

## How do you enlarge your collection?

Leo A. Martin

One thing we all have in common is NOT ENOUGH PLANTS. We know it's true, though often our spouses, greenhouses, windowsills, basements, patios, pocketbooks, common sense, etc. say otherwise. Some people have a list of what they will allow themselves to buy next, whereas some are impulse buyers. Some people are in a hurry and want the biggest specimens possible of everything they buy. Some people enjoy starting from seed or small seedlings, feeling like cheaters if they buy a plant more than a quarter as old as they are. (I'm in that category.) Some people want to collect all members of a given genus (don't try this with *Mammillaria*). Some people can't afford to spend much on their hobby. (Joining a cactus and succulent society is great if you're on a limited budget because so many of your new friends will be happy to share cuttings, offsets, and extra plants with you. It's well worth the membership fee.) Some people collect only things with big flowers, or white flowers, or fragrant flowers, or certain colored spines, or crested or monstrose, or with caudices, or things their friends can't grow, or things from certain deserts, or certain islands. You can see there are endless possible ways to categorize plants.

I'd like to suggest you start small. By this, I mean start from seed. Or, buy plants you're not too familiar with or haven't grown before in the smallest size you can find. This has several advantages:

- They take up less space in aggregate
- They cost less to buy-MUCH less
- You can afford many more plants this way
- Your live-in over-collection critic is less likely to notice a new plant in a one-inch pot than a blooming size saguaro
- You can learn on a cheap plant rather than a one-of-a-kind super-expensive monster
- The plant will more readily adapt to your situation when small than when in a 36" box
- You will get to identify many small things bought without nametags, and in the doing so you'll learn more about plants
- Often rarities are sold small and unlabeled, and you can find some nowhere else
- Many cacti bloom small and young, so you get fast results
- You will learn more about the plant's natural growth habits
- If you don't like the plant after a while, it's easier to give away something small and ugly than something large and ugly
- You can decide if you actually want it before you buy a big one

When I lived in St Louis, I bought several dozen of the smallest plants at the sale bench. They were in 3/4" plastic pots. They were 75 or 85 cents each. I moved them into 2" or 4" pots soon after buying them. I soon had lots of small cacti that bloom readily. Some of these tiny cacti include *Gymnocalycium baldianum* (with a flower bigger than the plant and more buds on the way), *G. erinaceum*, *G. stenogonum*; *Hamatocactus setispinus*, which blooms all summer with lightly fragrant yellow flowers; *Lobivia aurea* v.

*leucomalla* (with a yellow flower four times as big as the tiny plant and two more buds coming), *L. aurea* v. *winteriana*; *Mammillaria bombycina*, *M. melanocentra*, *M. microhelia*, *M. nejapensis*, *M. plumosa*, *M. theresae*, *M. zielmanniana* (now on its second flush of bloom); *Notocactus apricus*, *N. buiningii*, *N. crassigibbus*, *N. haselbergii*, *N. rutilans*, *N. scopa*, *N. vanvlietii*; two different *Rebutias* with dozens of orange flowers from tiny white balls in two-inch clay pots; *Sulcorebutia violacea*; *Thelocactus hexaedrophorus*; and *Weingartia neocummingii* with a dozen yellow flowers all around the crown.

Most of these were not labeled. I could tell which genus many were, and other club members helped me with some. Most species names I had to find in books, which taught me a lot about lots of plants. Some I wasn't sure of until the buds opened! That is part of the fun, however.

Look at tiny plants next time you pass a sales bench. It could be a lesson just waiting for you.