



Sowing Seeds of Knowledge Reaps Conservation with Beauty

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GCG, Inc. Mission: Beautification ... Conservation ... Education

What a privilege it is for me to return for this second volume of Garden Club of Georgia Inc.'s newsletter relating to the three schools offered through National Garden Club, Inc. These schools educate our members in the knowledge necessary to achieve our mission—Beautification ... Conservation ... Education and enable us to share this information with individual clubs and friends. (The fourth school offered through NGC, Inc. is Flower Show School and it also fulfills the mission, but in a different format.) Please know that each one of your editors is interested in your questions and opinions.

This month's Horticulture Edition is going to focus on sustainability in the garden with emphasis on a specific group of plants—succulents. Let's explore together some plants about which we have some misconceptions.

Sustainability—in the garden

In our general interpretation a 'garden' has two connotations—the vegetable garden and the flower garden. Of course vegetables can be incorporated in a flower garden and visa-versa, but that is a whole different topic! Let's concentrate on the two specific gardens; vegetable or flower. Weed control is a component of sustainable gardening that must be accomplished. Erosion control on slopes is another necessary control situation, but our discussion will address weed control—anything that controls weeds will also hold soil in place on an embankment. How are we going to control the weeds?

- Herbicide will definitely kill most weeds but in the process presents a danger to the desired vegetation. I killed some really pretty perennial asters the other

week even though great care was taken to not allow drift of the herbicide to affect the asters.

- Hand pulling annual weeds can be effective for a few days—but every time we pull up a weed, seeds come up with the roots.
- Mulch of sufficient thickness can deprive the weed seeds of light—a necessary element for germination—but we all know mulch isn't enough. Wait! Dampened newspaper or pasteboard boxes under the mulch!—that should solve the problem—and it does for a too short time. Back to herbicide
- Another solution—***ground cover!*** Let's explore this option in more detail because this is the subject this newsletter is hoping to promote!

What is a 'ground cover?' University of Illinois Extension Service has an excellent [website, http://extension.illinois.edu/groundcovers/about.cfm](http://extension.illinois.edu/groundcovers/about.cfm) Some of this information is from that website.

- Turf grass is the most widely planted ground cover in landscapes today. Why is a lush grass lawn **not** a good thing—water usage, non-organic materials used to make it lush—fertilizer, weed control, repeated necessity to mow the grass...all are environmentally inappropriate
- Ground covers can be one inch high to several feet. They can be woody as in a shrub or herbaceous, clumping or running, evergreen or deciduous, and the array of colors and textures is extensive.
- Groundcovers can unify different components in the landscape—hedging material, traffic barriers, visual guides to an entry, soften hardscapes such as walks, driveways, steps....they define space, provide a transition between the lawn and taller plants (flowers etc.)
- They add an interesting and attractive color and texture to the landscape, set the mood for an organized area
- In summary—start utilizing some 'new ideas' for ground cover

We are familiar with any number of 'ground covers' such as *Ajuga*, *Plumgago* (Dwarf) *Euphorbia polychrome* (cushion spurge), *Geranium ibericum* 'Johnson's Blue', (Perennial geranium), *Iberis*, (Candy Tuft), *Juniperus 'nana'* (any of the dwarf or creeping junipers) *Liriope spicata*. (good ol' lily turf), *Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea' (another 'good ol' plant—Creeping Charlie), *Thymus serpyllum*, (Creeping Thyme), *Pratia pedunculata* Blue Star Creeper (one of the best to use between stepping stones) and *Sedum species*; (which has many varieties

and cultivars and will be discussed in detail in an upcoming paragraph. The plants listed above are all hardy in Georgia; I've used every one of them. Each has its good points and drawbacks. One of the most significant faults of any ground cover is invasive growth, but there are ways to control that too!

Time for true confessions—last Thursday 6/18 I fell while weeding and managed to break my leg in two places—but the good news is they are simple breaks not requiring surgery or a cast. Six days later I'm already somewhat mobile and making rapid recovery—think I'll make the 6 week short estimate for recovery, but a three month projection for total healing—much less trauma than last summer! It is indeed a 'bummer' but could have been much worse. To say I'm embarrassed is an understatement!

