

A Short Romp in the Ruth Bancroft Gardens ... continued from page D16

Yuccas: These sword-shaped plants are native to the Americas and the Caribbean and like hot, dry regions. In their natural habitat they are pollinated by the yucca moth. Although yuccas are grown mostly for ornamental use, many species use the seeds, flowers, stems and sometimes the roots for food and medicine.

Echeveria: Many of the most beautiful small succulents are echeveria, often confused with aeoniums because of their rosettes. Their leaf colors are brilliantly hued and they boast flowers in red, orange, white, yellow, purple, and pink. They grow well between rocks and are a terrific ground cover or garden filler. Most echeveria species hail from Mexico.

Sedums: A hardy perennial with thick, fleshy leaves and stems and clusters of pretty flowers, sedums are most popular for groundcovers, borders and rock gardens. They require minimal to no care at all, are easy to propagate from cuttings, and are drought resistant.

Aloe: The best-friend plant for anyone with a sunburn, cut or bite, aloe is known as nature's soothing succulent. Aloes relieve itching and irritation on the skin, and reduces redness and swelling by inhibiting the body's release of histamine. In a garden, aloes bloom in bright colors of red, orange and yellow with over 500 species ranging from tiny to tree height. These unfussy favorites are a "must have" in any garden or container.

Agave: With over 200 species native to the Americas, agaves are diverse in colors, shapes, sizes, and spines. Agaves are sculptural. They can be a focal point in a landscape



A variety of succulents including aloes boast the colors of autumn.

Photo Cynthia Brian



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or can mix well with other plantings. Before planting an agave, make sure to read the label to determine the final size of the plant. Some agaves have a full-grown diameter of 13 to 14 feet while others remain small and compact.

Barrel Cactus: Always armed with heavy spines and prominent ribs, barrel cacti are known as the "fierce or wild cactus." Flowers always grow at the top without spines. Native Americans boiled the flowers to eat like cabbage. The fruits are considered inedible. Barrel cacti add a fascinating form to any landscape when planted in circles or artistic ways.

Prickly Pear Cactus: Optunias, commonly called prickly pear cactus, have yellow, red, purple or orange fruit that is delicious and sold in stores as tuna. The paddles are called Nopales and used in many ethnic recipes. The soluble fibers of both the fruit and the paddles are considered to stabilize blood sugar. These cacti make a great fence to keep out human and animal invaders as the spines are tiny and very sharp. My sister surrounded her property with optunias that bore enough fruit for a weekly farmer's market booth.