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Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ PROGRAM

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Mesembryanthemum cordifolium: Baby Sun Rose, Heartleaf Iceplant[1]

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https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/

This document is a part of a series originally written by Edward F. Gilman.

Introduction

Baby sun rose is a perennial groundcover with a prostrate growth habit. This plant may reach a height of 3 to 4 inches and spreads in the landscape, hugging the ground forming a tight, almost clipped appearance (Figure 1). This plant has 1-inch-long dark green glossy foliage (Figure 2) and bright red, pink, or purple aster-like flowers that bloom nearly year-round (Figure 3). This plant is well suited for use in a hanging basket, cascading down a wall, as a groundcover, or in a mass planting.



Figure 1. Full form—*Mesembryanthemum cordifolium*: baby sun rose.
Credit: © harrylurling, some rights reserved (CC-BY-ND) via iNaturalist



Figure 2. Leaf—*Mesembryanthemum cordifolium*: baby sun rose.
Credit: Amalia Gruber via Adobe Stock



Figure 3. Flower—*Mesembryanthemum cordifolium*: baby sun rose.
Credit: © gricel_arancibia, some rights reserved (CC-BY-NC) via iNaturalist

General Information

Scientific name: *Mesembryanthemum cordifolium*

Previous name(s): *Aptenia cordifolia*

Pronunciation: mes-em-bry-ANT-thee-mum cor-di-FULL-e-um

Common name(s): baby sun rose, heartleaf iceplant

Family: *Aizoaceae*

Plant type: groundcover

USDA hardiness zones: 10A through 11B (Figures 4 and 5)

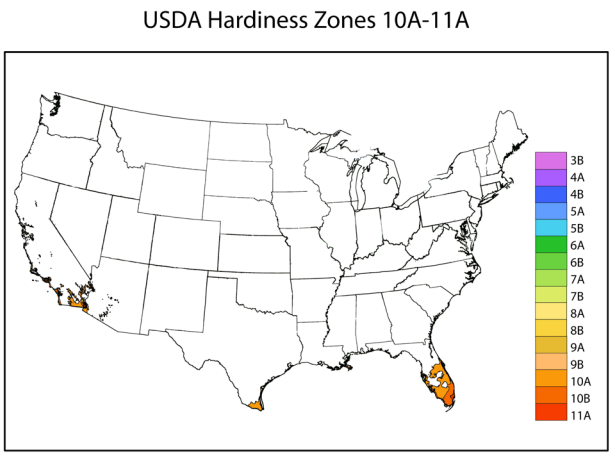


Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 10A–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map.
Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

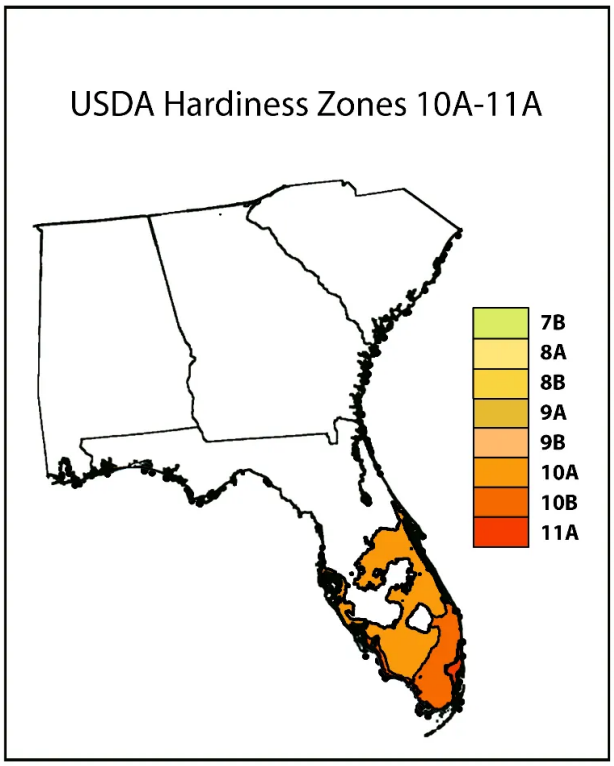


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 10A–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

Planting month for zones 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: native to Africa

Invasive potential: Not considered a problem species at this time

Uses: hanging basket; cascading down a wall; groundcover; mass planting; bedding plant; annual; rock garden

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: up to 4 inches

Spread: 1 to 2 feet

Plant habit: prostrate (flat)

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: red; pink; purple

Flower characteristic: spring-flowering; summer-flowering; fall-flowering; nyctinastic (flowers open during the day and close at night)

Fruit

Fruit shape: round; capsule

Fruit length: less than 1 inch

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not applicable

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerances: good

Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: evergreen foliage

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Baby sun rose should be planted in full sun, in well-drained soil to prevent root rot. After watering plants in containers, be sure to allow the soil to become fairly dry before watering again. Established landscape plants should require little if any irrigation in most years. A light fertilization two or three times during the year should be all the plant needs to maintain a good appearance.

This plant is best suited for a coastal landscape where wind and sandy soil keep the soil dry. It may be grown in a hanging basket in a well-drained medium or as a groundcover in a small landscape or rock garden.

Design Considerations

The low-growing habit and small leaves of the baby sun rose cover the ground in a thick, lush layer of green, perfect for filling in among other plants in the landscape. Simple forms and light or medium green foliage of companion plants will highlight the dark green glossy foliage of the sun rose. Clumping plants with upright form and larger textured leaves or strap-blade leaves would also contrast well with the matting, low-growing form. Locate it in front of an upright, grass or grass-like plant such as one of the ornamental grasses, African iris, or spartina to make a stunning, contrasting combination.

The mass of green works well with different flower colors, but bright and light colors will show the best next to the dark green foliage. Small or medium-size flowers with simple forms will contrast with the small dark flowers without adding too much detail.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern. Overwatering can cause root rot, leading to poor plant growth, chlorosis, and plant death.

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