



Succulent Sedums Are Suitable for Sustainable Gardens

by Thea Fiskin, UC Master Gardener

Sedum is a versatile workhorse genus of plants well-suited to our climate. From the plant family Crassulaceae, this succulent encompasses over 300 varieties, many suited to hot, dry conditions but also resistant to frost. Most varieties have small star-like flowers, borne in clusters in yellow, pink, red, or white.

The best known sedums are ground covers. Sedum acre (commonly referred to as goldmoss sedum) is so fast-growing that it can easily cover an acre and become a problem. I have mine between my driveway and garage, surrounded by concrete, and it makes a lovely green carpet, with yellow flowers in the spring. It also smothers all weeds, definitely a plus! Other sedums, such as spurium, album, anglicum, and lineare, are not so aggressive and make great ground covers.



As their common name "stonecrop" would indicate, many sedums are good rock garden selections, requiring little soil or water. Small sedums can be planted in crevices in stone walls, miniature gardens, and dish gardens. In England, sedum is sometimes used for green roofs.

Sierra Stonecrop and Pacific Stonecrop are native wild plants growing in the rocky foothills. Another native California sedum is *S. spathulifolium*, which grows in the coastal ranges and Sierra Nevada. Its leaves form rosettes on trailing stems and range in color from blue-green to deep purple. This variety is also a prized rock garden specimen.

Not all sedums are low-growing plants. *Sedum spectabile* grows to eighteen inches and features large clusters of flowers much beloved by bees and hummingbirds. As its name implies, this flower is a spectacle when in full bloom. Good varieties include atropurpureum, a deep pink; ruby glow, a deep red; and autumn joy, a rosy salmon. *Sedum spectabile* flowers over a long season and the blooms can be cut and dried for further enjoyment. These sedums are also easy to propagate from stem cuttings taken before the blooming stage.



Several varieties of sedum have migrated to our homes and patios as prized house plants. Burro tail (*S. morganianum*) grows its leaves in long thick tendrils which have a braided look. It grows best in a hanging pot or wall pot because of its long drooping stems. Burro tail loves the patio in the summer but needs some protection in the coldest months.

Another lovely plant for hanging pots is *S. sieboldii* with its long unbranched stems bearing round, flat fleshy leaves in threes and dusty pink flowers in the autumn. The variegated variety has a cream colored blotch in the center of each leaf. This sedum grows well in the rock garden but may die to the ground in the winter if planted outdoors and reappear in spring. Stem cuttings are best taken in the spring.

Pork and beans sedum (*S. rubrotinctum*) with its bean-like leaves, green at the base and rosy red at the tips, doubles as a houseplant and a rock garden specimen. It will survive our winters outside. Children seem to like this jaunty little plant. Sedums are a good first houseplant for children because these plants don't mind a little neglect and are easy to propagate.

Sedum is very easy to propagate by leaf or stem cuttings or by plant division. Generally, you can place a stem in a damp medium or even a glass of water and it will root. So if you or your neighbor have some sedum, it is really easy to make a lot more!

Tree sedums (*S. frutescens*) are a good natural bonsai. Indoors this plant will grow to about a foot tall and as it gets older it sheds its lower branches for a trunk-like appearance. It bears tiny white flowers in the spring.

Sedum spurium which is a ground cover can be used as a living liner for wire hanging baskets. Just cut a mat of the sedum from a nursery flat, place it upside down in the basket, add potting soil, and plant other plants on top in the basket. It looks particularly nice with other succulents such as hens and chickens (*Echeveria elegans*) and burro tail.

For an adventure in fun and easy gardening, try a few sedums from the nursery or beg some cuttings from a friend and plant!

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