
CENTRAL SPINE

Newsletter of the

CENTRAL ARIZONA CACTUS AND SUCCULENT SOCIETY

FEBRUARY, 2001

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT—

February 7 is considered the historical last frost day for Phoenix. We had a scare the night of February 8 when lows in the upper 20s were predicted but didn't materialize. Now, it seems, winter is over. I have been watering some of my plants through the winter on warm days, especially Baja California and winter-rain Andean cacti (*Copiapoa*, *Echinopsis*, *Lobivia*, some *Mammillaria*, *Neoporteria* and *Neochilenia*, *Tephrocactus*, *Trichocereus*.) *Mammillarias* have been blooming since late November, and *Ancistrocactus*, *Astrophytum*, *Frailea*, *Neoporteria*, and *Turbinicarpus* are all in bud or bloom now. If we have a few days in a row of warmer days and nights I'm going to water everything except the plants needing real heat for growth.

Note! Our March meeting has been moved to Sunday, April 1, at 1 p.m., in Webster. Strange day, strange time. This was necessary because the Desert Botanical Garden Spring Plant Sale was moved to March 23-25, the usual weekend for our show.

Tell all your friends! Dr. Ted Anderson of the Phoenix Desert Botanical Garden will be speaking on new understandings in cactus relationships and taxonomy.

Membership dues were announced in the December newsletter. Dues for 2001 are \$20 individual and \$25 family. If you have not yet renewed, mail your check to: CACSS, PO Box 8774, Scottsdale, AZ, 85252.

Note that dues will be prorated. If you join Jan-June, \$20/\$25. If you join July-Dec, \$10/\$12.50.

Our April show approaches fast. New show schedules will be available at the February meeting, as will be the entry cards. Please register for the show at the February meeting, if you can. If you cannot be there, let me know so you can be registered and receive cards and a show schedule. Bring in show plants April 4, Wednesday, from noon until 7 p.m.

Steve Southwell of RSVP Nurseries in San Jose, CA, was to speak to us this month. We just learned that he has been hospitalized and will be unable to travel for some time. Our thoughts are with him and his wife, Rowena.

Our speaker this month will be James Pickering of Tucson. James will speak on "The Virtues of Growing Discocactus in Small Spaces." He has a Web page at <http://www.brazilcacticult.org> with many photos of his plants, as well as cultural info. He specializes in smaller, easy-to-grow Brazilian cacti that bloom young and often. Surprisingly, *Discocactus* do well here in Arizona with just a little care. James will be giving all attendees a seedling *Discocactus* for their own collections.

Leo M

PLANT FAMILY OF THE MONTH: TERRESTRIAL BROMELIADS

Bromeliads are members of a large family of leaf-succulent plants, of which the best known is commonly called the pineapple, which belongs to the *Ananas* genus. The commercial pineapple is the *Ananas comosus*.



Ananas comosus var. *variegatus*¹

Bromeliads typically consist of a rosette of spined, stiff leaves, which produce colorful inflorescences from the middle of the rosette. While most are epiphytic, many are terrestrial. The most common, or often the easiest to grow, terrestrial Bromeliad genera are the *Dyckias* and *Hectias*, but one shouldn't omit *Cryptanthus* and *Ananas*. One general characteristic of all these bromeliads, however, is that you must wear thick gloves when transplanting or working with them!

Dyckias

Dyckias look like yuccas, agaves, and some other rosette-succulents. There are some 100 known species and many hybrids. Most hybrids come from *Dyckia fosteriana*—*Dyckia leptostachya*, resulting in deep maroon leaves all year.

Dyckias come in all colors and sizes. The leaves are typically stiff and spined in various shades of green rose, maroon, tan, and silver. Most come originally from central and southern Brazil but also from Paraguay, Bolivia, northern Argentina, and Uruguay.

These are mainly hardy plants that grow well in dry environments, although some do thrive in humid regions. Once established the *Dyckias* often spread out, but they can also be grown in pots. If in a pot, use a well-drained soil. All *Dyckias* love full sun to bright light.

One of the most difficult to grow is the previously rare *Dyckia marnier-lapostollei*. In habitat it is used to hot days and cool nights, but here in Arizona on the edge of my carport, mine gets morning sun and shaded afternoons and seems to love it.



