

CENTRAL SPINE

December, 2001

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

The Holiday Party and elections will be Sunday, December 9, in Webster Auditorium at the Desert Botanical Garden. This is our opportunity to dress up in our finest while enjoying each other's company. We can set up after eleven. We will plan on socializing and mingling at noon, followed by the election of officers, followed by the potluck meal. Jo Davis is coordinating the potluck. Please call her to coordinate what you will bring.

I heard rave reviews for Woody Minnich last month. Wish I could have been there. *Mammillaria* is his favorite cactus and it showed. Should we ask Woody back next year?



Mammillaria tetrandra

Photo by Jim A. Davis

I was in Mexico from November 9th to the 24th on a cycad tour (*Ceratozamia*, *Dioon*, *Zamia*) led by Jeff Chemnick of Santa Barbara. He is the cycad consultant to Lotusland and has been botanizing in Mexico—looking for cycads—for over 30 years. We started from Veracruz and traveled over 3,500 miles (5,631 km) through the states of Veracruz, Puebla, and Oaxaca. We stopped at many localities and saw many plants in habitat. I looked at cacti, *Echeverria*, and other succulents when I wasn't being watched, and even took photos of non-cycads. My slides turned out pretty well and I will be giving a talk to our club in March, 2002.

When I left it was in the 90s F with somewhat cool nights. Returning revealed that winter is here. In fact, I moved very tender plants two days after I returned because the previous night was so cold. It seems we didn't have fall this year. The winter-growing plants are springing into action.

For confirmed cactus growers it requires a certain amount of courage to soak a pot of soil with no foliage visible when the daytime temperature is under 60 F and nights in the 40s F. But that is what these plants like! Soon after such a watering South African bulbs poke new leaves through the soil and luxuriate in their good season. In habitat most see all their rain in the cool winter, maybe even with a little frost here and there. Summers are hot (though not quite so hot as here), sunny, and dry with no rain. Plants from within 20 miles (32 km) of the coast often receive water from fog condensation almost every night during spring and early summer. This is known as a Mediterranean climate, which occurs naturally only in the Mediterranean region, southwestern Africa, coastal southern California, Chile, and parts of coastal Australia.

We differ from that climate by having summer rain and much hotter summers. We are lucky here to have a manageable winter during which we can grow these plants outside (with minimal frost protection.) In colder parts of the U.S.A. it is tough to grow winter-growers without a greenhouse because they uniformly need excellent air circulation.

Our summers provide the challenge. None of these plants are accustomed to heat. The hottest it gets in the deserts of southwest Africa is in the 90s F; occasional days with hotter temperatures are rare exceptions. Some people here bring their plants into the house for a cool vacation away from the rain. Others move them to a shady area outside with cooler temperatures and rain protection.

If you are accustomed to growing plants in the summer and resting in the winter, try some plants from Mediterranean climates. You can extend your addiction to the whole year. Prominent succulent families from climates such as these are:

- ☉ Aizoaceae, the mesembs (*Aloinopsis*, *Argyroderma*, *Conophytum*, *Mestoklema*, *Odontophorus*)
- ☉ Aloaceae (*Aloe*, *Gasteria*, *Haworthia*)
- ☉ Asteraceae, the daisies (*Othonna* and *Senecio*)
- ☉ Crassulaceae (*Crassula*, *Echeveria*, *Sedum*, *Tylecodon*)
- ☉ Geraniaceae, the geraniums (*Monsonia*, *Pelargonium*, *Sarcocaulon*)

And, don't forget winter bulbs. These mostly don't need fertilizing, just water in the winter in deep pots, and give a dry summer rest. I stack the pots of dormant

bulbs in a closet over the summer. Most of these genera have incredibly beautiful and/or weird flowers.

Try some bulb species: *Gladiolus* (which are often strongly fragrant); *Ixia*; *Lachenalia*; *Lapeirousia*; *Massonia*; and *Moraea*. I buy seed from Silverhill Seed in South Africa

(<http://www.silverhillseeds.co.za>).

