

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month - March 2003 – *Crassula*

The genus *Crassula* is a mostly African member of the *Crassulaceae* family. *Crassula* is distinguished from the rest of the family by having as many stamens as petals, and having opposite leaves. Other African members of the *Crassulaceae* have twice as many stamens as petals.



***Crassula* cv. Tom Thumb**

The genus runs the gamut from beginner plants that are virtually indestructible to difficult winter growers that are intolerant of water in the summer, but at the same time prone to drying up if insufficient moisture isn't provided.

Many cultivars have been developed and are available at shows and even many local garden centers. First quality cultivars can sometimes be found at home centers.

Almost all the *Crassula* are winter growers. They start growth in October, grow until the days get too short, sit out the worst of the winter, and then grow again until the weather warms in the early summer. Most are dormant during the summer, or would prefer to be.

Propagation of almost all *Crassula* species is most easily done by vegetative offsets. Cuttings should be taken when the plants are in active growth, early spring being best, left to dry for a day or two, and then simply potted in the same mix as the original plant. Rooting is almost always rapid and new growth appears in a week or two.

Propagation from seed is possible. But surprisingly difficult, with the seed planted in October or November. Germination is sporadic, and keeping the young seedlings alive is often a challenge.

Crassulas to Crave

Crassula alstonii a wonderful miniature species with tight hemispherical leaves piling on one another. A specimen from the Huntington Library conservatory is shown below.



Crassula alstonii

Crassula ausiensis from Namibia is a clumping species, one of many that closely resembles a mesemb as much as a *Crassula*.

Crassula barbata from South Africa, only an inch and a half when fully grown is a ciliate (hairy) rosette. It offsets as the old head dies.

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Crassula falcata, more often a garden subject than a pot plant can grow to several feet high and across. It has spectacular heads of bright red flowers, often in August when this color is often missing from the succulent garden.

Crassula hemisphaerica from Namibia and South Africa, matches its name.



Crassula hirtipes

Crassula hirtipes shown above in a one inch pot is one of the classic miniatures. It propagates readily from stem cuttings

Crassula suzannae another of the small clumping species, looks much like a mesemb, and very sensitive to watering at the wrong time of year.

Crassula tecta has many forms and cultivars. White spotted and patterned leaves make this a choice species.

Great cultivars include:

Crassula Tom Thumb, (shown previous page) forms a dense mat of small leaves. The leaves color quickly with red edges setting off the green centers.



Crassula* cv. *Morgan's Beauty

Crassula Morgan's Beauty, shown above has wonderful gray leaves, with a blush of blue and pink. A classic hybrid between *C. falcata* and *C. mesembryanthemopsis*, its flowers match the beauty of the leaves.

Finally, no discussion of *Crassulas* would be complete without the wonderful garden plants, *Crassula arborescens*, *Crassula ovata*, and their various cultivars and hybrids.

References

Jacobsen, H. **A Handbook of Succulent Plants**
Court, D. **Succulent Flora of Southern Africa**
Folsom, D. et. al. **Dry Climate Gardening with Succulents**

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