



Trowel Talk!

September, 2011

Blooms provide star attraction

Every garden should include several members of the Sedum family. This large group of plants includes low-growing varieties which can be used as ground covers, edgings or in rock gardens, and taller varieties that can be a featured plant in the border.



Photo: Monique Paré

Sedum spectabile 'Variegatum'

All sedums, or stonecrops as they are commonly called, are extremely hardy perennials. They are succulent: their fleshy leaves and stems can store moisture, allowing them to withstand drought conditions. If you have a hot and sunny site, with well-drained, even sandy soil, put a sedum there. They will tolerate some shade but will NOT stand overwatering. Sedums are truly easy care; remove the faded flower stalks for a tidier look and divide the taller ones if the clump gets too large and floppy.

You will find some member of this family in bloom during every part of the gardening season, from

spring through to frost. Their blossoms are usually showy masses of tiny, star-shaped flowers, in white, all shades of pink, red or yellow.

Right now, the broccoli-like blossoms of the taller varieties are adding colour to the fall garden. The blooms of *Sedum* X 'Autumn Joy', a long-time favourite, start off green, slowly turn coral-pink and end up deep bronzy-red. A newer cultivar called 'Autumn Fire' colours up sooner and lasts just as long. The rosy-pink of two *S. spectabile* cultivars, 'Brilliant' and 'Neon', will clash with the Autumn cultivars, so if you have both types in your garden, keep them apart! 'Frosty Morn', a variegated form with pale pink flowers, is less robust than its cousins but makes a nice accent. These upright varieties are all 30-60cm tall so make great specimen plants. They sprout early in the spring, look fresh all summer, and bloom from late August often until the snow comes.



Photo: Kelly Noel

Sedum 'Autumn Fire'

Many of the prostrate sedums have the features of a good ground cover: they spread quickly to form a thick mat and are evergreen so there is no bare ground

in the spring. As a bonus, many have foliage with unusual colours or variegation. These are often used as featured plants near the front of the border where they make interesting accents among all the greenery.

Visitors to my garden always stop for a closer look at *S. spurium* 'Tricolor'. Its tiny green leaves with cream edges and pink accents are showy enough, but when it is covered with pink blossoms in July, it is an eye-catcher. The plum coloured foliage of 'Vera Jameson' is striking and is perfectly complemented by its dusty-rose flowers that appear in August.



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

Sedum acre — a prostrate form with yellow flowers

A good all-green choice is *S. flori-ferum* 'Weihenstephaner Gold'. Its leaves form small crisp rosettes that always look fresh and make a nice background for the bright yellow flowers it displays in June. Your local nursery will have many more excellent choices. And if you spot one you like in a friend's garden, ask for a piece. Gardeners love to share and sedums are easily divided at almost any time of the season.

Trowel Talk!

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Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton

Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1-3 pm (all year)
- Saturdays 7-8 pm (April through September ONLY)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

CLINICS:

Lansdowne Market: Sundays, July through September (9 a.m. – 1 p.m.)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Renovating an Old Garden – October 17 – 7:30 p.m.

Speaker: Mary Shearman-Reid, Master Gardener

4373 Generation Court, Ramsayville, Ontario

Hosted by the Gloucester Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Planning and planting for Spring (Bulbs) – October 20 – 7:30 p.m.

Speaker: Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

City View United Church, 6 Eppworth Avenue, Nepean, Ontario

Hosted by the Nepean Horticultural Society (guests welcome)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: 613-836-1491

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit our website:

<http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

September TO DO List

- Bloom check – is there still colour in your garden? If no, then visit a local garden centre to see what is in bloom to get ideas of what you can add.
- Deadhead perennials that have finished blooming to prevent unwanted self-seeding.
- Continue to water newly planted shrubs and trees (i.e., planted last year and this year) – especially during periods of drought. They need to go into the winter with lots of water stored in their root system.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:

Fall is an excellent time to divide and transplant perennials. Since we generally have cooler weather and more precipitation at this time of year, plants are less prone to transplant shock. And if they do look a little wilted or have that ‘just been chopped in half’ look, they will soon be going dormant anyway.

If you are dividing plants, it is good to get this chore done before the end of September. This gives the plants enough time to settle in and re-establish their roots before the ground freezes. A quick look at the mature plants in the fall garden and it becomes apparent which plants are crowded and won't be able to accommodate another season's growth.

Also, it is easier to envision the height and spacing when you are dealing with divisions of mature plants.

And of course, fall sales at the nurseries mean you can pick up some new stock at a reasonable cost.

Container grown plants that have a good root system can be put into the ground until the end of October. I've actually done this on Halloween (not by choice but because that was when the excavation of a construction project was complete) with snow-

flakes blowing around me. Because container grown plants have established root systems, and are probably already going dormant by October, putting them in the soil at this time is really no different than sinking the plant in its pot into the ground to winter it over.



October 1 – the start of the project



November 10 – the completed project

In either scenario, trim the plants back a bit after planting, but try to leave at least 20cm of the old stems

– they will help collect snow to protect the plants through winter. Then, make sure the newly planted perennials get lots of water up until the ground freezes. The roots will still be taking up moisture to get them through the winter.



One year later – 98% success with perennials, 100% success with shrubs

While not necessary for most plants, there may be a few that you think need extra protection after being relocated. If so, protect these plants with leaves or pine boughs once the ground freezes up.

As can be seen in the photos above, a fall planting can be very successful.

Mary Ann Van Berlo
Master Gardener