Central Spine

Newsletter of the Central Arizona Cactus and Succulent Society

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October 2022

Don’t miss the Annual Mega Auction on October 9.

CACSS OCTOBER MEGA AUCTION

By Chris Ginkel

Sunday, October 9, 2022
Desert Botanical Garden, Dorrance Hall, located at 1201 N. Galvin Parkway, Phoenix
Plant drop off: 12-2 p.m.
Plant auction: 2-4 p.m.

First and foremost, please remember that we are guests of the Desert Botanical Garden, and at all times we must follow the safety rules they have established.

This event is open to CACSS members and guests. No reservations are needed.

All activities will be held inside Dorrance Hall. Masks are always encouraged but not required. Please respect the personal space of others.

You may park behind Dorrance Hall and drop off plants between 12-2 p.m. After dropping off plants, you need to immediately move your vehicle to the main parking lot.

A greeter will be stationed inside Dorrance Hall and will assign you a bid number. You will use this number in place of your name when placing bids during the Silent Auction. We request you bring something to write with.

All walkways past the plant tables will be one way and clearly marked. Please do not linger in front of any plants. After placing your bid, please keep moving so that others may come and look at the plants. You may return to check on your bid after exiting the bidding area.

After the auction ends, please wait until our volunteers use a highlight marker to indicate the winner on the bid sheet. You may then collect your plant and bid sheet and proceed to the cashier.

During the Live Auction, all participants must respect the personal space of others. There will be seating available should you want to sit and rest.

Credit/debit cards will be the preferred method of payment, however, cash and checks will be accepted.

Plant donations will be accepted. If you wish to donate plants, but not stay for the auction, you can drop them off at the DBG that day and depart. There will be no free plants at this event.

This is one of the biggest fundraisers our society has and is a fun event for all. Please consider donating plants or cactus and succulent related items. There will be an email sent to members asking for volunteers to help at this event. If you wish to help, just

show up at any time starting at noon and I or Nick Diomede will let you how you can help.

Reach out to us on Facebook or via email at chrisginkel@gmail.com with any questions, and you will be contacted.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Cricket Peterson

It's time to start planning for 2023. At the September board meeting we will discuss organizing some field trips for 2023. The possibilities are Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Tucson and California. I would like to get some input from our 559 members. So, if there is a place you think would make a good group trip, please email me with your ideas at cricketcacss@gmail.com.

We also need some ideas for games to play at the holiday party that will be at Papago Park on December 11. The holiday party is outside at the ramadas and picnic site.

Remember, if you would like to be on the CACSS board for 2023, please get your name and information to Jo Davis or Cindy Capek by October 15.

Make sure you have marked your calendar for the 2023 Annual Show and Sale, March 28 – April 2.

Eleanor Luiten, 6 years old, shows off her *Gymnocalycium anisitsii* ssp. *multiproliferum* at the last PEG meeting. Her dad Ken said, "We pulled them as offsets from one of my plants and she potted them about six months ago. She hopes to enter one in the next CACSS Annual Show and Sale." Time to be thinking what you might enter too.

The best growers of cacti and succulents have killed the most numbers of plants. So if you want to be an amazingly successful plant grower, get to work killing some. In the grand scheme of things, there is no other way to know the absolute limits of what a plant can handle until you've crossed that line and find yourself with a deflated spiny balloon instead of a plant in your flowerpot.

WHY DO PLANTS DIE? Know that momma nature kills most of her plants before they reach maturity. "Survival of the fittest" means "death to everyone else." Plants less suited to their natural setting get killed off, and those more suited live on. To keep that balance, generally, in nature the majority are killed. The blooming beautiful plants we see hiking are the minority which have survived up to that point. The factors which can kill a plant are many: water, temperature, soil, light, air movement, attackers from bacteria to deer, and others.

Think of it this way; a plant has a certain amount of stress it can handle and be just fine. On the invisible gauge of plant health, between that thin green wedge of "thriving!" and that red zone labeled "death!", there is a very wide wedge of "stressed but fine." Plants in nature spend most of their time here. Among the different stresses a plant can have, it's often not one but a combination which can stress a plant. Sometimes it is just one stress, like death by salt poisoning because the dog peed on it. Sometimes it's a combination death. The plant was weakened, say by drought stress, or for too long when it suddenly received no light. Then two things killed the plant.

