

The Central Spine

THE CENTRAL SPINE

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Why do I grow plants from seeds? Why, indeed, when I think of the frustration of no germination or gratifying germination only to see those brave little nubbins mowed down by damp off or greedy little insects.

To me there is an excitement in inspecting newly seeded pots, watching for signs of the emerging cotyledons. Sometimes I'm astounded to see little cacti developing in a matter of days. Sometimes I've given up on a batch of seeds and reseeded in the same pot to be surprised with a double crop, then trying to remember what it is as I have lost the first tag.

I have tried to grow many different kinds of plants from seeds. Many years ago when we lived in Cincinnati I grew, as many people have done with avocados, a mango from a seed given to Stan by a co-worker. I've planted grapefruit seeds and had window-sill citrus in the Mid-West.

When we lived in Schenectady, Stan devised an indoor greenhouse with growlights and I started to try cactus seeds. The only place I could find succulents in New York at that time (late '60's) was at the variety store. Park's seed catalog was the only source I knew of then for cactus seeds.

After our move to Arizona, I gave up for a while growing succulents from seeds since I was able to buy small inexpensive plants at KMart. But then I started to see plants not available for sale and I again started to experiment with seed.

Many of my plants produce copious seeds which germinate around the mother plant (and in neighbor pots). I have found *parodias* very easy to grow after they have germinated this way. I also have five nickle and dime size *Aztekium Ritteri* which germinated this way about six years ago. The seeds of *Aztekium* are like a fleck of black pepper, so tiny!

Strombocactus disciformis also has very tiny seeds, but I found they grow very well in a separate pot. When I found fresh seeds on a plant I would throw them in with other young strombos so I have a pot of various sizes doing quite well. They get watered regularly all summer like everything else.

Now that I have a large collection I have found it interesting to pollinate my own plants and have grown some rare plants this way. *Euphorbia symmetrica*, *sarcocaulon burmannii* and *haworthia maughanii* are some examples. The *H. maughanii* are so slow, but after a year they are showing definite signs of the cylindrical cut off tips they will eventually have. Other *haworthias* are not so slow. In little over a year, *H. venosa* v.

oertendahlia have made sturdy plants big enough for three inch pots.

Of course, in a greenhouse one gets a variety of surprises popping up in pots. I've found anacampseros, donstenias, euphorbias and even cacti wandering far from their parents.

In our yard we have many trees I've started from seeds. there are mature blue palo verdes from seeds collected in McDowell Mt. Park, Acacia Farnesiana from seeds the Hennesseys gave me back in the '70's, a Chilean mesquite from seed of a tree from the Rubicek's yard in Tucson (collected on a CACSS bus trip), young Acacia stenophyla which Mike Gallagher grew from seed. We have another acacia (maybe Shafneri) grown from seeds our youngest son found on his way home from school. I also have very small boojum trees from seeds collected a few years ago by our daughter and son-in-law on a Baja trip.

We have aloes and nolinias from seeds sent to the Desert Botanical Garden from Switzerland on an exchange many years ago. Our CACSS had the opportunity to choose some seeds which were being discarded in a house cleaning.

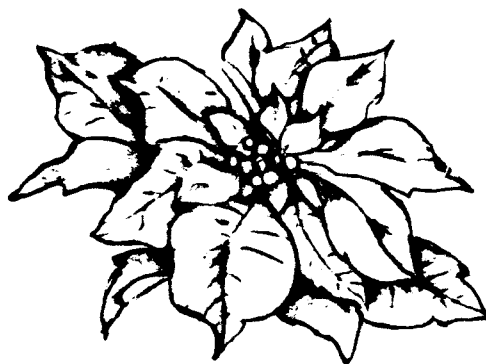
One year a friend and I sent to South Africa to purchase lithops seed from Desmond Cole. Lithops grow very easily from seeds. It's been really neat to see these babys grow up and flower.

I have a bunch of Bursera microphyla which I have grown from seed and am attempting to grow very slowly, thus bonsai-ing them. I've been amazed at how tough these little trees are.

As you can see, there is hardly a seed I don't like. Well, maybe the exception would be vegetables. I grew some patio tomatoes in pots last year but I became so angry at the birds and insects that I found it much more satisfactory to forego the practical food crop.

There has to be a time to say I have grown enough, but I just can't resist trying another tree or shrub or cactus or...

