

CENTRAL SPINE

OCTOBER 2000 NEWSLETTER OF THE

CENTRAL ARIZONA

CACTUS AND SUCCULENT SOCIETY

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

SMITTEN BY SANSEVEIRIAS
BY SUE HAKALA

The heat has let up, stimulating almost everything to start growing. A lot of cactus seed sprouted in the parents' pots: many *Notocactus*, *Frailea*, *Turbincarpus*, and even *Mammillaria schumannii*, two plants.

I find that, from the time it cools down in the late summer even a little at night, the plants put on at least half their annual growth in the months remaining before cold weather. So, I fertilize more, water a lot, and repot things that need to be actively growing for repotting. The books say to slow your plants down in August in preparation for the winter, but remember they were written by people in Europe or other Arctic climates. We have a solid 2 months left in our growing season.

I'm still having trouble with curve-billed threshers; they figured out how to push open the seams of the bird netting on my patio. The ground squirrels aren't causing so much trouble any more. And, the mealy bugs seem to be gone after a whole-collection Orthere party. I'm going to try Sue Hakala's suggestion of putting *Disystox* granules in the potting soil as I repot.

Our volunteers staffed an information booth at the Boyce-Thompson Arboretum Landscape Festival on Saturday, October 14. We gave out much information and many club membership brochures. We hope to see new faces at the October meeting. Many thanks to Carol and Maury Clapp, Jo Davis, Doug Dawson, Janet Hazlett, Alan Rinstone, Henry Triesler Jr.

The weekend of October 14-17 also saw the Western Regional Master Gardener's Convention in Mesa. The DBG was represented by an informational booth in the exhibit area. Kent Newland, who recently spoke to us on using color in the landscape, gave a talk on the plants of Baja California. I gave a talk on growing cactus for food and fruit, which included a big plug for the CACSS and the CSSA.

Bring plants into the October silent auction. The date is Sunday, October 29. This is how your club raises more than half its annual budget. We are pleased to have some plants donated by Harvey Lobe, former proprietor of Fancy Plants in California. We are the recipients of an *Agave americana mediopicta alba* and several *Jaemanthus albifloss* offsets.

Leo A. Martin

Sansevierias are those hardy plants you see growing in the dark areas of bars or in the inner courtyard of a mall where the sun never shines. Sometimes their pots become ashtrays and the soil is allowed to get as hard as a rock. Most gardeners have been underwhelmed by them. Many call them mother-in-law's tongue; perhaps that's why no one wants them around. Sansevierias are, in fact, amazingly tough and beautiful plants.

To correct a misconception about sansevieria, let's start with the pronunciation. Say: *san-sev-ee-AIR-ee-a*, not *san-se-VAIR-ee-a* as our lazy lexicon suggests. Sansas, as their admirers know them, are members of the Agave family, and most come from Africa, with a few from India and Asia.

WHY GROW THEM? You can touch them, stroke them, admire them up close or from a distance without having to give them enormous amounts of time and energy. They will look green and lush even in the worst part of the summer. Their white bloom consists of small flowers that open in succession on a short spike throughout the spring, summer and fall (depending on the species), sweetly scenting the night. Sansas generally look cheery and healthy all the time. They come in various sizes, shapes, textures, and a variety of colors. They can grow in almost any location, even a protected western exposure here in Phoenix. Perhaps most importantly, they will make you feel like you are the world's most fabulous gardener as they grow no matter what.

Another reason to grow sansas is the insects they attract: none. Yes, that's right, none.

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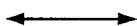
Upcoming Meetings

All on Sundays:



October 29

Silent Auction



November 18

Woody Minnich



December ????

Holiday Party

Plant of the Month October 2000: Stapeliads

Milkweed relatives in family Asclepiadaceae, including genera *Caralluma*, *Edithcolea*, *Hoodia*, *Huernia*, *Pseudolithos*, *Stapelia*, *Trichocaulon* among others. Native to warm regions of Africa and southwestern Asia, tolerating no frost except in a few species, they are accustomed to distinct seasonal temperature and water fluctuations. Many bloom now.