Knowledge from friends or a good book can provide the specific ways that plants "communicate" exactly which stress is nagging them to death. A little bit of learning empowers a grower of plants at home to a fast-track of improvement. Perhaps one of the most common stresses among cacti is etiolation. This is a fancy word for the plant stretching for light because there is not enough. This is what turns formerly cute little balls of cacti into awkward footballs and Hershey's Kiss-shaped things.

As the home caregivers, we are the architects of the plant's environment. If they die, we have the choice to see it two ways: 1. We don't understand the plant's needs and didn't give it those. 2. That plant was not suited to how we tend to provide for our plants, which is more common among expert or long-time growers of plants. We knew the plant's needs but did not provide them. Maybe you left that tropical cactus outside in October when the first frost happened, or maybe you went on holiday and forgot to tell your plant babysitter not to water that plant.

One trick to growing new plants, and especially cacti, is to understand where they come from. They evolved and are equipped for that place. We can fool them into being happy in our homes. For instance, lithops from South Africa like to be cool, extremely sunny and lightly watered in winter, but almost no water in summer. That's what it's like

in their corner of South Africa. Watering lithops in summer tends to lead to death. They essentially drown while asleep.

AUTOPSY FOR EDUCATION Look at those dead plants and see what they can say from the grave. This is where "reading" your plant's stresses gets extreme. A rotten base, turning brown, or smelly? Plant fell over? Or, lots of yellowing lower leaves of succulents? Probably overwatering. A white change of color? This is where using the mega-library of expertise from members of cacti clubs, in person or online, is an unmatchable resource for help.

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH WHAT YOU LEARN? Dead plants may tell you what was missing or excessive, so now you have choices of action.

CHANGE YOUR HABITS Getting into a habit of watering your potted cactus outdoors every Sunday or watering your in-ground cactus garden once a month might be the breakthrough to sudden success with your plants.

CHANGE THE PLACE Maybe that cactus is stretching in the north window. Time to move it to the south window. Maybe the cactus is getting a little too wet when you water everything else, so you can change the potting mix to drain better with more lava-rock or perlite. Perhaps it's time to...

GIVE UP This is legitimate. Sometimes no matter how hard you try, your lifestyle or home is not good for that plant, or the hassle to get it done is not worth the return. Lithops, African violets and ferns are not meant for me, for instance, because of poor winter light, traveling in summer and being gone for more than three days, respectively. So I've quit the suffering and quit trying plants which barely survive (which often means barely die) in my care. I'm not giving up summer vacations for ferns, as much as they call me like dancing sirens. In fact, travel led me to embrace cacti. Along these same lines, I've finally given up on growing most plants that are adapted to acid soils, the wet Himalayas and the cool-loving coastal succulents. I'm not sad about it. I've embraced South American cacti and agaves because of their ease and the amazing variety they provide.

CONCLUDING THE DEATH TALK It is for their known ease of care that cacti and succulents become a hobby for many folks, especially those who hate fickle, picky, prissy plants that want constant coddling. Cacti and succulents might need less, but they still need. Their needs are different. Any plant is easy in the right place, and any place is easy to grow a plant in if the right one is picked. So go out today, buy a plant and be okay with killing it. Then enjoy it when it surprises you and lives.

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Your editor's mantra: The right plant in the right place makes everybody happy.

Steve Plath, grower extraordinaire says: Remember you are growing roots not plants.

