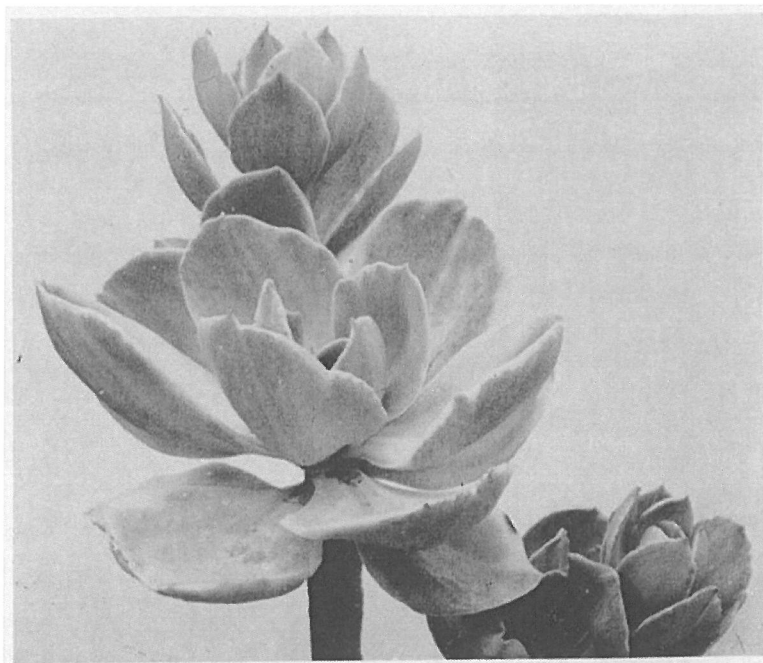


Echeveria 'Decora'

an overlooked
somatic mutant

by J. C. van Keppel

Photographs by the author



ECHEVERIA 'DECORA'

In my preceding article† I wrote on the variegated *Echeveria* 'Hoveyi'. Now I will tell you the story of another variegated *Echeveria*, long in cultivation without a name or incorrectly named. Many years ago it came into my possession as *Echeveria* 'Meynenii' hort., named after a Dutch horticulturist who introduced this plant to Dr. B. K. Boom of the Institute of Horticultural Plant Breeding at Wageningen.

'Decora' is a somatic mutant of *Echeveria* 'Metallica' hort., not to be confused with *Echeveria gibbiflora* var. *metallica* (Lem.) Baker, which is quite a different plant from *E. 'Metallica'* hort. The latter was wrongly identified in Holland as *Echeveria acutifolia* Lindl., a described species, while the plant in question is undoubtedly a hybrid. The origin of *E. 'Metallica'* hort. I hope to solve in the future by crossing experiments. In fact here we have the same situation as in the "Hoveyi-Zahnii" affair. The mutant has been described and pictured, but the origin of the plant of which it was an offshoot is unknown nowadays. The description of *E. 'Decora'* was overlooked by Berger and Von Poellnitz and I found it, while examining old journals, in *L'Illustration Horticole* 30:185, pl. 505, 1883, written by Emile Rodigas. Rodigas considered this plant as a variety of *E. metallica*, which means that already at that time there was confusion between the true and false "Metallica". The true variety is a plant with larger, broader, more or less cordate leaves, while the hybrid has smaller leaves, lighter coloured flowers and sterile anthers which are an indication that the plant is of hybrid origin.

In the same year that Rodigas published 'Decora', Carl Olbrich described, in *Gartenzeitung* 2:46, 1883, *E. metallica* var. *rosea*, bearing pinkish stripes on the leaves, which originated as a somatic mutant in his

