Mesembryanthemum cristallinum - New Crop Summary & Recommendations

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Mesembryanthemum, otherwise known as the ice plant, fig marigold (after the edible fruits), frost plant, diamond plant, mid-day flowers, and dew plant, is a very unique plant grown mainly for it’s beautiful daisy like flowers and it’s edible fruits. Mesembryanthemum is commonly referred to as the ice plant because the leaves have many tiny membrane bladders on them that look like ice crystals at a distance. It is also called the dew plant because the bladders could also look like dew. The ice plant has very distinctive leaves that not only possess the sap but also have a succulent texture and are wider towards the ends in a tear drop shape. The flowers have a long 12-15inch stalk and the colors of the flowers range from red to orange to yellow, pink, purple, and white.

The ice plant is extremely easy to grow. The leaves are alternate, ovate to spatulate. Each flower has thin numerous petals, five sepals, and many short stamens. With almost two hundred seeds I planted I had 99% germination. Because the ice plant is native to the Southern hemisphere it favors hot dry conditions and salt marshes. However, the plant does not produce many seeds and they are hard to harvest. That is the biggest problem with the plant. The ice plant also emits salts to the soil around it so it is not invaded by any other plants. It is also very aggressive in its own habitat.

Mesembryanthemum is hardy to zone 9 and is frost tender. In its native habitat it is a perennial but the more north it travels the more annualized it becomes. It also blooms from March to October. It flowers a proliferously from July through September. Each flower is hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs) and are pollinated by Insects.
A very interesting note about this fig marigold is that the fruit and the leaves are edible. The leaves are boiled and used like spinach. The leaves have an acidic flavor with a salty tang. They can also be pickled or used as a garnish.
Mesembryanthemum could very well be used as a short term annual here in northern Minnesota as long as it is kept from freezing. It is a very unique flower that could be enjoyed in a small bed outside for the summer or indoors with other cactus like plants for the entire winter.