

# GROWERTALKS

## Culture Notes

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## Growing Chick Charms Hens & Chicks

*Maria Zampini*



Low maintenance, water wise, drought tolerant and deer resistant—hens and chicks hit all the gardening touch points for both experienced and novice gardeners alike. A type of succulent, sempervivum actually translates as “live forever,” which mirrors their easy-to-grow reputation. As such, hens and chicks are exactly the type of plant consumers can succeed with, which, in turn, grows their gardening confidence and can lead to them branching out to try growing more “challenging” plants (all bad puns intended).

*Pictured: Gold Nugget in the Chick Charms Collection is new for 2017.*

Chris Hansen, breeder of the Winter Thriller Hellebores and SunSparkler Sedums, saw the opportunity to bring these grower-friendly plants to the landscape forefront AND in a way that also resonates with gardening youth.

With over 4,000 named varieties of sempervivums, Chris evaluated his private collection of close to 500 different plants and selected 12 of the most colorful varieties not readily available in the marketplace. He introduced them in early 2016 under the Chick Charms Collectable Hens & Chicks brand. He hopes to add one or two new varieties in to the collection each year and will start with Gold Nugget in 2017. This latest selection is the world’s first gold-foiled variety. Its fluorescent glow includes red tips for an added pop of color.



Chris’ criteria for final inclusion in the Chick Charms program are: 1) Great garden vigor; 2) Colorful for a majority of the year; 3) Color uniqueness; 4) Resistant to summer root rots and; 5) Heavy baby chick production.

Through his company Garden Solutions, Chris and his team grow and ship 72-cell plugs of Chick Charms Sempervivum to wholesale finish growers across the United States.

### **Production finishing**

- Finished pot/tray sizes: Suggested pot size is a 3.5-in. round Dillen pot or quart pot planted in September/October/November. An 18-pack shuttle tray by East Jordan Plastics (SKU #ST 350-18) is suggested (this allows for three plants each of six varieties).
- Soil: Any well-draining, normal greenhouse soilless media will suffice. The breeder uses SunGro852, which is the same as Fafard 52 soilless media.
- Tagging: The breeder highly recommends NOT putting tags in at the time of fall planting. A tag creates a “water arch” when watering and can also lead to small dots of mildew prior to shipping next spring.
- Watering: Keep freshly potted chicks on the moist side during their active fall growth cycle. Chicks put on a tremendous amount of growth during the cool months of September, October and November. The breeder hand waters all Chick Charms for best results. However, several varieties require less water and should be kept on the drier side. These drier growing varieties include Key Lime Kiss, Cotton Candy and Fringed Frosting.
- Fertilizing: Fertilize heavily during the fall growth spurt cycle with 200 to 300 ppm general all-purpose fertilizer or 200 ppm of a good Calcium-Magnesium (CaNO<sub>3</sub>/MgNO<sub>3</sub>) based fertilizer.
- Temperatures: Keep fall greenhouse temps at 65F (18C) heat/75F (23C) vent/80F (26C) fans until December 1. Then provide a gradual temperature reduction over a two-week period. Finally, hold them at 34 to 40F (1 to 4C) for the rest of the winter.
- Vernalization: Chick Charms do require an eight-week cold/vernalization period to obtain their best coloration the following spring. Keep at 34 to 40F (1 to 4C) for an eight-week period beginning December 1 and running through late January.

### **Spring growing**

- Fertilizing: Use light to no fertilizer in the spring on Chick Charms. You can use minimal 50 ppm fertilizer in the spring with every third watering. However, too much nitrogen can prevent bright coloration and cause green, lush growth instead.
- Watering: Keep plants on the moderately moist side. This helps encourage chicks to “plump” up and fully fill the pots.
- Temperatures: Increase temps to 60F (15C) during the night and maximum 75F (23C) during the daytime.

- Insects: Watch for root aphids, which are a white, cottony mass on the root system. If detected, treat with a Safari drench at 9 oz./100 gal.

### **Miscellaneous production notes**

- Always water ONLY in the cool morning hours prior to 10:00 a.m. Later watering in the heat of the day can cause instant rot.
- Do NOT pot and grow in mixed trays. Due to varying water needs, it's best to grow varieties independently and mix them the following spring. **GT**

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*Maria Zampini is President of UpShoot LLC and Brand Ambassador for Garden Solutions.*