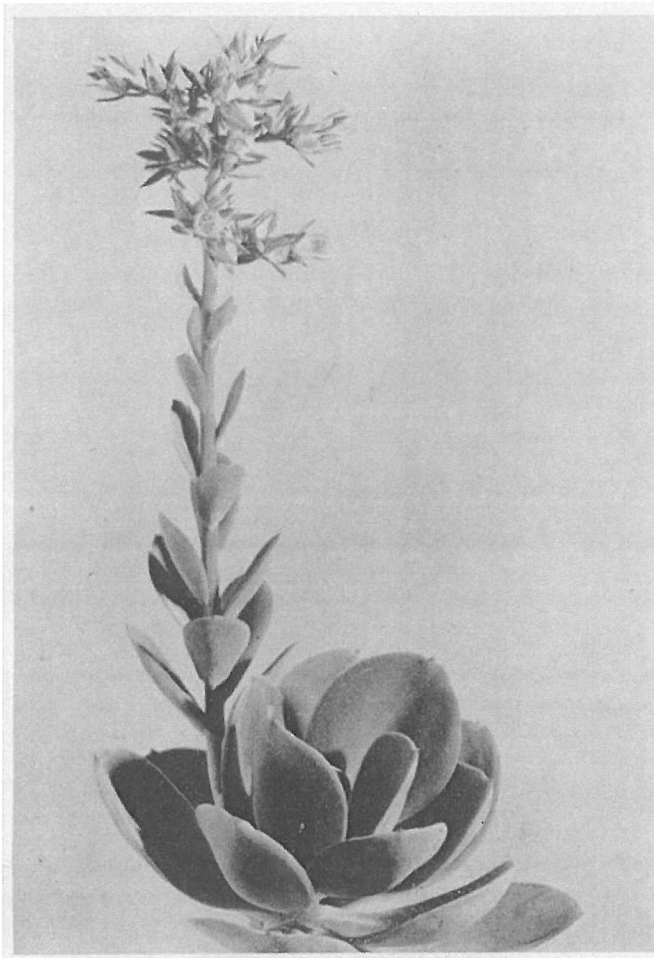
collection five or six years earlier. By further selection and propagation an overall pink leaf was stabilised. I suppose that this was nearly the same mutant, but lacking the whitish, chlorophyll-less tissue which is characteristic of 'Decora'. In my own collection 'Decora' reverted to the normal form and I hope that one day a new mutant resembling the old cultivar 'Rosea' will appear.

According to Rodigas, *E. 'Decora'* was introduced by Mrs. V. Debergue and Sons at Cambrai, Northern France. He does not say anything on its origin, only giving a short description of the variegation of the leaves and recommending it. The excellent colour-plate shows without any doubt the same plant as was distributed by me in England under the wrong name 'Meynenii'—so please change the name on your labels to *Echeveria 'Decora'*!

Description

Habit caulescent; stem 200 to 600mm long in older plants, 20-30mm thick, erect, with a dense rosette on top, 100-200mm in diameter. Leaves fleshy, 10-15, erect, later spreading, obovate, 40-100mm long, 20-50mm broad, margins irregular, most whitish or pinkish, apiculate, underside convex, upper side often deeply channelled, colour marbled green, whitish and pinkish, sometimes striped. Floral stems 200-400mm long, 10-15mm thick, often marbled, at first spreading, later erect; inflorescence leaves many in a loose rosette, smaller than in the main rosette but of the same colour. Flowers in a raceme of short cincinni with 1-5 flowers each; pedicels short, sepals unequal, widespreading at anthesis, 3-10mm long, shining reddish before flowering, later variegated; corolla pinkish outside, yellowish inside, 10mm long and wide, tips not strong, curving outwards; stigmas reddish; anthers sterile. Flowers in winter; strong-growing plants sometimes flower a second time.

†*Nat. Cact. & Succ. J.*, 26 (4): 101



ECHEVERIA 'METALLICA'

Remarks

E. 'Decora' is a much slower growing plant than the plant from which it is a somatic mutant; *E. 'Metallica'* hort., non Lemaire. The latter is a plant with purplish leaves with reddish margins when grown in a sandy soil with plenty of light and fresh air. When grown in the shade or in a rich soil, the leaves become much greener and much larger. This plant is often used in floral arrangements and in flower corsages. *E. 'Metallica'* hort. is closely related to (if not the same as) *E. 'Flammea'* hort. Americana (old form) as briefly described and pictured by Don Skinner in *Cact. & Succ. J. Amer.* 28:(6), 179-180, 1955.

Walther (*loc. cit.* 30:(2), 40-42, 1958) described another *Echeveria* 'Metallica' hort. as *E. violescens*. Without any doubt, although our plant sometimes is found named *E. violescens*, this is an error. The latter has more undulated leaves and longer inflorescence branches, while the flowers in bud are strongly nodding. There is yet another plant of this complex, known in our collections as *Echeveria* 'Purpurea' hort., with darker leaves than *E. 'Metallica'* hort. and larger, waxy, reddish flowers. Till now, I could not trace its origin.

Because *E. 'Metallica'* hort. has an inflorescence with very short panicle-like branches, this could be an indication that it is a hybrid of *E. fulgens* with *E. gibbiflora* var. *metallica*. It have not been able to repeat this crossing because all the specimens in our collections are of doubtful origin and all possibly belong to the 'Retusa Hybrids'. Using some of these plants I made back-crossings with *E. 'Metallica'*. In one case I raised two seedlings which were overall blue-green plants with broad leaves like 'Metallica'. They have not yet flowered. Another seedling I derived from a 'Retusa Hybrid' (as the male parent) has purplish leaves in winter. This seedling has flowered with more brilliant flowers than the female parent. The leaf-form and colour are the same as in 'Metallica' hort. But neither experiment solves the problem of the origin of *Echeveria* 'Metallica' hort.