

Toledo Blade, Garden Article

Date Submitted: Friday, June 13, 2019

Author: Amy Stone, OSU Extension – Lucas County

Try Some Hens and Chicks (Succulents, Not Poultry) In The Garden

I am the type of gardener who wants one of those, and of course one of those, and I have to have that one too. While I may have many favorites, I enjoy dabbling in variety, and am always trying something new or different.

My mom was a gardener and I like to think that I got my green thumbs from her, and of course all four of my grandparents who were farmers. My mom was a dabbler and had quite the collection of plants. I can remember a pair of my dad's old work boots that she commandeered after he was through, and used them as planters for some hens and chicks (*Sempervivum* spp.).

It wasn't too long ago that I had a pot or two of hens and chicks in my own landscape to serve as a reminder of my mom. What I grew to love is the toughness these plants would endure. I can remember being gone during the summer and coming back to some wilted, sometimes brown or even worse – plants that died due to my neglect, including lack of water while I was away. This really is not the case with a group of plants we call succulents. In fact, death and decline usually only occurs when the plants get too much water – the exact conditions that we are experiencing this spring.

There are some “tried and true” succulents that have been around a long time. Maybe some that grew in your parents or even grandparents' landscapes. Some of you might even have a start of those special plants in your landscape. I love the stories of plants being shared with family and friends. While hens and chicks remain popular with gardeners today, there are so many to choose from. Habits include ground covers, mounding, or upright. Colors of foliage and flowers vary greatly – I think there is something for everyone.

On your next trip to the garden center, check out their availability. I am sure you will find a succulent that needs to come home with you. Here are few you might be interested in:

- Prickly Pear Cactus (*Opuntia* spp.) – While there are many to choose from between the species and cultivars, we do have a native if that is our preference. The yellow flowers are eye catching, but thorns will require a “special place” in your landscape.

- Sedum Frosty Morn (*Sedum erythrostictum* 'Frosty Morn') – This variegated sedum adds great color to the landscape . If it becomes a little floppy in your landscape, pinching it back in the spring will help reduce its height and strengthen stems.
- Sedum 'Purple Emperor' (*Sedum telephium* 'Purple Emperor') – The dark foliage is purple, almost black, and is adorned with star shaped pink flowers that just pops above the dark foliage. Another eye catcher because of the contrast in colors.

So how are your succulents performing this season? Their ideal growing conditions is not what we have been experiencing. If current weather conditions continue, I have been known to move some containers under eaves or tuck them away so they miss the passing showers so they are allowed to dry out a bit. It isn't that simple if the plants are in the ground. Tents? Just kidding! This year's weather reminds me of how important site selection is, although nearly all sites have been wet this season.

I would love to see photos of your succulents. You can share them on the OSU Extension, Lucas County's Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/OSUExtensionLucasCounty/>) or email them to me directly at stone.91@osu.edu