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lewisia



Photos courtesy of Nurserymen's Exchange, Inc.

BOTANICAL NAME

Lewisia spp. (lew-ISS-ee-uh)

COMMON NAMES

Bitterroot, Cliff maids, Siskiyou *Lewisia*

DESCRIPTION

Lewisias are 6-inch-tall plants with small, attractive flowers and long, blade-shaped leaves that are succulent in appearance. The dark green leaves are arranged in rosettes. *Lewisias* are known as rock-garden plants but are growing in popularity as houseplants.

COLORS

Lewisias are available in hues of red, pink,

magenta, orange, gold, yellow, apricot, white and cream. The blossoms are often striped or bicolored.

CONSUMER LIFE

Each bloom cycle will last for several weeks. With proper care and favorable conditions, the plants can bloom several times a year. The plants can survive for years, depending on the environment.

AVAILABILITY

Lewisias bloom naturally in late spring and early summer. They usually are available from local growers. Order in advance to ensure availability.

Lewisia spp.—Bitterroot, Cliff maids, Siskiyou *Lewisia*

notable species

- *L. cotyledon* - This is the most popular species. A showy *L. cotyledon* hybrid is the 'Sunset' strain, which consists of several cultivars in vibrant hues including white, pink, yellow and apricot.
- *L. tweedyi* - This species has 6-centimeter-wide apricot blooms.



Lewisia spp.
Bitterroot, Cliff maids, Siskiyou *Lewisia*

in-store and consumer care

LIGHT Bright, indirect light is best for *Lewisia* plants displayed indoors. Full sun can be tolerated outdoors.

WATER Keep the soil moist at all times during the growing season, but water sparingly during the winter. Overwatering can cause root or crown rot.

TEMPERATURE Cool to average warmth is best for displaying *Lewisias*. Do not refrigerate them because sudden drops in temperature may result in wilt and blossom drop. Keep the plants cool in winter.

HUMIDITY The plants will do best in areas with moderate humidity. Do not mist *Lewisias*' leaves.

FERTILIZER Feed the plants every three weeks during the growing season with a high phosphorus or bloom fertilizer.

SOIL *Lewisia* plants prefer sandy, well-drained soil. A mixture of equal parts soil,

sand, pea-gravel and good compost is best.

GROOMING Cut *Lewisia* plants back when they have finished flowering to remove faded flowers and leaves. The plants naturally stay fairly compact and neat.

REPOTTING The plants can be repotted in the spring.

ETHYLENE SENSITIVITY *Lewisias* are not sensitive to ethylene gas.

quality checklist

BLOOMS Remove florets from the stems as they fade.

FOLIAGE Avoid plants that show signs of wilt, rot, mold or yellowing.

PESTS AND DISEASES *Lewisias* are relatively trouble free. Watch for red spider mites on indoor plants, and control them with insecticidal soap.

fun facts

WHAT'S IN A NAME *Lewisias* were named in honor of Capt. Meriwether Lewis, a leader of the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804-1806. The specimens collected by Capt. Lewis were sent to the The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia as dried roots and surprised the researchers by blooming, giving rise to the species name "*rediviva*."

FAMILY *Lewisias* are members of the *Portulacaceae*, or purslane, family. Relatives include *Portulaca* (purslane, moss rose), *Claytonia* (spring beauty) and *Montia* (miner's lettuce).

HOME SWEET HOME In the United States, *Lewisia* plants are native to Washington, Oregon, California, Montana, Colorado and Arizona. They also are native to the Sagebrush Plains and Alpine areas of British Columbia, Canada. **sfr**



Some information provided by:
The House Plant Expert, Book Two
by Dr. D.G. Hessayon
Daves Garden, <http://davesgarden.com>
North American Rock Garden Society
www.nargs.org
Britannica, www.britannica.com

Reach "Blooming Plant of the Month" writer Steven W. Brown, AIFD, at sbfloral@aol.com or (415) 239-3140.