

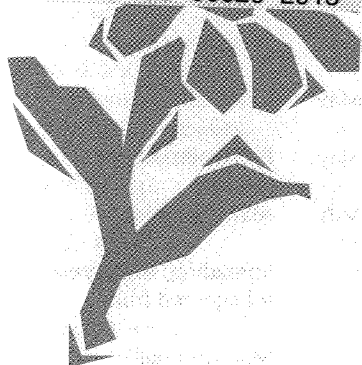
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Rock Garden Plants

no. 7.401

by J.E. Klett and R.A. Cox¹

Quick Facts...

Rock gardens are effective if built on a natural slope or terrace.

Use rocks of one geological type.

Good drainage is necessary.

Plant a variety of species in the rockery.

The garden should not be larger than can be easily maintained.

The ideal location for a rock garden is a natural slope or terrace, such as those found at the side or rear of a house based on a split-level or garden-level design.

Use rocks of one geological type. A common rock in Colorado is native granite covered with lichens (moss rock). Rocks are available from nurseries, landscape contractors and rock dealers. An effective rock garden should have several large rocks, some weighing 200 pounds or more.

Set the rock into the ground so at least one-third is buried. Place rocks in a natural way, following the grain of the rock. Position rocks to control soil erosion between rocks and to allow soil pockets of various sizes for plants. Use smaller, similar rock as a mulch. Place lichen-covered rock to expose as much of the lichen as possible.

Provide good drainage. Most plants suitable for rock gardens require a well-drained soil. For most plants, incorporate organic matter into heavier clay soils to improve texture and provide better drainage.

A rock garden should be no larger than can be easily maintained. Rock gardens have high maintenance requirements. Weed control is the biggest problem.

Plant a variety of species, repeating some species several times to make the garden look natural. Ideally, rock garden plants should spread slowly. Take care not to overplant.

Plant Selection

Many types of plants are suitable for rock gardens. Generally, plants that are low growing and have a clumping habit are preferred. Perennial plants are most common in rock gardens, although some annuals can be used. Table 1 lists many rock garden plants, along with their characteristics and cultural requirements.



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Table 1: Recommended rock garden plants.

Plant Name	Height	Exposure	Soil Preference	Flower Color	Bloom Period	Remarks
<i>Aethionema grandiflorum</i> Persian stonecress	6-12 in.	Sun	Dry, sandy	Pink	May	Evergreen; mat-like foliage.
<i>Ajuga reptans</i> Carpet bugle	4-10 in.	Shady spots	Well-drained	Blue, pink, white, purple	May-June	Several varieties.
<i>Alyssum montanum</i> Mountain alyssum	4-8 in.	Sun	Dry, rocky	Yellow	April-May	Gray foliage.
<i>Arabis alpina</i> Alpine rockcress	6 in.	Sun	Dry, rocky, poor	White, pink	April-May	Evergreen; mat-like foliage.
<i>Arabis caucasica</i> Wall rockcress	6-12 in.	Sun	Well-drained	White	April-May	Many varieties.
<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i> Kinnikinnick	6-8 in.	Shade or part sun	Acid, high in humus, well-drained	White-tinged red	May-June	Spreading; evergreen foliage; red fruits.
<i>Arenaria verna</i> Moss sandwort	3 in.	Shade to part sun	Well-drained, poor	White	May	Mat-forming.
<i>Armeria maritima</i> Thrift	4-10 in.	Sun	Dry, well-drained	Pink, white, purple	May-June	Several varieties.
<i>Aurinia saxatilis</i> Basket-of-gold	8-12 in.	Sun	Dry, rocky	Yellow	April-May	Shear after bloom.
<i>Campanula carpatica</i> Carpathian harebell	8 in.	Sun	Well-drained	White, blue, purple	June-July	Several varieties.
<i>Campanula elatines</i> Adriatic bellflower	6-8 in.	Sun to part shade	Well-drained	Blue-violet	May-June	Sharp-toothed foliage.
<i>Campanula poscharskyana</i> Serbian bellflower	6-8 in.	Sun to part shade	Well-drained	Blue	June-August	Prolific flowers.
<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i> Bluebell	8-12 in.	Part shade	Well-drained	Blue	May-Sept.	Bell-like flowers on slender stems.
<i>Cerastium tomentosum</i> Snow-in-summer	4-10 in.	Sun	Dry, well-drained	White	May-June	Aggressive; shear after bloom.
<i>Cerastostigma plumbaginoides</i> Plumbago	8 in.	Sun to part shade	Well-amended	Blue-purple	Aug-Sept.	Foliage turns red in fall.
<i>Delosperma cooperi</i> Purple ice plant	2-3 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Purple	June-frost	Succulent foliage.
<i>Delosperma nubigenum</i> Yellow ice plant	2-3 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Yellow	May-June	Succulent foliage.
<i>Dianthus deltoides</i> 'Brilliant', 'Zing Rose'	6-8 in.	Sun to part shade	Well-drained	Red	May-Sept.	Foliage dark green; matted.
<i>Dianthus gratianopolitanus</i> 'Tiny Rubies', 'Bath's Pink'	4-10 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Pink	May-June	Spreading; grayish-green foliage.
<i>Dianthus plumarius</i> Cottage pink	6-12 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Red, pink, white	May-June	Several varieties.
<i>*Euphorbia epithymoides</i> (polychroma) Cushion spurge	12-18 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Yellow	May-June	Red fall color.
<i>Geranium</i> spp. Cranesbill	Varies with species	Sun to part shade	Well-drained	White, pink, red, purple	May-August	Several species suitable for rock and amended gardens.
<i>Gypsophila repens</i> Creeping baby's breath	4-8 in.	Sun	Well-drained	White, pink	June-July	Mat-like.
<i>Heuchera sanguinea</i> Coral bells	6-18 in.	Sun to part shade	Well-drained	Red, pink, white	June-August	Mounded foliage with taller bell-shaped flowers.
<i>Iberis sempervirens</i> Candytuft	12 in.	Shade to part sun	Well-amended	White	May-June, repeats in fall	Evergreen foliage.
<i>Linum flavum</i> 'Compactum' Dwarf golden flax	6-12 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Yellow	May-July	Darker green foliage.
<i>Oenothera speciosa</i> White evening primrose	6-10 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Pink to white	June-Sept.	Day-flowering.
<i>Penstemon caespitosus</i> Creeping penstemon	3-6 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Blue	May-June	Mat-like; dark green foliage.
<i>Penstemon pinifolius</i> Pineleaf penstemon	8-12 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Red	June-Sept.	Needle-like, evergreen foliage.
<i>Phlox subulata</i> Moss pink or creeping phlox	6-8 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Pink, white, lavender	April-May	Several varieties.

