

GARDEN SPOT

# Mosses thrive in rock gardens



MARTY FIGLEY

It's always exciting to meet a new plant and I recently was introduced to several at the recent Metropolitan Detroit Landscape Association/Meadow Brook Garden Show.

In the rock garden installed and maintained by Ray Wiegand's Nursery Inc. (where the trains entertain), assistant wholesale manager Rick Born pointed out Irish moss and Scottish moss. The nursery is at 47747 Romeo Plank Road, Macomb (call (810) 286-3658).

These plants aren't really mosses, but are *Sagina sublostusa*, false mosses that take heavy traffic, are excellent planted between bricks or stepping stones and make a significant addition to the various plants in a rock garden.

"Both of these plants like an acidic soil, 6 to 6.2 pH, and grow in the sun, which is important," Born said. "Although they are late to re-leaf in the spring, they are evergreen (Irish is dark green and Scottish is pale green), they're worth the wait. These 'mosses' only need pruning for esthetic purposes."

Born did caution me that when these plants are grown under ideal conditions they could be quite invasive, although they are easily controlled.

"We have been growing these plants in the nursery for at least six years and find that they are excellent plants."

True mosses grow normally in the woods and need shade. This variety of *Sagina* thrives in the sun and loves sand. Drainage is important and although it loves moisture it must dry out before giving it a thorough soak — 1-1/2 inches deep every two days. Although fertilization isn't necessary it may appreciate an occasional spray of muracid.

### Other varieties

Several sedum, *Crassulaceae*, varieties are also important in the rock garden scene and also prefer a sunny site. One especially is *S. kamtschaticum*.

"You could play football on it and it won't bother it."

It has proved to be quite successful and is a particularly attractive sedum. The plant grows only five inches tall with white-margined green leaves. It flowers in the summer with orange-yellow blossoms.

There are many other low-growing sedums and Wiegand's Nursery has had good luck with three of them. They are all *S. spurium*. The first variety, "Red Carpet," has red foliage and pink flowers; the second, "Dragonblood," has red foliage and white flowers, and *S. spurium tricolor*, sometimes called the Christmas sedum, has foliage that is red, green and white.

Other sedums that may be of interest are *S. acre*, a vigorous, evergreen species that grows only two inches high and has bright yellow flowers in the summer. Another perennial is *S. dasyphyllum*, with grayish-green oval foliage on pinkish-gray stems.

### Recommended reading

A good book about plants suitable for the rock garden will guide you in the proper selection for your growing conditions. Two of the latest offerings are both published by Timber Press. They are "Cushion Plants for the Rock Garden," Duncan Lowe (\$29.95), and "Rock Garden Plants of North America," edited by Jane McGary (\$49.95).

"Cushion Plants for the Rock Garden" details both easy-to-grow and more demanding varieties of these plants. Information about the survival tactics



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Rock fans: The dark green Irish moss and light green Scottish moss are excellent in a rock garden.

of 87 plants for pots, troughs, plunge

See FIGLEY, D2

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