Dyckia marnier-lapostollei of the Editor

Other well-known *Dyckias* in cultivation are:

- ☉ *Dyckia brevifolia*: green leaves in full sun with yellow flowers.
- ☉ *Dyckia fosteriana*: silvery green leaves that become bronze in full sun with deep yellow flowers.
- ☉ *Dyckia leptostachya*: maroon leaves with orange-red flowers.
- ☉ *Dyckia remotiflora*: gray-green leaves with deep orange flowers.
- ☉ *Dyckia choristaminea*: gray-green leaves, less spined than most, with yellow flowers. Rather a “dwarf” species compared to most.

Hectias

Hectias are very rugged heavily-spined, plants found in dry areas of Texas, Mexico, and northern Central America. There are some 40 known species. Most come from Mexico, thriving in dry scrub land conditions or on rocky cliffs. While they need less water than *Dyckias*, they are similar in all other respects (such as soil, growth conditions, and so on). The

flowers appear on branching inflorescences and are usually white or pink.

The most known species is *Hectia argentea*. It has long, silvery leaves and provides a spike of tiny white flowers.

Cryptanthus

This is a genus created in the 20th century, and they are also called *earth stars* due to their flattish form. They are generally small plants and come in a variety of colors. All have white flowers. These plants grows best in semi-shade and variegation is common.



*Cryptanthus fosteriana*¹

Sources

¹*Bromeliads* (Victoria Padilla), 1973

Growing Bromeliads (Ed. Barry W. Williams and Ian Hodgson), 1990.

Jim A. Davis, Edit.

SOILS AND POTS

Dirt is what you sweep up from under the furniture. Soil is what plants grow in.

Plants need something for their roots. Soil serves as an anchor, a food source, a water source, and sometimes as protection, in those plants that shrink beneath the ground during dry periods.

Looking around the world, we see different plants growing in different soils. At a given level of light, heat, and water, members of genus *Begonia* grow better in soil high in organic components rather than sand.

Lithops usually die quickly in rich soils. Paying attention to soils makes a big difference in your plants.

Some people try to grow plants in soil duplicating the natural environment. This isn't necessary, for pot growth is already unnatural. Despite differences in soils in nature, most plants can be grown in almost any soil mix if attention is given to water retention, nutrients, and pest avoidance. Another consideration is weight: We move our plants around, and a 5-gallon pot full of desert soil weighs a lot. We want a soil that has good drainage, retains some water but not too much, is composed of inexpensive, readily-available materials, and does not break down too fast.

Desert plants are adapted to living in poor soils that often are dry for long periods. But, many grow better with more water and nutrients than they receive in nature. The ideal for most of our desert plants is to stay moist for 5–7 days after watering during periods of active growth. Few like being wet for very long. Most desert plants require soils with a fairly high air content, as well. Roots need oxygen too.

The type of pot used makes a difference as well. Clay pots dry out faster than do plastic, glazed, or high-fired pots of the same size because water can evaporate through the clay, but not through plastic, glazing, or high-fired finishes. Larger pots stay moist longer than small pots. Evaporation depends on the surface area exposed, and a deeper pot will take longer to dry out than a shallower pot of the same diameter. A hole in the bottom is imperative unless you are growing water lilies.

When people talk about soils with good drainage, they refer to soils through which water drains rapidly, leaving the soil moist. One can be fooled. When one waters a pot of completely dry peat moss, the water pours out the drainage holes fast. But, because peat moss once dry won't take up water without prolonged soaking, the water will not reach any roots growing in the peat moss. If peat moss stays too wet, it turns into a

black mushy culture medium for fungus. These are some reasons why I don't use peat moss in my soil mixes. Many people do so very successfully; I think it requires more attention to your plants and more time spent watering.

Commercial-bagged cactus mixes are mostly peat moss, and I think these are just about the worst soils for beginners to use. Once dry (and they dry fast in our climate) the soil will never get wet again, and the plant will dry up even though the owner is watering regularly.

"Cactus mix" soils are used by many commercial growers. They are light, important when considering how many trays need to be moved around, and composed of inexpensive materials. These growers buy the components in bulk and mix the soils themselves, which is much cheaper than buying bagged "cactus mix." These growers look at their plants daily, and they never usually let their plants dry completely.