Back to business! This morning was lovely—my golf/garden cart can be driven from the right seat so the last few days it has been possible to monitor my garden and that has been wonderful for me. This morning I observed a multitude of ground covers in my garden and to also rethink the subject ground covers.

- Sedums can and do provide an excellent opportunity to control flower beds.
- Many other herbaceous plants are just as successful—here is a list of herbaceous plants used in this 'homegrown' garden
 - *Chrysanthemum pacifica*—invasive but a really nice plant 12 to 15" tall, variegated variety available
 - *Nepeta x faassenii*—catmint, but my cat ignores it as do neighbor cats; use a dwarf cultivar such as 'Select Blue'. 2' tall, cut back after bloom and get new bloom—maybe 3 times a year.
 - *Achillea multiflora* or *millefolium*—common yarrow, lovely variety of colors available from 18" to 3'! Most of the pretty colors are short, (*multiflora*) but there is a white variety (*millefolium*) which is 3' and great in a wildflower garden. I use mine in the 'whimsy garden' as a tall border.
 - *Rudbeckia fulgida* or *R. hirta*—black eyed susan ect, can make a really nice border or just let it ramble through a cottage/wild flower area. It reseeds, is basically perennial and is happy.
 - *Trachelospermum asiaticum*—Asiatic Jasmine, one of the best ground covers under trees. Will climb trees, but mine doesn't, and it is in a large area of several oak and pine trees. Spreads nicely and really keeps weeds down.

We've mentioned several great ground covers and tried to give a brief description of each of them. **BUT before you decide to plant any plant do some research and get a good idea of faults and good points—there is not a plant that doesn't have some good qualities and some really obnoxious ones.** (A weed is any plant out of place) Here is a short list of plants that have been the bane of my garden experience. In this Georgia climate they are unbelievably invasive.



Houttuynia cordata 'Chameleon' planted in a wooded area close to the house. Totally destroyed by a french drain installation—but came back stronger than ever the next spring! Twenty years later I'm still trying to get rid of it! This is a picture from this year. The root goes to China and round up does not touch the root.

Also supposed to have a lovely pink variegation—it did the first year, but never again. Just don't plant it—I beg of you.



Hedera helix—English Ivy, it also is environmentally invasive and extremely difficult to eradicate. It will climb trees, and destroy anything in its way. (Does not kill the tree, but makes it susceptible to wind damage) Because my background is from colder climates I didn't realize it wouldn't die back in mid Georgia—it

is now eliminated from the area where it was planted, but in my stupidity I just threw it in the woods! Now it is rampant there but I keep it off the trees and try to prevent it from spreading further. It is on our property, but who will control it a few years from now...?

All of the Genera listed previously are herbaceous plants and general good gardening practice will be successful.

Succulents—with emphasis on Sedum

What are hardy succulents?

- This is a two part question
 - A succulent is any plant which has some part of it—leaf, stem, which is more than normally thickened/fleshy to retain water. Primarily thought of as 'desert plants' but have uses far beyond that limited scope.

- A hardy succulent can survive cold winter temperatures to at least USDA zone 5 and some will go to Zone 3. Three Genera we will be exploring include those listed below, but there are an amazing number of Sedum commonly used as ground cover in the succulent description.
 - Sempervivum such as Hen and Chicks
 - Sedum
 - Delosperma
- What soil conditions are necessary to grow Hardy Succulents?
 - The soil must be well drained. Hardy succulents planted in water logged soil (clay) will not survive.
 - Ideally soil should be at least 50% perlite, coarse grit or sand—not builders sand-- it says ‘ideally’ but how often do we work with ideal conditions?! I grow most everything in clay soil augmented with gravel, coarse mulch (from trees cut from our woods—not the fancy stuff available commercially) Planting on hillsides or berms usually provides drainage
 - Top dressing your plants with sharp sand, pebbles or grit is also a good idea to prevent root rot (from poor drainage)
 - Bone meal can be added at any time
- Fertilizing
 - Fertilizer should be a very low nitrogen type. 5-10-10 is an acceptable level. Apply in spring
 - I rarely fertilize my succulents—but I rarely fertilize any of my plants except for some slow release pellets and an annual top dressing of ‘Black Cow’.

