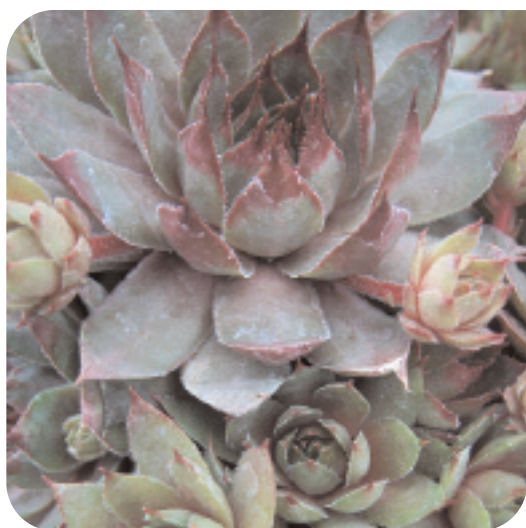


Succulent Choices

These striking and efficient little camels of the plant world add texture, color, diversity, and personality to the northern landscape—and there are dozens of new varieties.



Story and photos by
Eric Johnson

Clockwise from top left: An assortment of creeping sedums add texture to a container; Autumn Joy sedum darkens as the season progresses; *Sempervivum* 'Red Beauty'; the yellow bracts on euphorbia are part of the plant's leaf structure not a true bloom.

Succulents are big right now. Recent years have delivered a flood of new varieties, no doubt because gardeners love the many colors, textures, and forms that these hardy and disease- and pest-resistant plants bring to the landscape. Their drought tolerance makes them environmentally friendly and tending them lends well to recent green movements to conserve water in the home landscape.

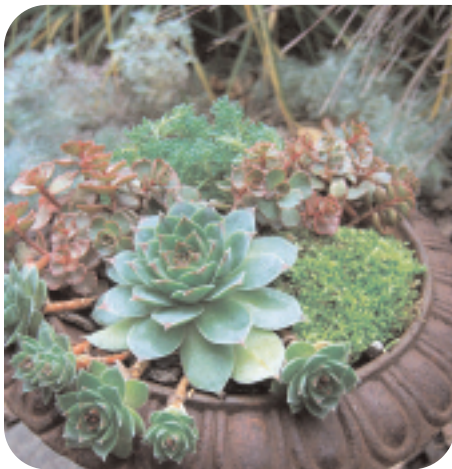
By nature, succulents store water in their tissue for use when they need it most—this process is what creates their often bizarre forms and shapes. The world of succulents contains more than 10,000 species and each one

has its own distinct plant personality. Sedums (creeping and upright), sempervivums (commonly known as hens and chicks), euphorbias (spurge), yuccas, and hardy cacti, are what are most often found in northern gardens.

Focus on Sempervivums

Latin for “always live,” sempervivums, commonly known as hens and chicks, are nearly indestructible. Many varieties are hardy as far north as USDA Zone 3. Their biggest enemy is wet feet going into the winter. They don't make an enormous impact in the total landscape, but their sweet clusters of rosettes do command

succulent choices



Top, from left: Two views of *Sedum spurium* 'Dragon's Blood'; a cluster of hens and chicks add interest to a rock garden. Bottom, from left: Mix sedum and hens and chicks for a stunning container; artichoke agave; hens and chicks grow in tight groups. Page 41, top: Euphorbia.

attention when happened upon, tucked beside a rock or hardscape or planted en masse. It takes about three years for a chick to mature into a full-sized hen.

All the hens and chicks listed below are hardy to zone 3 and reach a height of 2 to 4 inches and a cluster width of 8 to 12 inches after a few years. They do send up flowers, but they aren't showy and gardeners often remove them to maintain the plant's neat appearance. A few varieties to consider:

- 'Brauni.' Dark green leaves in the form of many tight rosettes. Tips may redden in the fall.
- 'Red Beauty.' Gray-green leaves with a blood-red cast.
- 'Rojin.' Olive green rosettes turn intense burgundy as temperatures cool.
- 'Sanford Hybrids.' Rosettes in shades of red.
- 'Silverine.' Pointy, silvery-green leaves with a burgundy base.

Yucca

There is something distinctly non-Minnesotan about yucca, with its acupuncture sharp leaves like swords and nearly 6-foot-high stalks producing bell-shaped flowers. That said, they are striking specimens and several varieties do well in the North. They love to bake in the sun and demand well-drained

soil. The varieties below are hardy to zone 4 and bloom from July to August.

- *Yucca filamentosa* 'Ivory Tower.' Height: 60 inches. Width: 36 inches. Green foliage with white flowers.
- *Yucca filamentosa* 'Color Guard' PP9393. Height: 72 inches. Width: 48 inches. Green and white variegated foliage with white flowers.
- *Yucca glauca*. Sometimes referred to as soapweed. Height: 72 inches. Width: 36 inches. A more native looking yucca with matte green leaves and white flowers.

