

Drosanthemum

The Ice Plant Family is one of southern Africa's great gifts to the world, prized by gardeners for the vivid floral displays and unusual growth forms found within this group. This is a large family with thousands of species, varying from small shrubs to ground covers to oddities which look more like rocks than like normal plants. Many of the "mimicry plants" with names like Living Stones or Split Rocks require specialized care and are more often seen in potted collections than grown out in gardens. On the other hand, some of the ground covers and clumping ones are widely sold in nurseries, and among these are several species in the genus *Drosanthemum*.

The most widely planted *Drosanthemum* is *D. floribundum*, commonly sold as Floribunda Ice Plant. It is much used as a ground cover in coastal areas such as Pacifica and makes dazzling sheets of bright pink flowers in late spring to summer. *D. speciosum*, a mounding species, is less commonly seen but equally brilliant when in flower. It often has scarlet flowers, but there are orange and yellow forms as well. Annie's Annuals in Richmond has introduced a spectacular form named *D. speciosum* 'Pele' with magenta buds opening to many-petaled flowers which are yellow at the center, giving way to red and magenta at the outside. Two more species of *Drosanthemum* are the similar-looking *D. bicolor* and *D. micans*. They have a growth habit like *D. speciosum*, and flowers with yellow centers and red-orange tips, but with fewer petals than 'Pele'. Like *D. speciosum*, they cover themselves with flowers in spring, but *D. micans* in particular is reported to put out a few flowers here and there throughout the year, especially in coastal conditions. Like many shrubby ice plants, these *Drosanthemums* can get a little straggly and develop dead patches in time, and when this happens they can be cut back to encourage fresh new growth.

All *Drosanthemum* species have small succulent leaves covered with little crystalline blisters which make them glitter in the sun. Because of this they are sometimes called Dewflowers. They need plenty of sun and good drainage, but are otherwise easy to grow and able to tolerate temperatures down to at least the upper twenties. For sheer floral fire-power, they are hard to beat.

