

Ghost Plant is a Solid Presence in Fall Containers

November 9, 2009 by [Hilda Brucker](#) (Edit)

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Photo: Flickr

I can't remember exactly when, or from where, I acquired ghost plant, but I've had it for many years. And to be honest, I can never remember its proper name, so last night I did an Internet search for it — *Graptopetalum paraguayense*.

My impromptu search also turned up the information that ghost plant is only winter hardy in zones 9 and 10, meaning it survives temperatures no lower than 20 to 25 degrees. *Really?* Hmm... I've been growing it in containers in Atlanta (zone 7) for maybe ten years now. And I know we've had plenty of clear, cold nights when the mercury has plunged into the low teens during that time, so I think the conventional wisdom about

this plant is wrong. I can tell you that I leave it outside year round, and it looks great all winter.

Here's a shot I took last February. Ghost plant is cascading down the side of a strawberry pot that's planted with blue pansies and some miscellaneous sedum. It sits on my kitchen porch in the western sun. In the summer I replace the pansies with portulaca, or sometimes gomphrena.



Photo: H. Brucker

I personally think ghost plant is one beautiful succulent. It forms grayish-green rosettes that shimmer with subtle highlights of pink and aqua, almost like a mother-of-pearl finish. And it's prolific. It multiplies much more fruitfully than hen-and-chicks ever has for me. A single rosette will put out long stems that form ever more rosettes, spilling over the sides of pots to make a nice display. (I've never grown ghost plant in the ground, but it probably works well in a dry climate and well drained soil.)

If you jostle ghost plant or bump into it, you're likely to knock off a petal or two. This is a plant that comes undone easily. Just pick up the fallen bits and lay them against the potting soil in your container. Each petal will form a tiny rosette at one end, just like in the photo, and that rosette will grow to full size and put down roots — ensuring you'll have plenty of passalong plants to spread around the neighborhood.



Photo: H. Brucker

So what to make of the conflicting hardiness information I'm throwing at you? Here's what I think: If you live in zone 7 or the warmer parts of zone 6, maybe ghost plant will turn out to be as reliably perennial for you as it has been for me. And even if you live in a colder climate, why not grow ghost plant as a three-season annual? Whether it turns out to be hardy to temperatures in the teens or the 20s is irrelevant, as long as you overwinter a few rosettes indoors. Then, you can use ghost plant as "bookends" to your growing season, the same way you use pansies during the cold days of early spring and late fall. The only difference is that ghost plant won't melt away for you when the warm weather arrive!