Now comes the fun part—some specific plants to use! Three different Genera were listed: Sempervivums, Sedum, Delesperma of which we will concentrate for ground cover on the Sedums, but there are also some Sempervivums which can add a different texture. Delesperma are wonderful—commonly referred to as Ice Plants they are a colorful, hardy, low



spreading plant with ‘shimmering’ flowers of every color adding texture to the surrounding plants. The picture below show a *Delosperma cooperii* with some *Agava americana* which has not been hardy for me though it can be marginally hardy. Mine are planted in containers and put behind the azaleas next to the garage for winter protection—sometimes it works, sometimes not. This is such a glorious

picture from google...none of mine are in bloom right now. *D. cooperi* is available in many different colors—A+++

Sedums used as ground cover offer diverse choices. Below are some species which have been successful for me. These are basic, easily accessible species—but check the big box stores, specialty nurseries, and the internet—search Sedum plants.



Sedum kamtschaticum

Beautiful ground cover. Grows about 6" tall with masses of yellow flowers in July. Also known for its unusual red and gold coloring in the fall.



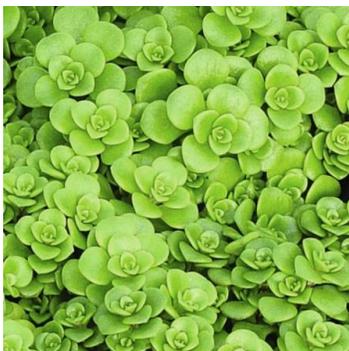
Sedum rupestre 'Angelina'

A terrific low evergreen groundcover for sunny areas. Forms a trailing mat of succulent golden-yellow leaves. Clusters of yellow starry flowers in the summer. Beautiful cascading habit in containers. Develops amber tones in the autumn. 4" to 6" tall.



Sedum nussbaumerianum

Low growing subshrub to 8 inches tall by 2-3 feet wide with reddish-brown 1 inch long leaves that are pointed at their tips. In late winter to spring appear the white lightly fragrant flowers in a flat topped umbel-like inflorescence



Sedum makinoi 'Limelight'

Growing 4 to 6 inches tall with lime green leaves and yellow flowers this one is a delight to spark up the garden. There is a smaller leafed cultivar 'Ogon' which is a favorite of mine especially in a container.



Sedum pachyphyllum

Probably wouldn't use this in the ground because it is marginally hardy to 15-20°, but it is so much fun...grows to 10-20 inches tall, blooms with yellow flowers. Sometimes the leaves bend down with weight of leaves!



Sedum sieboldii

Blue-green 3/4 " leaves with pink flowers in the fall. Leaf edges turn pink in the heat of summer. This one is poisonous.



Sedum reflexum 'Blue Spruce'

It really does resemble a spruce forest in miniature! Blue green foliage which takes on tones of purple in cold weather.

Robert Lewis Stevenson said, "The world is so full of a number of things, we should all be happy as kings!" The world of succulents is like that—the examples here barely scratch the surface. To do some research into this new territory (as you should with any new Genus-Species-Cultivar) below is a short list of suggestions

- The internet
 - Search 'succulents' and start there
 - As you get some background move on to specific Species
 - The Cactus Succulent Society of the United States

- Books
 - The Garden Succulents Primer, Gideon Smith and Ben-Erik Van Wyk, Timber Press, 2008
 - Hardy Succulents, Gwen Moore Kelaidis with photographs by Saxon Holt, Story Publishing (couldn't find a date, but believe it was published about 2008)
- Visit nurseries
 - Simply Succulents on the web
 - Pike Nurseries in Georgia
 - Big Box Stores have a pretty good variety!
 - Robin and Mark Porter at Plant Emporium, 232 W. Taylor Street, Griffin,GA, and Mill Pond Nursery, 105 Hwy 85 Connector in Brooks, GA

One more use for any Succulent! They make outstanding container plants. Sun tolerant, low water needs—be adventurous and give them a try. You won't be sorry.



The large silver/gray plants in each container are Echeveria which are not hardy, but well worth bring inside for the winter. This is a whole different topic—but if you would like to know more let me know!

Happy Gardening,
Gail, the happy but clumsy gardener
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