Table 1, continued: Recommended rock garden plants.

Plant Name	Height	Exposure	Soil Preference	Flower Color	Bloom Period	Remarks
<i>Potentilla nepalensis</i> 'Wilmottiae' Wilmott cinquefoil	6-12 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Pink to red	May-July	Best planted in groups.
<i>Potentilla x tonguei</i> Staghorn cinquefoil	6-8 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Apricot with red centers	May-August	Evergreen some winters.
<i>Saponaria ocymoides</i> Rock soapwort	6-10 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Pink	May-July	Shear after bloom.
<i>Saxifraga</i> spp. Saxifrage	Varies with species	Sun to part shade	Moist but well-drained	Varies with species	April-July	Many species.
<i>Sedum</i> spp. Stonecrop	Variable 1-15 in.	Sun	Any well-drained	Varies with species	July-Oct.	Some evergreen; some more appropriate as ground covers.
<i>Sempervivum</i> spp. Houseleek, hen and chicks	2-6 in., flower taller	Sun	Dry, gravelly	Unimportant	July-Sept.	Succulent, evergreen foliage in rosettes.
<i>Teucrium chamaedrys</i> Germander	6-12 in.	Sun	Well-drained	Purple-pink	July-August	Evergreen; cut back after flowering.
<i>Thymus x citriodorus</i> Lemon thyme	4-12 in.	Sun	Loose, well-drained	Purple	June-July	Lemon-scented foliage.
<i>Thymus pseudolanuginosus</i> Woolly thyme	2-4 in.	Sun	Loose, well-drained	Infrequent, pink and purple	June-July	Woolly-gray foliage turns purplish in winter; groundcover
<i>Thymus serpyllum</i> Mother-of-thyme	1-4 in.	Sun	Loose, well-drained	Purple	June-July	Aromatic foliage; mat-forming groundcover.
<i>Veronica pectinata</i> Woolly veronica	2-3 in.	Sun to part shade	Well-drained, fertile	Blue to purple	May-July	Gray, mat-like foliage turns purplish in winter.
<i>Veronica prostrata</i> Prostrate speedwell	2-6 in.	Sun to part shade	Well-drained, fertile	Blue to purple	May-June	Dense mats suitable as groundcover.
<i>Veronica repens</i> Creeping speedwell	2-3 in.	Sun to part shade	Well-drained, fertile	Blue to purple	May-June	Mat-like groundcover; several varieties.
<i>Viola cornuta</i> Horned violet	4-8 in.	Part shade	Moist, fertile	Violet	May-June	Many varieties in various flower colors.
<i>Viola odorata</i> Sweet violet	6-8 in.	Part shade	Moist, fertile	Violet	May-June	Many varieties; potentially invasive.

*This species is less invasive than *E. cyparissias* (cypress spurge) or *E. myrsinites* (myrtle spurge), which are not recommended. Milky sap of *Euphorbias* may cause skin irritation, especially in warm weather.

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