

Aptenia cordifolia Baby Sunrose¹

Edward F. Gilman, Ryan W. Klein, and Gail Hansen²

Introduction

Inch-long, dark green foliage and bright red, aster-like flowers combine to make baby sunrose a spectacular hanging basket or ground cover for small, exposed, well-drained gardens. Glossy foliage sparkles in the sun forming a superb backdrop displaying the 3/4-inch blossoms nearly year-round. The moderately thick, succulent stems are flexible and easily snapped. They appear to crawl along the soil and hug the ground forming a tight, almost clipped appearance. Plants grow no taller than about 3 to 4 inches.



Figure 1. Full form—*Aptenia cordifolia*: baby sunrose.
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf—*Aptenia cordifolia*: baby sunrose.
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Figure 3. Flower—*Aptenia cordifolia*: baby sunrose.
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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department; and Gail Hansen, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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General Information

Scientific name: *Aptenia cordifolia*

Pronunciation: ap-TEE-nee-uh kor-dif-FOLE-ee-uh

Common name(s): baby sunrose, heartleaf iceplant

Family: Aizoaceae

Plant type: ground cover

USDA hardiness zones: 10 through 11 (Figure 4)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: native to Africa

Invasive potential: Not considered a problem species at this time and may be recommended by UF/IFAS faculty (reassess in 10 years)

Uses: hanging basket; cascading down a wall; ground cover; mass planting

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 0 to ½ feet

Spread: depends upon supporting structure

Plant habit: prostrate (flat)

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: red

Flower characteristic: spring-flowering; summer-flowering; fall flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown

Fruit length: unknown

Fruit cover: unknown

Fruit color: unknown

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not applicable

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerance: unknown

Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

More often grown in a hanging basket in well-drained media, its small stature and slow growth make it suited for a ground cover in a small landscape or rock garden. Locate it in front of an upright, grass or grass-like plant such as one of the ornamental grasses, African iris or spartina to make a stunning, contrasting combination.

Be sure to locate baby sunrose in the full sun, and keep the soil on the dry side once it becomes established to prevent root rot. It is best suited for a coastal landscape where wind and sandy soil keep the soil dry. A light fertilization two or three times during the year should be all the plant needs to maintain a good appearance. After watering plants in containers, be sure to allow the media to become fairly dry before the next irrigation. Established landscape plants

should require little if any irrigation in most years. Do not plant in a landscape soil unless it is very well-drained.

Design Considerations

The low-growing habit and small leaves of the baby sunrose cover the ground in a thick, lush layer of green, perfect for filling in among other plants in the landscape. Simple forms and light or medium green foliage of companion plants will highlight the dark green glossy foliage of the sunrose. Clumping plants with upright form and larger textured leaves or strap-blade leaves would also contrast well with the matting, low-growing form. The mass of green works well with different flower colors, but bright and light colors will show the best next to the dark green foliage. Small- or medium-size flowers with simple forms will contrast with the small red flowers without adding too much detail.

Pests and Diseases

If soil is kept too moist, roots can rot, causing poor growth, chlorosis, and plant death.