Good drainage is promoted by larger particles in the soil mix. Smaller particles retain more water. When you water a pot filled with silt, the water stays pooled on the surface for minutes to hours, and the silt stays moist a long time, at least days to a week. A pot of fine sand drains much faster and stays moist quite a while, but not as long as the silt. Coarse sand drains even faster and dries fast. A pot of large gravel retains almost no water and is dry within minutes to hours.

Most succulent hobbyists use soil mixes composed of some commercial potting soil, some gravel or pumice, and some garden soil. There are no magic mixes. Here in Phoenix plants in pots will do just fine in soil dug up from your garden.

Another good approach is mixing coarse sand from a wash with commercial potting soil, in a ratio around 3/4 mineral material to 1/4 potting soil. I grow all my *Ariocarpus*, *Ferocactus*, *Mammillaria* and Allies, and most *Opuntia* in pure wash sand. I use a little added potting soil for other cacti and most succulents. If I didn't have immediate access to a wash, I'd probably

use pumice instead, or keep a 5-gallon bucket and a small shovel in my truck for digging my own.

Leo A. M

A BOOK REVIEW

Landscape Plants for Dry Regions. Warren Jones & Charles Sacamano, Fischer Books, Tucson, AZ, (2000): 366 pp, Glossary, Index. (\$39.95)

This latest book to enter our library is dedicated to giving concise information about plants that grow well in the arid climate regions of the Southwest and elsewhere. The opening pages of the book have short essays on dry climate and its effects on plant growth. Landscaping tips are included with planting suggestions, watering routines, soil mixes, pruning and fertilizing. The main portion of the book is devoted to listing over 600 species of plants in alphabetical order. The selections include vines, trees, shrubs, groundcovers and succulents. Representative plants have been chosen from around the world and their inclusion is based upon their ability to survive in desert areas. Both authors are professional landscape designers and have spent many years in academia as professors of horticulture. They share many tips and suggestions that would improve all of our gardens.

Each plant is featured with the following information: Cold Hardiness, Landscape Value, Cultural Requirements, and Potential Problems. The plants are described, with common names, scientific names and family affiliation. Specific information is given about sun/shade requirements and propagation methods. The book is profusely illustrated with color pictures for each entry.

The entries for our native Southwestern plants are somewhat sparse compared to other dry regions. For example, there are 33 different kinds of Acacia trees, but only one *Echinocactus*; 20 kinds of Eucalyptus trees but only two *Ferocactus*; and neither Sedum nor *Haworthia* is presented. Neither cacti nor other succulents are well represented. It is impossible to expect one

book to have information about all of the plants in which we have an interest.

The splendid value of this book is as a reference for trees, shrubs and small plants that are readily adaptable to Arizona's climate. The material is presented concisely, in an easy-to-read format, and would be a valued addition to any library.

Reviewed by Muriel B, CACSS Librarian

MARCH MEETING IN APRIL

Due to the Spring Plant Sale and other DBG commitments for Webster Auditorium in March, the March meeting will be held on April 1 at 1 p.m.

IN MEMORIAM—JAMES JONES

Jim began volunteering at the Desert Botanical Garden in 1992. He was a regular Thursday Docent and Garden Ambassador who really enjoyed giving tours. As a Master Gardener and a CACSS member, he was the perfect person to research and write the Prickly Problems column in the Volunteers' *Gatherings* newsletter. Jim's background in Army logistics came in handy as he helped staff find ways to move visitors safely around during the Garden path renovations. He was fluent in Chinese and Greek, a Harvard professor, an Episcopal clergyman, and was twice-promoted to full colonel: once in the Army Infantry in WWII and as an Army Chaplain in Korea. We will miss his wonderful quips and jokes that always put life into perspective. Thank you, Jim

CENTRAL ARIZONA CACTUS AND SUCCULENT SOCIETY 2000

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Deadline for insertion in next issue: March 18, 2001.

Send insertions to: Jim D: pantenor@dancris.com

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CALENDAR

All meetings at 2 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

February 25	James Pickering
April 1 at 1:00 p.m.	Dr. Ted Anderson of the DBG.
April 4–8	Annual Plant Show
May 20	Awards & Silent Auction



*Dyckia altissima*¹

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