Once you start exploring the world of succulents, the floodgate opens. Don't limit your green thumb to only hardy varieties. *Sedum* 'Lemon Coral' makes a splash in a container. Artichoke agave and tri-color century plant are small museum pieces and echeveria ranges in color from fluorescent blue to creamy white to deep red. The popular annual moss rose (*Portulaca*) is a succulent, with all the low-maintenance characteristics and flowers that "wow." Grow any of these as annuals, either in containers or in the earth. Most can be moved in for the winter to spend the colder months on a sunny windowsill and then move back outdoors in the late spring to join the fun with the rest of their versatile succulent family members.

Euphoric over Euphorbia

Commonly known as spurge, euphorbias now come in kicky colors, while maintaining the great, low-maintenance characteristics of all succulents. What you think may be their flowers, are actually bracts (modified leaves). Think poinsettias, which are in the non-hardy limb of the family. These colorful bracts give the impression of flowers, long after the blooms, which appear in April and May, have faded.

Euphorbias are a polite presence in the garden, maintaining an orderly little mound of interesting foliage. Tough as nails, they dot the garden with tufts of pleasing texture and are perfect for filling design holes in a border. They thrive in full sun and are well-suited to a rock garden. Once established, they are very drought tolerant. Side note: They carry a toxic, milky sap that can cause skin irritation and make you pretty sick if ingested. See the chart below for varieties to consider.



Best Euphorbia Options

Variety	Zone	Average height	Average width	Foliage color	Bloom color	Bloom time	Notes
<i>Euphorbia dulcis</i> 'Chameleon'	4	15"	15"	Burgundy	Yellow bracts	April-May	Re-seeds, loves rich, moist soil.
<i>E. polychroma</i> Cushion Spurge	3	18"	18"	Green	Yellow bracts	April-May	Foliage turns red in fall.
<i>E. epithymoides</i> 'First Blush' PP15292	4	12"	12"	Variegated green/white	Yellow bracts	April-May	Variegated leaves.
<i>E. myrsinites</i> Myrtle-leaved Spurge	4-5	12"	12"	Silver/green	Yellow bracts	April-May	May need winter protection, reliable in zone 4 .

An Inside Job

If you don't have the right outdoor conditions to grow succulents, consider one of these five high-impact, low-maintenance indoor options. Most do require bright, indirect lighting to thrive.

Cactus. Where do you begin? So many from which to choose. Big, small, stately, or strange, all are striking. All are low-maintenance.

Kalanchoe. Delicate star-shaped flowers in pink, peach, yellow, fuchsia, purple, and red are long lived on waxy green foliage. They are easy to find in stores in late winter and spring.

Jade plant. They mature into wonderful little trees in the home. Some varieties have a red hue to them. They do best in bright, indirect light.

Aloe. In addition to adding a matte, blue-green finish to your interior landscape, they really are nice to have around when you burn yourself. Just snap off a leaf and rub where you need it.

Sanseveria. Affectionately known as mother-in-law's tongue, they are indestructible and attractive. Every office needs to have one. —E.J.



For indoor color, try kalanchoe



Keep aloe on hand for treating burns.



Jade plants thrive in indirect light.

succulent choices



Top, from left: Sedum are often used on green roofs, such as this full-sun porch roof; *Sedum* 'Blue Spruce' is aptly named; *S. kamtschaticum* 'Variegatum'. Bottom, from left: Tuck sedum between rocks for a dramatic effect; *S. rupestre* 'Angelina'; *Sedum acre* performs well in a rock garden.

Creeping Sedum							
Variety	Zone	Average height	Average width	Foliage color	Bloom color	Bloom time	Notes
<i>Sedum acre</i>	3	3"	8"	Green	Yellow	May-August	Crawls around and over rocks.
<i>S. rupestre</i> 'Angelina' PPAF	3	3-6"	12-14"	Golden-yellow	Yellow	June-July	Orange tips in fall.
<i>S.</i> 'Weihenstephaner Gold'	4	3"	12"	Green	Yellow/orange	June-July	Common name Bailey Gold.
<i>S.</i> 'Bertram Anderson'	4	6"	12"	Burgundy stems, red/purple/bluish leaves	Hot pink	Late summer	Provides striking contrast.
<i>S.</i> 'Blue Spruce'	4	6-8"	12"	Blue-green	Yellow	June-August	Very blue spruce-like.
<i>S. spurium</i> 'Dragon's Blood'	4	4"	12"	Green with red edges.	Red	July-August	Leaves turn orange in fall.
<i>S. hybridum</i> 'Immergrunchen'	3	3-5"	12"	Green	Yellow	June	Semi-evergreen foliage. Larger leaves.
<i>S.</i> 'John Creech'	3	2"	12"	Green	Pink/lavender	May-June	Very pretty pink flowers.
<i>S. cauticola</i> 'Lidakense'	4	2"	4"	Blue-green with pink hues	Pink-purple	August-September	Has been reported hardy to zone 3.
<i>S. sieboldii</i> 'October Daphne'	3	6-12"	12"	Blue-green	Pink	August-Sept.	Unique foliage color.
<i>S.</i> 'Pink Dragon'	3	4-6"	12-18"	Green	Pink	July	Tolerant of poor conditions. Available only at Bachman's.
<i>S. spurium</i> 'Tricolor'	4	4"	12"	Pink/white/green variegated	Pink	June-August	Unique foliage.
<i>S. kamtschaticum</i> 'Variegatum'	4	4"	12"	Green/white	Orange/yellow	June-July	Variegated foliage.
<i>S. spurium</i> 'Voodoo'	3	6"	12"	Maroon	Red	June-July	Striking dark foliage.
<i>S. pulchellum</i> 'Widow's Cross'	4	6"	9"	Green	Pink	June	Tolerates shade and moisture.

