Black Bells

Stapelia leendertziae



Black Bells foliage
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 8 inches

Spread: 24 inches

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: 9

Other Names: Maroon Cup Flower, Rugose Cup Starfish Flower

Description:

A clump forming succulent with erect, pubescent green stems that resembles a small cactus, but it is not in the cactus family; burgundy-purple cup flowers appearing in fall, are attractive but smell like rotting meat and attract flies; site carefully

Ornamental Features

Black Bells is a highly distinctive and unusual plant. Although it actually isn't technically a cactus, it is still a succulent evergreen which behaves much like a cactus. It is characterized by the highly modified and distinctive spiny ribbed green stems that comprise the bulk of the plant, and which are designed to retain water for extended periods of time. It leaves remain green in color throughout the year.

Landscape Attributes

Black Bells is an unusual succulent evergreen plant with a generally mounded habit of growth. Unlike a cactus, which this plant resembles, it does have foliage, but it's the spiny green ribbed stem segments that are of primary interest from a landscape or garden perspective.

This is a relatively low maintenance plant, and usually looks its best without pruning, although it will tolerate pruning. Gardeners should be aware of the following characteristic(s) that may warrant special consideration;

- Invasive
- Spiny
- Self-Seeding

Black Bells is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Mass Planting
- Rock/Alpine Gardens
- Border Edging
- General Garden Use
- Container Planting

Planting & Growing

Black Bells will grow to be about 8 inches tall at maturity, with a spread of 24 inches. Its foliage tends to remain low and dense right to the ground. It grows at a slow rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for approximately 10 years. As an evegreen perennial, this plant will typically keep its form and foliage year-round.

This plant does best in full sun to partial shade. It prefers dry to average moisture levels with very well-drained soil, and will often die in standing water. It is considered to be drought-tolerant, and thus makes an ideal choice for a low-water garden or xeriscape application. This plant should not require much in the way of fertilizing once established, although it may appreciate a shot of general-purpose fertilizer from time to time early in the growing season. It is not particular as to soil pH, but grows best in poor soils. It is somewhat tolerant of urban pollution. This species is not originally from North America, and parts of it are known to be toxic to humans and animals, so care should be exercised in planting it around children and pets. It can be propagated by division.

Black Bells is a fine choice for the garden, but it is also a good selection for planting in outdoor pots and containers. It is often used as a 'filler' in the 'spiller-thriller-filler' container combination, providing the canvas against which the thriller plants stand out. Note that when growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.