

Q: At the Ruth Bancroft Garden, I asked about an unplanted mound of rocks and dirt, and was told this area would be planted with Woolly Blue Curls. Can you tell me about this plant?

A: The mound you mention is in the part of the garden planted with mostly California natives, and Woolly Blue Curls comes from the central and southern parts of the state, as well as to the south in northern Baja California. We removed some leggy older plants of this species before creating the mound, and are planning to put new ones in this spot. The rocky soil should suit it well, since it requires extra-good drainage.

The botanical name for this delightful species is *Trichostema lanatum*, with “*Trichostema*” meaning hairy-stemmed, and “*lanatum*” meaning woolly. This name is quite appropriate, since the flowering stalks, and the sepals at the base of the flowers, have a dense covering of woolly hairs, which are usually purple or pinkish-purple. The flowers themselves are blue, with long arching stamens that account for the “curls” in its common name. Like the sages, this plant has aromatic leaves and belongs to the mint family (Lamiaceae).

Woolly Blue Curls is a shrub which gets to be about 3 or 4 feet tall, with narrow deep green leaves. It is normally wider than it is tall, and can sprawl and become leggy in time, so a little pruning can help to keep it more compact. It has a long flowering season, from spring to fall.

Q: The column about Echeveria ‘Frosty’ mentioned that some of the hybrids of Echeveria pulvinata have the syllable “pulv” in their names. This was of interest to me, since I bought one called ‘Pulv-Oliver’ and had wondered about this curious name. Can you tell me about the “Oliver” in the other half of my plant’s name?

A: The Echeveria species which we now call *Echeveria harmsii* has exceptionally large flowers for the size of the plant, and it was initially given a genus of its own and named *Oliveranthus elegans*. Keeping it as a separate genus could not be justified, so it was eventually moved into Echeveria. Normally, this would have resulted in the new name being *Echeveria elegans*, keeping the same species designation, but his name was already taken by another plant (the so-called Mexican Snowball). For this reason, a new name was needed, and *Echeveria harmsii* was chosen.

*Echeveria ‘Pulv-Oliver’* was a creation of renowned plant breeder Victor Reiter of San Francisco. When he produced this hybrid in 1932, the name *Echeveria harmsii* was new and had not yet gained wide acceptance, so he used the older “*Oliveranthus*” in putting together his cultivar name.