CENTRAL SPINE NEWSLETTER IS TAKING A VACATION IN NOVEMBER

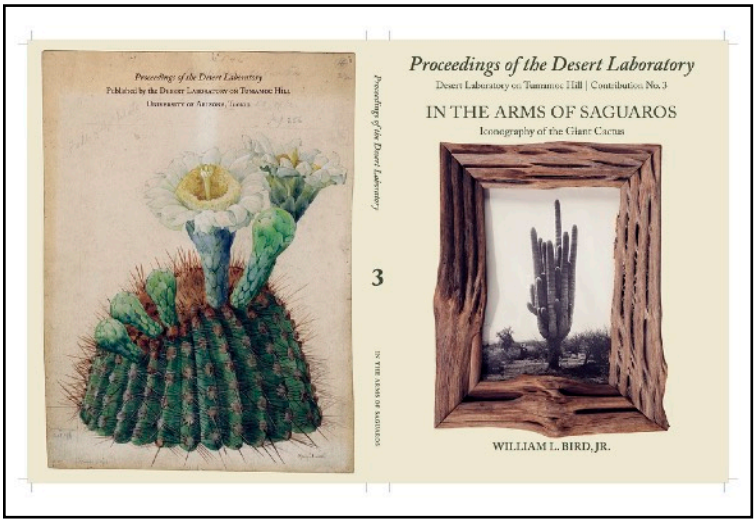
There will be no November newsletter as the newsletter team is taking a break. The November program information is below.

IN THE ARMS OF SAGUAROS: ICONOGRAPHY OF THE GIANT CACTUS

Photos and text by William Lawrence (Larry) Bird, Jr.

Join Larry for our meeting November 13, 2 p.m. at Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren, located at 2450 N. 64th St., Scottsdale.

William Lawrence (Larry) Bird, Jr. will discuss the history of the saguaro cactus and its popular imagery in a talk drawn from his recent book, *In the Arms of Saguaros: Iconography of the Giant Cactus*, published by the Desert Laboratory on Tumamoc Hill, University of Arizona. This book is in the CACSS library.



Book cover of *In the Arms of Saguaros.*

Larry's illustrated talk will picture the earliest published images of the saguaro, dating to the era of botanical discovery in the Sonoran Desert in the late 1840's. A dramatic uptick in saguaro imagery followed the railroad's penetration of the Sonoran Desert in the early 1880's. Transplanted saguaro displays acquainted Americans, and the world, with saguaros firsthand. Images of the plant enjoyed wide circulation.

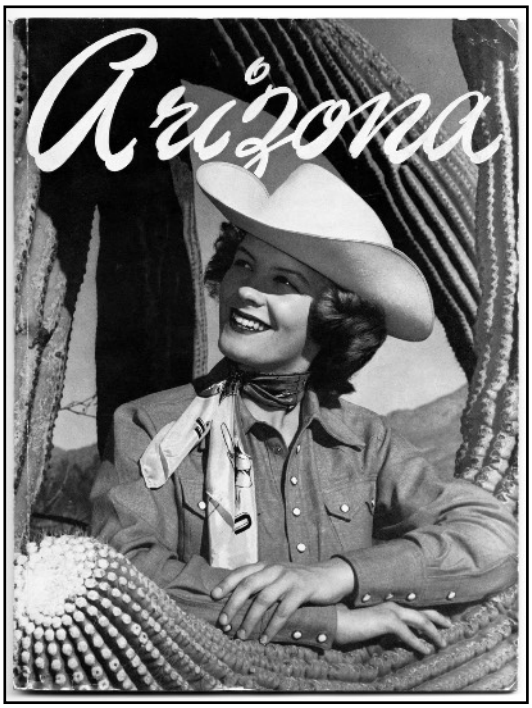
In the years bracketing the Second World War, southern Arizona's travel and tourism industry elevated the saguaro to the status of a regional icon. For many outside the region, and unfamiliar with the plant, the saguaro became such a popular icon of the American West, that by the early 1960's, it came to reside in a new, if largely imaginary, commercial range.

In showing photos and snapshots taken over the years of people from all walks of life posing with saguaros, standing, sitting, leaning, and touching, comes the question, why?

In the end, the answer is not so much about us touching the plants. These plants touch *us*.

Biographical information: William Lawrence (Larry) Bird, Jr. is curator emeritus of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Larry holds a Ph.D. in American History from Georgetown University (1985). He earned his M.A. in American history from the University of Arizona (1975), and his B.A. in American history from the University of Maryland (1973).



