

Autumn officially arrives in two days. Typically, when one thinks of beautiful autumn flowers, chrysanthemums and asters come to mind. Perhaps not as prevalent but just as beautiful is another autumn flower, one that even has the word autumn in its variety name.

In our yard and throughout the countryside, I have been noticing 'Autumn Joy' in full bloom. This variety of flowering plant belongs to the genus *Sedum*. Such plants are commonly called showy stonecrop sedum or border stonecrop sedum. The word sedum itself is so widely used that it, too, has become a common name for the plant.

'Autumn Joy' sedums are upright perennial plants with thick stems and succulent, fleshy leaves. Their stout, sturdy stems support massive flower heads which develop in summer and burst into bloom in autumn. The flowers begin blooming in shades of pale pink and light mauve then



changing to a deep rose and beautiful bronze as autumn progresses. Even after frost, the flowers of 'Autumn Joy' remain attractive well into the winter. If the plants are left standing, they not only provide winter interest but become a great food source for birds. Deer do not particularly like them which is good news for those living on acreages.

Interestingly, there are numerous types of sedum, all of which have fleshy, succulent leaves. Low-growing varieties hug the ground and may reach just two inches in height; whereas, tall varieties top out at two feet or more.

Sedums offer an assortment of attributes. First, they require little maintenance. They make good cut flowers. Sedums attract butterflies. With their thick, succulent leaves, they are quite capable of withstanding

drought as well as wet, rainy weather. Unfortunately, extreme heat and lack of sun can cause sedums to become somewhat leggy. Pruning the plants back in early July will encourage them to grow sturdier and bushier.



Most sedums do well in USDA Zones 3 through 9. Sedum prefers a sunny location with well-drained soil. They look especially good in mass plantings. Because they are attractive all season, sedums are fitting for edging, specimen plants and containers. Smaller

varieties are a great choice for rock gardens. Sedum flowers do not need deadheading and often look great through the winter months. After several years, the center of sedum plants will show signs of dying out. To keep the plant vigorous, division is needed at this point. Divide plants every three to four years as new growth begins in early spring by lifting the entire plant, dividing and then replanting. Stem cuttings can be taken at any time and are another excellent method for propagating sedum.

Suggested varieties of larger sedum include the following:

- *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy' —a favorite because it is a strong and beautiful performer.
- *Sedum spectabile* 'Brilliant' —a clearer pink than most sedum flowers.
- *Sedum* 'Vera Jamison' —burgundy leaves and mauve flowers with a trailing habit.

- *Sedum* ‘Black Jack’ —deep burgundy almost black-foliage and strong upright growth.
- *Sedum* ‘Cloud Nine’ —variegated foliage.

Before frost destroys all flowers, I encourage you take time to enjoy the beauty of autumn, including ‘Autumn Joy.’ As a matter of fact, autumn is a great time to plant *Sedum* ‘Autumn Joy’ as well as many other perennials.