Most are spreading stem succulents without leaves; some are upright, solitary or clumping. Flowers are five-pointed stars, from enormous (*S. gigantea*, the second-largest flower on Earth) to tiny. There is often a strong to overpowering fragrance of rotting organic material to the flower, which is part of the attraction to the flies and to the connoisseur. The black sheep of the family smell like honey or roses. There is a fascinating central floral structure best appreciated under magnification; it ensures only proper pollinators will carry out pollination. Seeds are borne in 2-horned seed pods, in common with other Asclepiadaceae, and have parachutes.

In habitat the small creepers are found under shrubs and colored solid green, not the red often seen in plants receiving more sun in collections. The parachute-aided seeds blow around until they lodge in the debris at the foot of a shrub or tree. The stems creep out from there, forming a skirt under the tree or shrub.

The larger, more upright ones (*Hoodia*, *Edithcolea*, *Pseudolithos*, *Trichocaulon*) often occur exposed to full desert sun.

They respond to heavy watering during warm weather while nights are cool. Cut back on watering during the high heat for the small creepers, but don't let dry out completely or they will go dormant for a while. The full sun lovers enjoy regular water throughout the heat of the summer. And, the whole group responds very favorably to heavy doses of fertilizer. I have experimented and found they do best in deep pots (to prevent rapid drying out of the roots) and a mostly mineral soil mix, with up to 50% organic material.

When days and nights are cool, keep them bone dry, ensure excellent air circulation, and watch for mealybugs. I keep mine outside on a covered patio during the winter; they will all tolerate temperatures down to freezing if bone dry. On really cold nights I bring them inside. Water lightly during the winter if there are a few warm days in a row. Resume regular watering when daytime temperatures are routinely over 70 degrees.

If a plant isn't growing during warm weather, or if it looks poorly during cold weather, it has mealybugs, even if you can't see them. Treat it with a chemical; rubbing alcohol won't work on these plants, because the mealybugs hide beneath ground level where the roots emerge from the stem. Disystox in the potting soil or a regular systemic spray program (I use Orthene) is a must for these plants. If you can get Marathion (imidacloprid, a systemic analog of nicotine) use that.

They are very easy to grow from seed or cuttings.

Central Arizona Cactus and Succulent Society

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SANSEVIERIAS, CONTINUED

I've been growing over 30 different sansevierias, some for nearly 30 years. I have never seen an insect even walk across a leaf. There are no insect problems. Nothing to discuss. Nothing to spray. Nothing to pick off. Personally, I find this one of their finest qualities: they are always healthy!

HOW TO GROW Sansevierias, like all succulents, like a quick draining soil. I use potting soil (no bark or sticks, just soil), and about ½ pumice, with a little slow release fertilizer thrown in. I find the larger the pot, the larger they will grow—no mystery here. They will grow until they fill the pot. Then, they will split the pot. It doesn't matter what kind of pot: metal, clay, plastic, stone. When they want out, the relentless pressure that their tubers put out can crack through anything. It is best to replant them once a year, if for no other reason than to save your pots. They will love it, and will grow and grow and grow.

All of my plants are outside. Most are in pots in my shade house. They also are protected from winter frosts, and enjoy a little heat from the electric heater. Experimenting several years ago, I planted some on the north side of the northeast corner of my house. They aren't growing very fast, and don't look very robust. I planted some in a blazing southern exposure; they got sunburned, frosted, and don't look real healthy.

I cut them back this July as I felt sorry for them; then, in September, they started growing robustly. I planted a large variety of different sansevierias on the west end of my patio where they get lots of sun and reflection from concrete, but protection from frosts under the patio cover. This group is by far the happiest and healthiest. They are all watered slowly and deeply about every two weeks in the warm months, once a month in the cool months.

The only exceptions I've found to this are the yellow or variegated sansevierias. They don't like getting cold (generally below 50F), and they don't like direct sun. It seems that the plant tissues are more delicate and can't take extremes.

All plants are fertilized with rose food three times a year: late February, early June, and early September. You can fertilize more. They'll like it. Soon, though, you will have more sansevierias than you know what to do with. My potted plants are watered weekly in the warm months, about once a month in the cool ones.