Left, Marcia Louise Luglan posed with a saguaro arm in 1950 *Western Ways*, *Pictorial America–Arizona Edition*. Photograph by Ray Manley. Right, brochure cover. *In Arizona's Valley of the Sun*, Mesa, Arizona Chamber of Commerce, ca. 1940.

He began his museum career as a graduate student at the University of Arizona, working part-time at the Arizona Historical Society with a grant-in-aid funded by Emery and Ann-Eve Johnson.

He is the author of several books and a curator of Smithsonian exhibits drawn from museum and archival source material. His interests lie at the intersection of politics, popular culture and the history of visual display. His Smithsonian exhibits, and their companion books, include *Paint by Number*; *Holidays on Display* and *Souvenir Nation*.

He is a former Rockefeller Foundation Humanities Fellow and an award-winning recipient of Pima County's 2022 Books of the Year list for *In the Arms of Saguaros*, the subject of this meeting's talk.

MAMMILLARIA CLUSTERS

By Tom Glavich Photos by Sue Hakala

Reprinted from the January, 2017 San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society's *Communique*

Mammillaria is one of the larger genera in the cactus family and one of the most variable. Some members remaining solitary columns for their entire lives, some remaining as fingernail size solitary globulars, some clumped and heavily spined with hooks, straight sharp spines, or feathery soft spines.

Although most *Mammillaria* are native to Mexico, some species in the genus can be found from Columbia to Kansas and California. With this wide distribution, the cultivation requirements obviously vary considerably. The species from the tropics and warmer areas are rarely tolerant of cold and damp. Those from the drier desert regions are also intolerant of continued damp but can take considerable cold. With these restrictions aside, most *Mammillaria* are easy to grow.

Mammillaria baumii purchased as a single head in 1980.

The secrets to good growth are a continued supply of fertilizer during the growing season, strong light and maintenance of a clean and insect-free growing environment. The white and densely spined species want full sun and do best on a table unprotected (except from prolonged heavy rain) all year long (maybe not here in the Phoenix area where they appreciate afternoon shade). The appearance of white mealy bug egg cases (*Mammillaria's* worst enemy) on the tips of the spines or the appearance of ants means that mealy bugs are sucking the sap and life of the plant. Immediate treatment is required with a thorough washing and spraying with an insecticide.

Propagation of *Mammillaria* clusters is easy. Cuttings can be taken at any time during the growing season (April to early November), left to dry for a few days and replanted in a clean potting mix (pure pumice is even better). Rooting is rapid with short white roots generally appearing after a couple of weeks.

Mammillaria are one of the easiest species to grow from seed. The seeds are simply placed on top of a damp potting mix, covered with a light coating of gravel, placed in a plastic bag in bright light (out of direct sun), and allowed to germinate. Germination usually occurs in a week to 10 days. The seedlings can stay in the plastic bag for

several weeks, until they get large enough to survive unprotected, and should then be removed to a still shaded but brighter and drier environment. Show quality plants can often be grown in just 4 or 5 years, and entries can be ready for seedling classes in as little as 6 months. Best results are obtained when the seeds are started in late March to late May.

Mammillaria baumii is a densely spined species with wonderful large yellow flowers. It is easy to grow and makes an impressive specimen in a modest size pot. It comes from Tamaulipas in Mexico.

Mammillaria elongata, one of the first cacti that everyone grows, is easy and extraordinarily tolerant of abuse. It has the odd characteristic of being very popular and also unfairly neglected since advanced growers ignore this easy grower, even though there are a variety of forms and colors, many of which can make a spectacular plant.

Mammillaria geminispina is a variable species with some varieties having short white spines, while others have long flexible centrals.

Left, *Mammillaria lenta* in spring bloom. Right, *Mammillaria geminispina* 'Super Clone' with 63 new heads emerging.

Mammillaria lenta, from Coahuila, forms mounds of off-white to white. Slower growing than the somewhat similar *M. plumosa,* it is often a show winner.

Mammillaria plumosa is a relatively quick grower, forming mounds of white heads. The heads are covered with white feathery spines which must be kept dry if the color is to be maintained.