Upright Sedum							
Variety	Zone	Average height	Average width	Foliage color	Bloom color	Bloom time	Notes
S. 'Beka' PP18398 (Autumn Delight)	3	18"	18-24v	Chartreuse/green variegated	Pink	August-Sept.	Bright spot in the border.
S. 'Autumn Fire'	3	18"	18"	Green	Bronze-red	August-Sept.	Very similar to 'Autumn Joy' with sturdier stems.
S. 'Autumn Joy'	3	18"	18"	Green	Bronze-red	August-Sept.	Honey aroma when blooming.
S. <i>spectabile</i> 'Black Jack'	3	24"	30"	Purple to black	Pink	August-Sept.	Very dramatic. (PP16736)
S. <i>spectabile</i> 'Brilliant'	3	18"	18"	Chartreuse green	Bright pink	August-Sept.	Flowers turn reddish in fall.
S. 'Matrona'	3	18"	18"	Reddish/grey	Light pink	August-Sept.	Striking in border.
S. 'Mohrchen'	4	18-24"	18"	Bronze-red/maroon stems	Pink	August-Sept.	Reported to zone 2.
S. <i>spectabile</i> 'Neon'	3	18"	18"	Green	Rosy red	August-Sept.	Very showy flowers. Deeper rose than 'Brilliant.'
S. <i>spectabile</i> 'Pink Chablis' PP16831	3	16"	16"	Blue-green, edged in white	Bright pink	August-Sept.	Slightly smaller than most upright varieties.
S. 'Postman's Pride'	3	18"	18"	Burgundy	Pink	August-Sept.	Burgundy buds.
S. 'Purple Emperor'	3	18"	18"	Dark purple	Deep pink	August-Sept.	Rich colors.
S. <i>spectabile</i> 'Stardust'	3	18"	18"	Green	White	August-Sept.	White flowers stand out in landscape.
S. 'Xenox' PP16888	3	18"	18"	Deep purple	Rosy red	July-September	Foliage darkens throughout season. Narrow leaves.

So Many Sedums, So Little Time

Sedum, commonly known as stonecrop, is the nearly perfect perennial. It is foolproof with its overall hardiness as well as its adaptability to varied growing conditions. Though it thrives in full-sun, most will tolerate filtered sun. The more moisture, the more lush and large the plant, though well-drained soil is a must, especially going into winter. Its very nature



dictates incredible drought tolerance.

The multitudes of both creeping and upright sedums fold wonderfully into a total garden scheme. One cleverly placed sedum (especially the dark-leaved or chartreuse-green varieties) creates a focal point in the perennial border. A sweep of Autumn Joy is a treat for the senses.

Creeping varieties make wonderful groundcovers as they spread freely (some might be considered invasive, though less so in the North). They soften hardscapes, folding comfortably around rocks. Their root systems allow them to be tucked into minimal amounts of soil within a stonewall. No surprise since sedum comes from the Latin *sedo*, meaning to sit, as to sit on a wall.

The number of varieties of upright sedums seems to have exploded over the last few years, offering varying leaf, stem, and flower colors. Generally, most upright varieties bloom from late summer into fall, with the creeping varieties blooming earlier in the season. The thick, fleshy leaves make sedum stand out in the perennial border, adding contrast in form and texture. Their waxiness catches the light and some varieties offer a cast of blue and red that is rare in other plants. Most flower in tight, close clusters that make a tidy impact. They are butterfly and bee magnets.



Above: Early in the season, upright sedum (front) provide a green contrast to summer perennials
Left: In fall, sedum color and take center stage.

Sedums don't require extra fertilization to do well and soil that is too rich can contribute to the flopping over that sometimes occurs in late summer. A little organic fertilizer such as fish emulsion or compost will suffice. If plants do flop, it can also be a sign of a need to be divided, which is easy to do in the spring. They transplant easily. Some gardeners have reported success with preventing plants from flopping by cutting them back by half in late June. ▣

A regular contributor to Northern Gardener, Eric Johnson is a graphic and garden designer. He blogs at gardendra-ma.com.