

Ice Plant — *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum* L.¹

James M. Stephens²

The ice plant is a little-known vegetable of the southern hemisphere, now introduced to warm areas in the north. It is seldom grown in Florida gardens and is unlikely to become more than a curiosity plant.

Ice plant is named after the shimmering silvery dots that cover the leaves. Other names used for it are fig marigold (after the edible fruits), frost plant, diamond plant, mid-day flowers, and dew plant. This is not to be confused with New Zealand spinach, which is sometimes referred to in gardening booklets as New Zealand ice plant.

DESCRIPTION

The plant is a perennial, but is grown in gardens as an annual. It is a small (about the size of bibb lettuce), peculiar looking plant with numerous 12-15 inch long stems. Blades of the leaves widen towards the outer ends and become narrow near the stalk.

All green parts of the plant are covered with small, transparent, membranous bladders, which give the plant the appearance of being covered with frozen dew. Each tiny, white flower has a swollen calyx covered with the bladders. Seeds are very small, black, and shiny.

CULTURE

The culture of ice plant appears to be quite easy. Sow the very small seeds shallowly like spinach seeds. Space rows 1 foot apart, and thin plants to stand 6 inches in the row.

Ice plant is favored by hot and dry climatic conditions. Since Florida's climate is hot and sometimes dry, it is possible that the plant would do well here if planted in the spring. A big problem is lack of a source of seeds.

USE

Once the plant has several leaves and is well established, pick the leaves as desired. The slightly acid-flavored, fleshy parts of the leaves are boiled and served like spinach.

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