LIBRARY NOTES

By Co-Librarian Diana Rogers

The CACSS library collection **will not** be available at the Mega Auction on Sunday, October 9. We will, however, have the RED Return Bin at the auction, so please feel free to return library books. Thanks!

For both new and longtime members, a brief reminder about the CACSS Library Collection and Policies

- Since our CACSS books do not have a permanent home, it has become a "mobile collection" transported by volunteers to approximately nine meetings per year. Of course, this means not every title will be available at every meeting. Contact the librarians if you would like to borrow a specific title.
- A listing of the materials owned is available on our website. Choose 'Library' from the drop down menu and use the links for books, journals and periodicals to search for specific titles.
- Checking out books, journals or magazines: We limit each member in good standing to 2 items for 2 months. If there is a waiting list for a title, we will limit the check-out period to one month. If an item becomes overdue, we will send an email reminder shorty before the next meeting. Contact the librarian if other arrangements must be made for return of items.
- PLEASE return items by placing only in the RED Book Return Bin on the library tables.
- Donations: If you want to donate an item or items, please put a slip in each item with your name. If you want your item returned if we can not use it, state that on the slip with your name.
- Our Library Donation Policy: We reserve the right to put items in the CACSS collection, sell on Amazon or eBay, sell at meetings, or donate to other libraries. All these decisions are according to the librarian's knowledge and research on the donation.

If you have questions or requests, please contact:
Diana Rogers / azdiana53@gmail.com
Nancy Mumpton / nancymumpton@gmail.com

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Maricopa County Master Gardeners and Metro Tech High School Present:

Fall Festival & Plant Sale

Saturday, October 22, 2022 8 am–1 pm

- Choose from a huge variety of affordable landscape and garden plants
- Ask a Master Gardener
- Wide range of vendors for your home and garden
- Prize Drawings
- Rummage Sale
- Food, Crafts and more from Metrotech Student Clubs
- Activities for Kids & More

Metro Tech High School
19th Ave & Thomas
Phoenix

https://extension.arizona.edu/maricopamg

SCAN ME

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
Cooperative Extension
Maricopa County - Master Gardeners

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Edward C. Martin, Interim Director, Extension, Division of Agriculture, Life and Veterinary Sciences, and Cooperative Extension, The University of Arizona. The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or genetic information in its programs and activities. With questions about access or to request any disability-related accommodations in this Fall Festival and Plant Sale such as ASL interpreting, closed-captioning, wheelchair access, or electronic text, etc., please contact Beth Reidhead, breidhead@arizona.edu, (602)827-8211.

CENTRALAZCACTUS FACEBOOK PAGE

By Michelle Schrade

One of the best things about our Facebook page is the unexpected tidbits of information found in the comments section of posts. Today, and in future Facebook updates, I will be featuring the posts I find to be most informative. Many times, nuggets of information are shared and expanded on in the comments section.

This month two posts caught my eye. September 2, Donata Hilgeman-Montgomery asked for advice in collecting seeds from fleshy cactus seed pods and how to best broadcast seeds when planting. Administrator Ken Luiten gave detailed instruction on making slurry out of the pulpy seed mix and spreading the mixture thinly on a paper towel to dry.

Cactus of the Month: *Ferocactus chrysacanthus* 'Red Spines' form posted September 19 by Eric Lundberg. Succulent of the Month: *Mangave* 'Snow Leopard' posted September 15 by Cameron Davis.

