

Crevice Gardens (& Tufa)

Perfect for our Climate

Summer in Spokane is dry and hot July through September. Plants from the intermountain West are well adapted to our climate, and require less water and less care. With correct construction, alpiners are very simple in our area.

Crevice Garden Construction

Crevice gardens are a variant of the rock garden. The rocks are set closely, 2-3" apart in most cases, sometimes only 1". Larger mats may be accommodated by 6" gaps. The rocks allow root run and protection similar to alpine conditions. Set flagstone on edge, at least 2' buried, and backfilled with sandy loam. Larger stones may also be used, and may be even more impressive. A crevice garden of 10' x 30' will make an impressive display of dwarf alpine plants. Smaller or larger areas are certainly possible and may also be attractive.

Tufa is a special and rare calcareous rock, so porous that plants root directly into it. There are many dwarf cushion plants that prefer this environment, including some of the most beautiful alpiners. These rocks may be placed in groupings with narrow crevices. In addition to planting crevices, the rocks are drilled and planted directly. The sand from the drilling is used to backfill the holes when planting. The tufa acts like a sponge, and holds moisture if the soil beneath is kept moist (overhead irrigation is not a problem). Full sun is appropriate.

Many crevice garden plants are quite xeric, but irrigation is needed, especially for the younger garden (first 2 years) and sporadically thereafter. If plants from the Alps are desired (or other areas of higher rainfall than the Rockies), irrigation will be needed every summer.

Fascinating textures and intrigue

Few gardeners have experience growing very dwarf plants such as occur above the timberline. These include many gorgeous and extremely hardy (growing at 14,000' is not easy) alpiners. A relatively small garden can house a large number of plants, particularly when tufa is used. The fascinating shapes and textures, and proportionately huge bloom displays, are certain to be a hit with the discerning gardener.

The Easiest Care

Crevice gardens use ¼" gravel mulch that does not need replacing. The plants are very dwarf and create little waste. The plants are quite hardy, and few suffer in a bad winter.

Getting Started

Our crevice garden and Tufa Trail will show examples. Tower sales staff are happy to assist. Select plants with cushion, tufted, mat or dome habits for best effect. Keep to small scale--these are dwarf alpiners.



Crevice Garden Plants

There are *thousands* of possible crevice garden plants. Except in very large gardens, use traditional mats, cushions, and domes (dwarf plants). The plants below are consistent performers, and will give you a fabulous garden. Remember to use some plants in multiples so there will be some continuity in the garden. These are incredible plants that mature quickly to your delight.

- Alyssum** There are many dwarf species, such as propinquum that work fabulously.
- Androsace** This entire genus offers gorgeous cushions perfect for Tufa.
- Aquilegia jonesii** Dwarf variety with very attractive blue flowers.
- Arenaria** There are numerous choices within this genus, an easy alpine plant.
- Bolax gummifera** Low mat feels like plastic. Yellow flowers early summer.
- Delosperma sphalmanthoides** Dwarf cushion from of hardy ice plant, pink flowers.
- Delosperma 'Oberg'** Smaller cultivar of hardy ice plant, adapts to crevices. Pink/white.
- Delosperma congestus 'Gold Nugget'/'White Nugget'** Both are size appropriate.
- Delphinium grandiflorum 'Blauer Zwerg'** Brilliant blue on 14" stems. Amazing.
- Dianthus simulans** Tight dome of tiny foliage. Tiny pink flowers. Neat looking.
- Draba** There are many excellent species. Yellow flowers early. Tight, low habit.
- Eriogonum kennedyi, E. caespitosum** All dwarf eriogonums look perfect in crevices.
- Geranium magniflorum 'La Vita Lace'** Lacy foliage on neat small plant. *
- Juniperus communis 'Compressa'** Will look in scale for several years if planted young.
- Opuntia fragilis** Dwarf cacti look great (there are several others as well)
- Origanum 'Kent Beauty'** For the larger crevice garden, or bordering the crevice area.
- Penstemon** There are many species fit for dwarf conditions, including rupifraga, linearis v. coloradoensis, teucriodes, etc. as well as dwarf cultivars.
- Pinus mugo 'Valley Cushion'** A dwarf conifer that adds interest in winter.
- Raoulia** All species have tiny foliage, form hard mats.
- Saxifraga** Most important for tufa. Encrusted varieties are fabulous growing in tufa. Dwarf cushions of very tight foliage, showy bloom. Many cultivars and species.
- Sedum oregonense** This and other dwarf sedums will fit the crevice look.
- Sempervivum** All the hens and chicks work well here.
- Silene acaulis** Tight bright green mat of tiny foliage. A must in rockery.
- Teucrium** Several species, such as T. polium v. capitatum. Beautiful foliage.
- Veronica liwanensis** Like a creeping thyme, but very tight mat with bright blue bloom.*
- Veronica oltensis** Even tinier foliage, speckled with tiny but bright blue flowers.

The above are relatively common plants, but there are many more choices available at Tower.

* = Recommended by Denver Botanic Gardens