PROPAGATING It's so easy to divide sansevierias. After getting the plant out of the pot (which is no small feat at times), use a large, sharp, sterilized (with alcohol) knife to cut apart the large tubers. Place the plants in the shade for 2-3 days while the cut dries up and calluses over. This is to seal the wound so that no bad stuff can enter the plant. Be sure to sterilize the knife before moving on to a new plant. Or, cut a leaf off a plant then just stick it in the soil. Water when the soil dries out, and, guess what, you'll have a new plant. Leaf cuttings do not work with variegated plants.

WHAT KIND SHOULD YOU GROW? Sansevierias have basically two kinds of leaves: soft = tropical home environment, hard = desert-like home environment. Let that be your guide in purchasing and deciding where to place them. Remember Sue's mantra: The right plant in the right place makes everyone happy.

In sunny locations try *S. singularis* which is dark green, hard like a tusk and about 15" tall; *S. kirkii* v. *pulchra* which has oval, slightly cupped, dark green leaves; *S. cylindrica* which can be 30 - 60 inches tall with a stiff erect fan shape.

For hanging baskets *S. parva* and *S. socotra* are handsome. Nice variegated ones are *S. cv. 'Gold Hahnii'* with buttery-yellow leaves and green stripes; speckled *S. guineensis*; snakeskin patterned *S. trifasciata*. Silver-colored ones include 'Moonshine', a beauty with broad but short leaves; and *S. silver trifasciata laurentii*.

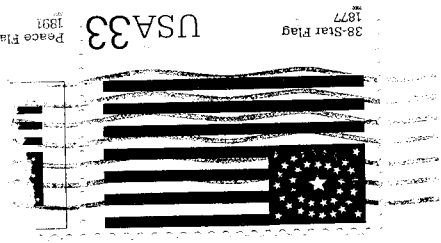
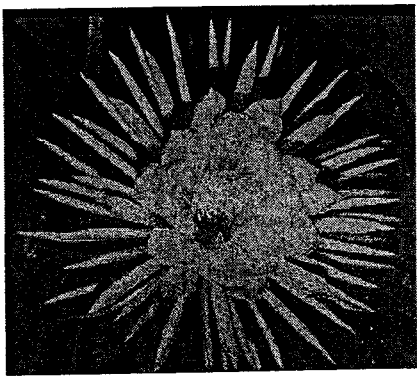
If I had to choose one as my all time favorite, I'd probably choose 'Lillian True.' The leaves are positively sensuous. They look like creamy mustard with beautiful lime to dark green stripes, tall and graceful. Always perky, but a bit bashful about the sun. Many people who aren't yet stricken with a love of Sansevierias covet this plant when they see it.

One of the most beautiful potted sansevierias I've ever seen is right in our backyard. Next time you are at the Desert Botanical Garden (which has a small and unremarkable sansevieria collection in the Succulent House), be sure to have a drink from the fountain on the Webster Auditorium patio. Look to your right. Tucked into the corner under the eave is an enormous pot, chock full of a spectacular plant.

WHERE TO BUY SANSEVIERIAS Every nursery, grocery, and discount store always have a few. Sometimes quite unusual and exotic ones can be found with the more typical. I always check these rather mundane locations as I never know what I might find. Even at major plant sales there are few sansevierias available, though sometimes you may find a new introduction not even named yet as I did at a recent Huntington Botanical Garden plant sale. Grisby Cactus Gardens in Vista, California, Singers' Growing Things in Northridge, California, and B & B Cactus Farm in Tucson have been good sources. Individual growers are always looking for good homes for pups and offshoots; just ask.

There's not much written about Sansevierias. Most succulent books begrudgingly give a paragraph to the entire genus. Don't let that detract you. These beautiful plants don't need an authority to tell you how to grow them. Just get one, they'll do the rest themselves, all the while looking alluring and captivating. Before you know it, you, too, will be smitten with Sansevierias.

BY SUE HAKALA



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and Succulent Society
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**Central Arizona Cactus and
Succulent Society Meets
Sunday October 29, 2000, 2 pm
Webster Auditorium,
Desert Botanical Garden**

This Month's Feature:

SILENT AUCTION!!!