Joan Skirvin



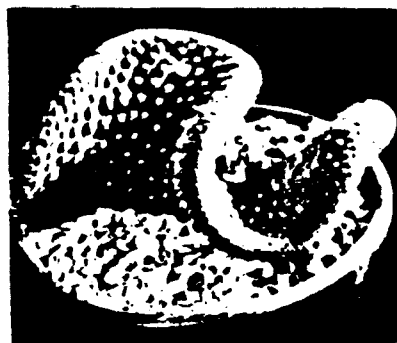
THE CLASSIC CACTUS: (From: THE BEAVER TALE, CACTUS & SUCCULENT SOC. S. NEVADA)

Somehow I never thought about cactus being called "classic" but I guess in their own way, they really are for connoisseurs and beginners alike really delight in this natural sculpture from the desert. Hopefully, our knowledge of cacti does not stop at a long, prickly stalk in the desert, and we know of the wondrous discovery of a new world of shape and mystery that awaits us. There are many thousand members of the Cacti Family, and their diverse and beautiful qualities are really astounding. Cacti can produce some of the most gorgeous blossoms of all the flowering plants. In the Mammillarias especially the blooms usually are formed of many tight flowers encircling the plant. The flowers on some of smaller cacti can be larger than the plant itself, while the orchid cactus in particular shoots out a large brilliant flower of white, red, orchid, yellow etc. Cacti especially are known for their toughness and durability. They can live in a drier atmosphere with less care than almost any other plant, so if you are absent-minded (as I am occasionally) or just plain absent for a time, there is no big worry as they store enough water to hang in.

Long ago when the climate changed from wet to dry and our present desert areas were formed, these plants evolved stems to hold water, and spines to reduce evaporation. This natural adaptation resulted in the great durability and stark, sculptural beauty of these plants. Look at the star-shaped *Astrophytum* (Bishop's Cap) or the dramatic - *Lophocereus schottii* monstrous (monstrous totem pole). Other cacti like the *Ferocactus* (fire barrel) and the *Cleistocactus* (silver torch) are prized for their brilliant colors and unusual arrangement of their spines. Although most cacti come from desert areas, some like the *Aporocactus* (rattail cactus) and the night-blooming *Cereus* grow on trees in tropical rain forests in their natural habitat. Nature combines form and function in these amazing plants and comes up with natural sculpture to add its magnificent charm to our world.



In the formation of many of the different species of cacti from time to time there appears a crested or monstrous growth which could be referred to as abnormal growth. Some of us get all "hung up" on this abnormal growth, and look at it as a really prize specimen. The formations are seldom alike, even in a particular species. I find myself drawn to these special variations more and more. Anyone can have a cactus in its normal growth, but not everyone could have a crested one exactly like yours.



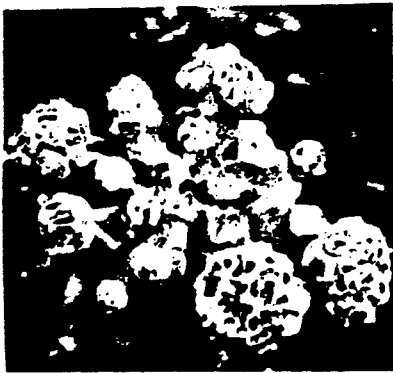
OPUNTIA
MICRODASYNS CREST



MAMMILLARIA CARMENAE
CREST



LOBIVIA DENSISPINA
CREST



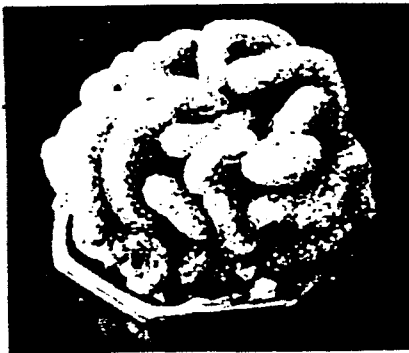
ASTROPHYTUM MYRIOSTIGMA
MONSTROSE



MAMMILLARIA
ELEGANS CREST



Pygmaocereus densiaculeatus crest



Mammillaria elongata crest



NOTOCACTUS OTTONIS
CREST

MONSTROSE PLANTS

It is called a freak
or a monstrose
Where there should be
one appendage
There are four.
It is different
Unique
Budding into deformity.
If it were human
We would gasp and
turn away.
But it is a plant
And we sigh
And say
It is beautiful.

Lowell McMillan



WHAT WOULD A BUNCH OF CACTUS NUTS WANT FOR CHRISTMAS?

-a greenhouse (50' x 100') (It pays to think big.)
-for my plants to grow. (Now, is that too much to ask?)
-time and space...more time to spend with my plants...and more space to put them.
-a robot to help me to repot plants and clean up and help take care of them
-an arboretum in my back yard....maybe like the one Col. Boyce Thompson had in his backyard.
-my greenhouse to be rid of all mealy bugs, and never to see one again.
-land to go with my greenhouse...room to expand.



