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Blooming Succulents?

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Succulents are blooming in my garden. However, this succulent species has never flowered in the past and now seven plants are all blooming at the same time. The succulents are all species of sempervivum, more commonly known as hens and chicks or houseleeks. Sempervivums are not known for their flowers. Summer is here and it is very startling to see a familiar garden plant begin to grow in an unfamiliar way. The center of the plant, which is a rosette, pushes up and up as it turns into a flower stalk. The leaves on the end of the stalk peel back to reveal a cluster of buds that bloom into small star shaped flowers. The flower stalk may grow an inch or more than a foot. Blooms are typically pink, but can be red, pale yellow or white.

Sempervivum is a genus of hardy, monocarpic alpine succulents that survive in cold, harsh environments - perfect for El Dorado County. Monocarpic means each rosette can only ever flower once and then dies. Semper is Latin for *always* and vivum means *alive*. Why would the name of a plant that dies after flowering once mean always alive or live- forever?

Sometimes, sempervivum will grow for four years or more without flowering. During those years of growing, the plant continues to produce offsets or “chicks.” Once a plant does bloom and die, it has usually produced many, many offsets to replace it, giving the appearance that it lives forever.

Hens and chicks don’t always wait several years to flower. Overcrowding or stress can cause plants to bloom early. Cutting the flower stalk off a sempervivum will not prevent the plant from dying. The sempervivum blooming in my garden are Sempervivum tectorum “Greenii.” They are blue gray with each leaf tipped in deep red. The flower stalk is tall and striking.

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Echeveria succulents are also commonly called hens and chicks. However, echeveria can produce flowers several times in their lifetimes. They do not die after flowering. The flower stalks of echeveria are different from sempervivum. It is not the center of the plant that grows upwards.

The Succulent Garden at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden is a wonderful place to visit to see the amazing variety of succulents and cactus that thrive in El Dorado County.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.