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How to Grow Ice Plants: The Complete Beginner's Guide



Photo Credit: Monika Valachovic

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Planting, Growing, and Caring for Ice Plants

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TRY NOW

Ice, ice, baby! Warm up your garden with these low-maintenance ground covers that are suitable for outdoor beds or patio containers. With bright colors and succulent foliage, ice plants make a fantastic choice for adding low-maintenance color to the garden. Learn how to plant, grow, and care for ice plants.

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About Ice Plants

Ice plant is the common name for many species of plants in the genera *Delosperma* and *Lampranthus*. They are succulent-leaved perennial ground covers

Why are they called ice plants? According to the cooperative extension at the University of Arkansas, "some species (but not the winter hardy species) excrete calcium crystals on their leaves that give the plants the look of a heavy frost, hence the common name." They sparkle in the sun!

Ice plants are fast-growers native to Africa and love hot, dry conditions. They are perfect for groundcovers, rock gardens, and xeriscapes. They also love the arid and sunny conditions that other plants find challenging and tolerate poor soil well.

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An excellent, attractive groundcover.

Credit: Boligolov Andrew

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PLANTING

Ice plants need a site with excellent drainage and will suffer or die in wet, heavy soil. They relish full sun and dry conditions, just like succulents you might grow in pots. Hardiness varies with species, but many are cold hardy in USDA zones 6-10. Sandy or shallow rocky and gravelly soil is perfect, and neutral soil pH is ideal.

area if you plan on using them as ground cover, and purchase a few extra to fill in bare spots caused by casualties. For best coverage, space them about 15-18 inches apart. They can often be bought by the flat for a reduced price per plant when many are needed for large areas.

Ice plants in containers can be used as spiller plants, cascading over the edge of terra cotta pots. Choose companion dry-loving plants like lavenders or other succulents. Drainage is critical to happy, blooming ice plants, especially in containers.

When to Plant Ice Plants

In cooler regions, plant ice plants outdoors in late spring to early summer. In hot climates, try a fall planting to establish them before the next heat cycle.

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How to Plant Ice Plants

Ice plants are often purchased as small, four-inch pots or smaller plugs from a garden center or nursery. Transplanting them is easy and fast.

- Water the plugs or pots of ice plants before you transplant them to reduce plant stress. This will also help them come free from the pot more easily.
- Remove all grasses and weeds from the planting area, and loosen the soil at least six inches deep with a garden fork.
- Gently remove the ice plants from their containers. If you plan to plant groundcover, set them out and adjust

empty spot. They should be about 15–18" apart.

- Use a hand trowel and dig a small hole, as deep as the plug or pot and a bit wider.
- Set the ice plant in the hole, check the depth, and refill the hole, firming the soil around the roots.
- Once all the ice plants are planted, grab the hose and sprinkler and give them a good soaking.

GROWING

Ice plants are drought-resistant, but they'll need water for the first season while getting established. Once they've begun to grow, they can be considered somewhat established, and you can cut back on watering. Well-established ice plants shouldn't need supplemental watering.

Ice plants are native to hot areas with stony, dry soils, and fertilizer is unnecessary except in the most nutrient-poor

blooms. If you feel fertilization is necessary, use a low-nitrogen (N) product.

When your ice plants are mature, you can divide them to expand your ground cover.

Take your trowel, dig up a piece with roots and stems, and replant it. Treat any divided plants and the mother plant as not yet established and water more frequently. Pruning can be done in spring to remove winter-killed stems.

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Types

out with bright golden centers. An excellent mat-forming ground cover that reaches about 3-6 inches high.

- **'Alan's Apricot'** (*Delosperma* hybrid) shows off delicately apricot-colored blooms on two-inch high plants. It tolerates colder temperatures and may survive in USDA zone 5.
- **Orange Ice Plant** (*Lampranthus aurantiacus*) can be a giant for ice plants, reaching over a foot tall and spreading as much as 4-5 feet. Bright orange flowers are more upright than other ice plants, and they are hardy in USDA zones 9-11.
- **'Fire Spinner'** (*Delosperma* hybrid) has pink, red, and orange rings on each of many blooms. A stunner in mass plantings, it is hardy in USDA zones 5-9.



Orange ice plant in the garden,
Lampranthus aurantiacus. Credit:
Rkyomar



PESTS/DISEASES

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WIT AND WISDOM

- Planting ice plants near a south or west-facing wall can provide extra warmth in regions that are borderline for cold hardiness.
- Foliage on succulents that turns brown or appears to wither and dry out may actually signify root rot from overwatering.

FLOWERS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Wilcox



Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer and master gardener with a passion for soil health, small producers, forestry, and horticulture.

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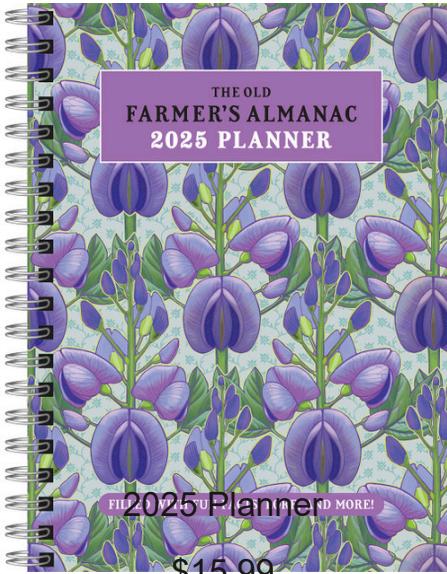
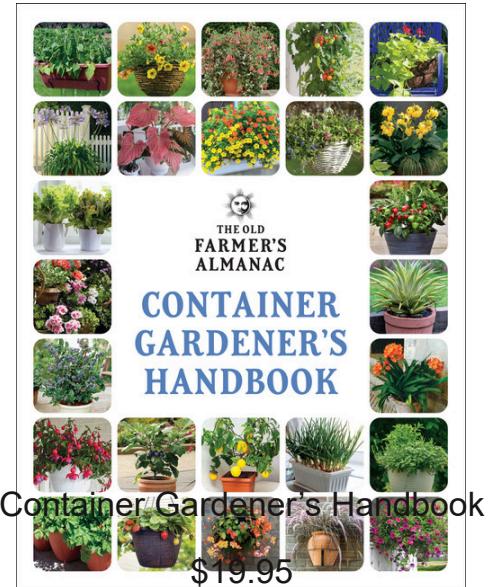
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