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## Aptenia cordifolia | Plantz Africa

### Introduction



The glossy succulent leaves and bright magenta pink flowers are distinctive characteristics of *Aptenia cordifolia*. It is a well-known groundcover or creeping plant.

### Description

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*Aptenia cordifolia* is an evergreen and fast-growing succulent, often a short-lived perennial, 250 mm high. The roots are fleshy and thick. The succulent stems are four-angled or rounded, 600 mm long, and grow flat on the ground. Bladder or water cells are closely arranged on the surfaces of the stems and shine in the sunlight. The green leaves are fleshy, flat, heart- to oval-shaped, 60 x 25 mm long, and are widely spaced in pairs or singularly arranged. Water cells are scattered on the leaf surface.



Flowers are purple to red, shiny, small to medium, 15 mm wide and borne singly or in clusters on short flower stalks. Terminal flowers are found in the forks of the branches. The flowers are self-fertilized and flowering occurs from spring to autumn (August to April). Flowers open during the bright hours of the day (midday to early afternoon).

The fruit is a capsule with four lidless chambers (locules). Each chamber contains one large black-brown seed with a rough surface.



The genus *Aptenia* belongs to the Mesembryanthemaceae or vygie family. The family name is derived from the Greek word, *mesembria*, meaning midday, and *anthemom*, meaning flower, referring to the flowers that open in the afternoon (noon).

The genus name, *Aptenia* N.E.Brown, is derived from the Greek word, *apten*, meaning wingless, and refers to the wingless seed. The species name, *cordifolia* is derived from the in Latin words, *cordi*, meaning heart, and *folium*, meaning leaf.

This genus is endemic to South Africa and consists of four species, *Aptenia geniculiflora*, *A. haeckeliana* and *A. lancifolia*. They all occur in the summer rainfall regions of South Africa.

*Aptenia geniculiflorais* is an erect deciduous perennial with 4-angled branches. It bears white to pale yellow flowers and occurs on dry flats in scrambling bush found in Namibia to Eastern Cape.

*Aptenia haeckeliana* is a succulent perennial, grows flat on to the ground, and the stems are 4-angled. The leaves are flat; flowers are pale yellow. It occurs in karroid flats from Port Elizabeth to Alexandria.

*Aptenia lancifolia* (purple aptenia) is a perennial succulent, 300 mm high. It bears magenta flowers with narrow or lance-shaped leaves and occurs in the Northern Cape.

The shiny, bright flowers attract butterflies, bees and other insects. It is a drought-resistant plant, tolerates high rainfall and irregular watering.

*Aptenia cordifolia* is a well-known groundcover. It is an ideal plant for coastal gardens as it tolerates sea spray and grows in sandy soil. It can be used in rockeries or outcrops, terraced slopes and along roadside embankments. It requires full sun or semi-shade; it can be planted underneath trees. If grown in unfavourable conditions, the plant will die.

*Aptenia cordifolia* is easily grown from seed and cuttings. Sow seed in summer. The plant can be divided and runners can be planted directly into the ground. Before planting, prepare the garden bed by digging over the soil; add compost and a slow-release fertilizer. Once established it requires less water. Trim or prune the plant to maintain its shape. The plant can become weedy.