Leo Chan

For gardeners in climates with truly cold winters, the use of succulent plants in the landscape has primarily been limited to sedums and sempervivums, until the last quarter of a century. No doubt, these are showy succulents that can be attractive in any garden, and they can be exceptional groundcovers, or rock garden subjects. In modern times, the trend toward water conservation has dramatically increased the popularity of any plant that looks like it may be water thrifty. The fat leaves or stems of succulents give just the right impression. In fact, for the last several seasons the number of new sedum and sempervivum cultivars being introduced to the garden industry has grown by leaps and bounds. I would like to review some of the more successful, cold hardy succulents that can be recommended to gardeners in cold climates.

It is logical that low maintenance plants, with less demanding water needs, would enjoy a great deal of appeal to many gardeners. An added bonus for those using succulents in the landscape is that many of these plants will remain attractive through the winter months, and oftentimes the dormant foliage will turn rich colors or add dramatic texture in the snow (Fig. 1). As xeric gardens gain favor, the increasing demand for more cold tolerant, succulent plants is not surprising. While sedums and sempervivums handily fill the needs of most gardeners, there are always those with an eye out for something special. They too have plenty to choose from. Other choices within the Crassulaceae include jovibaras, rhodolias, rosularias, and some quite attractive orostachys species and hybrids. In the last few years these plants have become much easier to find in garden centers and through mail-order nurseries. For the truly adventurous succulent collector that is willing to take risks, there are even more choices. Crassula sarcocaulis subsp. rupicola and C. corallina have been tested in cold climates and both are known to be possible to grow in the right microclimate. The Denver Botanic Gardens had C. sarcocaulis subsp. rupicola in an open bed for quite some time. There are hardy clones of C. corallina in cultivation from higher altitudes in South Africa that are somewhat dependable in cold regions. C. setulosa is reliably cold hardy and

Pushing the Limits
with cacti and succulents in cold climates #24

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I. Even where snow and cold winters can be counted on large numbers of cacti and succulents can be grown outdoors. A week after this snowfall several mesemb flowers were blooming.