THE GENUS ALOE ENCOMPASSES OVER 350 SPECIES, THE GREAT MAJORITY BEING NATIVE TO THE SOUTHERN AREAS OF AFRICA. THE GROUP TO BE DISCUSSED IN THIS ARTICLE ARE THE SOFT-LEAVED, SMALLER SPECIES GENERALLY CALLED THE "GRASS ALOES".

UNLIKE MANY OF THEIR LARGER COUSINS, THESE PLANTS CAN BE GROWN IN SMALL CONTAINERS, WITH MATURE FLOWERING SPECIMENS EASILY HANDLED IN GALLON POTS. MANY CAN ALSO BE GROWN IN THE GROUND IN THE PHOENIX AREA. IN CONTAINER CULTIVATION THEY HAVE FEW SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS OTHER THAN GOOD DRAINAGE AND ADEQUATE WATER AND FERTILIZER, AND WILL OFTEN FLOWER OVER LONG PERIODS OF TIME. WHEN GROWN IN THE GROUND, THE DRAINAGE REQUIREMENT IS ESSENTIAL, AND SOME SPECIES LIKE A.

KNIPHOFIODES, MODESTA, OR INCONSPICUA WILL FORM A SORT OF UNDERGROUND "BULB" OF LEAF BASES FROM WHICH NEW LEAVES WILL GROW AFTER THE OTHERS HAVE DIED BACK EACH YEAR. ALSO, AS MIGHT BE SURMISED FROM THE GROUP NAME, THESE PLANTS GENERALLY GROW AMONG GRASSES WHICH PROVIDE SHADE, SO THEY WILL SELDOM SURVIVE OUR CLIMATE IN FULL SUN DURING THE SUMMER.

ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO PRECISE GEOGRAPHICAL SEPERATION, THE GROUP IS GENERALLY DIVIDED INTO 2 GROUPS, THE SOUTHERN TEMPERATE CLIMATE GROUP WHICH USUALLY HAVE CAPITATE FLOWERS (THE FLOWERS FORM A HEAD ON THE TIP OF THE INFLORENCE), AND A MORE NORTHERLY, TROPICAL CLIMATE GROUP THAT USUALLY HAVE CYLINDRIC-ACUMINATE FLOWERS (ELONGATED AND TAPERING TO A POINT) AND GENERALLY REQUIRE MORE WATER THAN THE OTHER GROUP.

UNLIKE MOST OF THEIR LARGER COUSINS, MANY GRASS ALOES HAVE DISTICHOUS LEAVES (ARE ARRANGED IN 2 VERTICAL RANKS) AND RETAIN THE CHARACTERISTIC TO MATURITY. SOME IN THIS GROUP INCLUDE PARVIFLORA, ALBIDA, MINIMA, LINEARIFOLIA , HLANGAPIES, COOPERI, HAZELIANA, OR WILDII. AND ONE, A.BALLII FROM ZIMBABWE, EVEN IMITATES THE LARGER A.SUPRAFOLIATA IN STARTING WITH DISTICHOUS LEAVES WHICH LATER FORM A ROSETTE IN MATURITY.

THE RANGE OF FLOWER COLORS IS VARIED, FROM THE WHITE OF ALBIDA, PINK OF MINIMA OR MYRIACANTHA, YELLOW OF KRAUSSII OR INTEGRA, TO THE REDS INCLUDING VERECUNDA AND SOUTPANSBERGENSIS AND NUBIGENA. WITH MANY OF THE PLANTS HAVING MACULATE (SPOTTED) LEAVES, THEY ARE ALWAYS ATTRACTIVE PLANTS

THE MAJOR DRAWBACK TO THIS GROUP IS THE POOR AVAILABILITY OF PLANTS IN NURSERIES. THEY CAN BE GROWN FROM SEED AS WITH MOST ALOES, BUT I HAVE LITTLE EXPERIENCE WITH GETTING THIS GROUP TO SET SEED. THE OTHER, AND PROBABLY PREFERABLE METHOD, IS BY OFFSETS FROM THE PLANTS THEMSELVES. SOME, SUCH AS A. MICROCANTHA AND MINIMA, RARELY OFFSET; BUT MOST FREELY SUCKER, WITH A. THOMPSONIAE PROBABLY THE MOST PROLIFIC. THESE OFFSETS CAN BE EASILY ROOTED, AND WITH A LITTLE TLC YOU ARE ON YOUR WAY !

Michael Gallagher

