order to keep cattle from eating them.

Cultivation of both genera is easy. They are winter growers, dormant in the summer. During dormancy, *Tylecodon* prefer little or no water, depending on size, while *Cotyledon* do better with some water even while dormant. Many of the smaller species are under-shrubs and do best with some shade in the summer. *Cotyledon* get leggy with time and do much better with pruning during the growing period to keep the plants compact and tight. They can be cut back severely and will quickly recover when growth starts in the spring.

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Collectable *Cotyledons*

Cotyledon cuneata is a low growing shrub with bright green leaves. It has bright yellow flowers during the summer, just as the plant enters dormancy. From Namaqualand, it, as most of the *Cotyledon*, prefers some shade.

Cotyledon ladismithiensis is about as easy a plant as there is to grow. Native to Cape Province, South Africa, and named after the town Ladismith, it is readily available. It needs bright light to stay compact. A variegated form is also available.

Cotyledon orbiculata is native to areas stretching from South Africa to Angola. Oval leaves, often accented with red make for an interesting plant.

Cotyledon undulate is glaucous, and has wavy or fringed leaf ends. Keep this pruned and in bright light to bring out the blue while keeping it tight.

Terrific *Tylecodon*

Tylecodon buchholzianus is one of the stranger smaller *Tylecodon*. It can grow through photosynthesis in the stem, and only rarely bothers to set leaves at all.

Tylecodon grandiflora is similar to *Tylecodon paniculatus*, described below. It is smaller, but makes up for its size by a brilliant display of red and yellow flowers on very long stalks. It is easy to grow.

Tylecodon paniculatus is a very quickly growing pachycaul. It forms a shrub a few feet high in just a few years. It needs hard pruning to make it form a thick trunk. It loses all its leaves in July, flowers in August, and starts showing winter

leaves in October. Very easy to grow, and takes some frost.

Tylecodon pearsonii is a small shrub. As leaves dry and fall, in early summer, they leave scars on the stems that persist for several years, leaving an interesting pattern of the growth of years past.

Tylecodon reticulatus is one of the shrub species, generally smaller than *Tylecodon paniculatus*. After flowering, it keeps a dense covering of dried floral stems and seed heads that give it some protection from the summer sun.

Tylecodon schaeferianus is one of many small *Tylecodon* with tuberous roots. These send up a few small stems, each with a few to a few dozen leaves. These are the under shrubs species, hidden for the most part by larger xerophytes in habitat, but wonderful for a miniature display or a bonsai display in a show pot.

Tylecodon similis is another miniature species, with tuberous roots. It puts out only a few leaves each year, and grows slowly. It is an interesting miniature form of *Tylecodon*.

Tylecodon wallichii is the scourge of South African cattle farmers, and the delight of pachycaul growers the world around. This species is very toxic to cattle (and humans too if eaten!), It has persistent stems for each leaf which give it a heavily armored appearance. It is a beautiful species, and as easy to grow as any.

References

Jacobsen, H. **A Handbook of Succulent Plants**
Court, D. **Succulent Flora of Southern Africa**

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