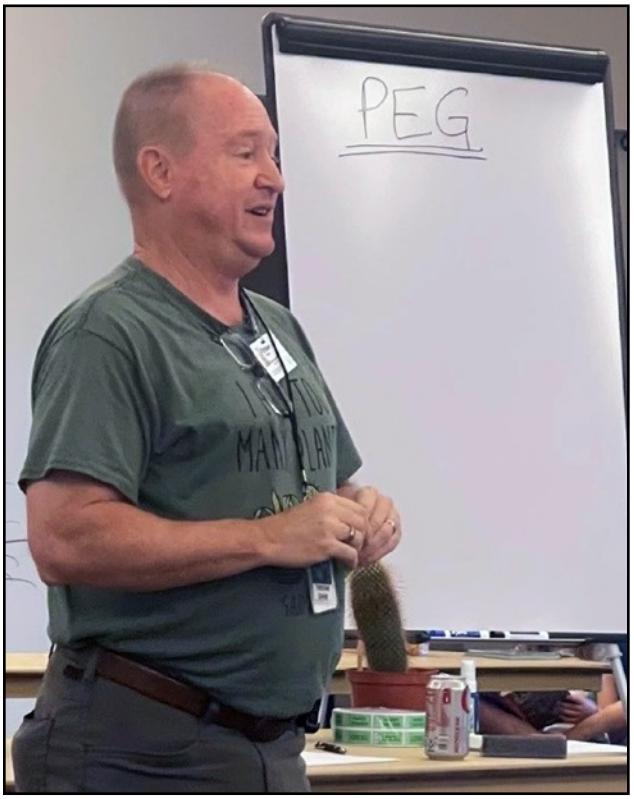
He also shared tips on bulk seed sowing using templates and a creased business card for precise seed placement. How clever! Also discussed were seed stratification and germination. Information very helpful for newbies growing cactus from seed. All this information in one cool post!

September 13, Julie Sander Covin asked how best to separate cactus with multiple pups. She provided pictures, which were a plus. She also asked people's personal preferences. To divide or not to divide, that is the question. This led to a lively discussion as to the aesthetics and merits of plant division. A side post about the usefulness of rubber tipped tongs and their necessity in potting plants was an added bonus.

PEG - Propagation Education Group

Photo by Kim Andrews

A big thank you goes out to Tristan Davis who organized the last PEG meeting and presented a talk about how plants get their names. Everyone went home with a free plant and a smile.



Central Arizona Cactus and Succulent Society, a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization, established in 1973, is an affiliate of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America. We are grateful to the Desert Botanical Garden for providing our meeting space and supporting our projects

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DESERT BOTANICAL GARDEN FOUNDING

By Virginia F. Martin

Below are excerpts from *Through the Years at the Desert Botanical Garden* by Virginia F. Martin, from the November-December 1975 Cactus and Succulent *Journal*.

Although the Central Arizona Cactus and Succulent Society has no official affiliation with the Desert Botanical Garden, the Society certainly feels that the Garden is its home and supports its efforts.

The dream of a forward-looking engineer, Gustaf H. Starck (1871-1947), was the forerunner of the DBG—the beauty of which most assuredly has far surpassed that dream. He was an engineer with the Salt River Project in 1910.

While engaged in this work, he became most interested in desert plants. He grew a line of citrus trees and did experimental work on purchased acreage at Scottsdale and Indian School Roads in Phoenix.

He spent much time tramping in the desert and tried to get plants identified. Although he could not find anyone locally who knew the names, he built up a file of herbarium sheets and sent them to the National Herbarium in Washington, D.C. for identification. Interested people, who came on horseback and in wagons, met with him for plant discussions on Sunday afternoons (much like the CACSS does today).

In 1929-30, Mrs. Gertrude Divine Webster, a wealthy New Englander, became interested in what he was doing. She brought some plants back from Switzerland for the group, but was denied permission to bring them into the country. Arizona Senator Hayden was successful in getting them for the “Desert Club.” The group later incorporated so they could acquire land on which to build a desert botanical garden. The group was able to get a bill through the State of Arizona House setting aside 300 acres in Papago Park for the future development of a desert botanical garden.

Mrs. Webster, a concerned philanthropist, contributed all building materials for the construction of the garden’s first building, the Webster Auditorium and administration office, erected in 1938 with WPA labor. Engineer Starck’s collection of desert plants and Mrs.Webster’s collection of cacti and other plants from her nearby estate, “Arcadia,” made up some of the original plantings.

W. Hubert Earle, who had came to the garden as a horticulturist in 1947, was named the first director in 1957.

Send comments, suggestions and submissions to Editor Sue Hakala at cacsscentralspine@gmail.com