Leo A. Martin

Notice of Elections: Officers and Directors

The annual election will be held at the Holiday Party on December 9, 2001. Nominations will be taken from the floor for all offices and directors. If you wish to nominate somebody, please be sure you have asked them in advance and they are willing to run and serve. Feel free to nominate yourself!

We welcome enthusiastic people on the board.

2002 CSSA Regional Conferences

The CSSA Convention is held in odd years. In even years the various regions of the US hold regional conferences, usually on a weekend. These are great fun. The host clubs try to select inexpensive venues and speakers are usually fantastic. Mark your 2002 calendars for:

- ☉ Mid-America Conference, Kansas City June 7–9
 - ☉ Pacific Regional Conference, Seattle, July 26–28
- There will also be a Southeast Conference in Miami, and Sonoran IV in Tucson. Stay tuned for further details.

PLANT OF THE MONTH: *OTHONNA*

Mostly small to very small shrubs, this genus is in the daisy family, Asteraceae (sometimes called Compositae.) They all come from African winter-rainfall climates. Flowers are yellow bottle brushes much like those on dandelions, also in Asteraceae; some flower just before beginning their summer rest, and others flower after beginning growth in the fall. Quite a few have thick stems or even caudices, which explains a lot of their appeal to succulentophiles.



Othonna herrei

It is amazing to see a seemingly dead stick or brownish rock leaf out and grow in the space of a few days, but this show is repeated annually for *Othonna* growers.

Now is the time of active growth. Water thoroughly and heavily, not allowing the plants to dry completely. Give as much sun as possible in our winters but protect from frost. Fertilizer results in faster growth.

As nights warm up in spring *Othonna* will look stressed. Stop watering; let them go dormant for the entire summer. The leaves will be shed and the fashionable dead stick look will return. Put them someplace with good air circulation but no rain and no watering. Mine summer indoors, a dead stick collection on a high windowsill.

In the fall, sometime around early to mid October, when nights cool down, the plants may start growing on their own. If not, take them to their sunny winter home and give a good soaking. If they are ready to grow they will leaf out. If not, let the soil dry and try again in 10–14 days. When it is definitely cool they will grow.

I neither overpot nor underpot these plants; they have an average-sized root system. I prefer heavy clay soil because it needs to be watered much less often than do lighter mixes in order to keep evenly moist in the growing season. In fact, most of my winter-growing plants are in heavy clay. The drawback is that pots are heavier. Any soil may be used; *Othonna* is not picky.



Othonna euphorbioides

{*Othonna* pictures from *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Succulents* by Gordon Rowley.}

OFFICERS & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Deadline for insertion in the next issue of the *Central Spine*: January 10, 2002. Send insertions to Jim A. Davis (who has switched back to Earthlink) at: pantenor@earthlink.net or to him at P O Box 2875, Peoria, AZ 85380

Central Spine is the newsletter of the Central Arizona Cactus and Succulent Society. All opinions are those of respective authors. Publication herein does not imply that CACSS or any CACSS members agree with any statements published.

CALENDAR

December 9	Holiday Party & Elections (1 P.M.)
January 20	Ken Schutz, Director of the DBG, on the future of the DBG and on his trip to Kenya
February 24	Cesar Mazier of the DBG on Australia
March 24	Leo Martin talking on the Flora of Veracruz and Oaxaca, Mexico
April 3-7	Annual Plant Show
May 19	
June 30	
July 28	
August 25	
September 29	

Meetings are at 2 P.M. in Webster Auditorium, unless otherwise noted. All meetings include a question and answer session on growing plants.

Internet Plant Groups/Clubs/Lists (E-mail)

Here are some plant clubs that I belong to. If any one belongs to others, please pass on the e-mail addresses to the Editor. For all of these you can either receive member e-mail one at a time or set it up for receiving batches of messages (usually once a day).

All have the same address except for the group name, which appears after the group field in the address:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ADENIUM>

/group/Aloe

/group/Crown_of_Thorns

/group/Euphorbia_etc

/group/Fat-Plants

/group/MESEMBS

Just go to the site and sign up, or you can view some information without signing up. Some groups have enormous picture files available to members, and you also can upload your pictures.



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