

CENTRAL SPINE

March 2026



Cochemiea boolii by Sue Hakala.

THE SOUTHWEST NATIVE PLANT PRIMER By Jack Dash

Join Jack at the **2 p.m. March 8** meeting in Dorrance Hall at Desert Botanical Garden. Come earlier to socialize and bid on plants at the silent auction.

There is increasing interest in the American Southwest about using native plants in home and commercial gardens to knit together landscapes impacted by habitat fragmentation and climate change. Jack Dash's presentation *The Southwest Native Plant Primer* is based on his book of the same name. It introduces important concepts

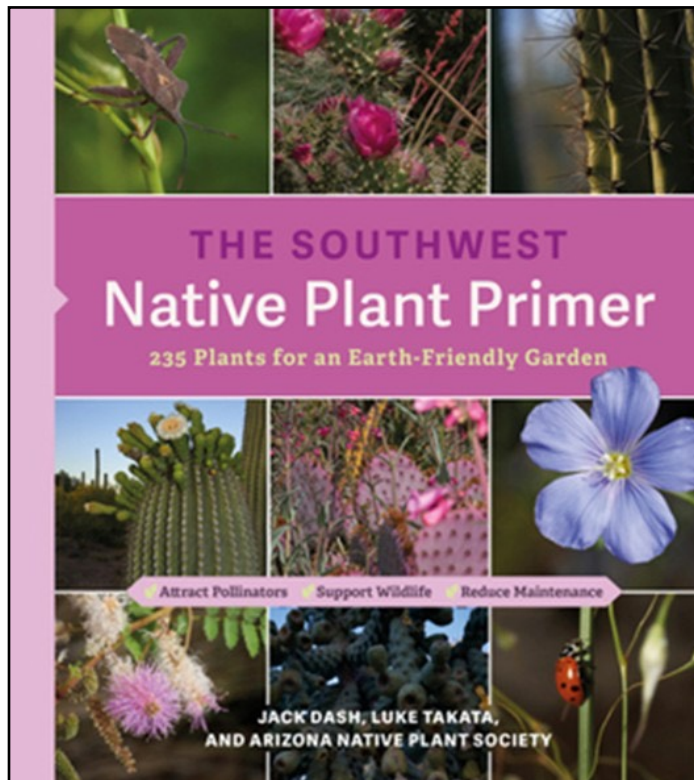
for arid-land gardeners, while highlighting wildflowers, grasses, vines, cacti, and trees. His talk serves to engage gardeners of any skill level interested in choosing native plants that make a positive environmental impact in a garden.

Though there are vast differences between locations within this region, there are also surprising commonalities that Jack will discuss. He aims for his book to serve as a resource to new and experienced gardeners alike, providing up-to-date information about current best practices for gardening in the Southwest.

Jack Dash is a horticulturalist and writer based in Tucson, Arizona. A graduate of Prescott College, Jack is a board member of the Arizona

Native Plant Society and co-editor of its biannual publication, the *Plant Press Arizona*. He is the gardens and facilities manager at Tohono Chul Botanical Garden, and an advocate for ecologically-based urban landscaping.

Jack is the co-creator of "Atascosa Borderlands" a visual storytelling project centered on the culture and ecology of the Atascosa Highlands in southern Arizona.



CACSS ANNUAL SHOW AND SALE MARCH 27-29, 2026 By Kathi Metzger

The CACSS Annual Show and Sale is coming up. CACSS members, please sign up for one or more volunteer positions. Volunteer opportunities begin on Wednesday, March 25 through Sunday, March 29. Available opportunities include helping with set-up and plant registration, plant judging, greeting and assisting visitors, cashiering, working as a floater, serving as a plant expert, helping customers pot their newly purchased plants, taking care of food and beverages, and assisting vendors. Come in, work a bit and then enjoy the Annual Show and Sale. It's the volunteers that make the event run as smoothly as it does. Your generosity with volunteering helps make this event successful!

How else can you participate? Bring plants! Please fill out your entry cards as best as you can BEFORE you come. CACSS member Jenny Kuo of Cookie's Cacti has prepared videos to get you inspired: *How to Prepare for the Show and Sale* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZmmwQjsNqE> and *Essential Tips for First-time Exhibitors* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRMBTk86IAg>. CACSS members will be available at the next meeting to help you fill out your exhibitor entry cards and give you tips on expertly showing your plants. Rules and plant categories are available on the CACSS website: <https://centralarizonacactus.org/show-and-sale.html>.

Plant drop-off hours are Wednesday, March 25, from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Show and Sale hours are Friday-Sunday from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. The sale portion of the event will close early on Sunday only at 3 p.m, allowing vendors to pack up a little early. This change should help to alleviate some congestion between vendors leaving and members retrieving their plants at the end of the day.

Commemorative T-shirts will be available for pre-sale to members at the March club meeting. For only \$25, you can purchase and wear your beautiful new shirt to the Annual Show and Sale!

Other needs include: donating cuttings (reach out to Bob Hopfner for help with transportation) and boxes for purchasers to transport their lovelies home.

Thanks so much everyone. See you in March!

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IT TAKES A VILLAGE By Ruthanne LaQua

The 2026 CACSS Annual Show and Sale will be less than four weeks away by the time you read this. Behind-the-scenes there is a true flurry of activity going on. The Show and Sale Team, along with all of our committees, has been hard at work since last summer moving through the many stages of planning and preparation. We are now ready to implement the ideas and best practices that will make this year's event exceptional.

For those of us who “enjoy” the long planning process (and yes, even the occasional chaos) that comes with hosting a weekend extravaganza like this at Desert Botanical Garden, the anticipation can be almost as exciting as opening day itself. It truly takes a village to pull this off. You might be surprised to learn that the event requires 200 volunteer slots, each four hours long. When I first heard that number, I was shocked. I've been involved in fundraising weekends like these for nearly 30 years, and I've rarely seen such a high total of required volunteer hours needed for a single event week.

One reason this event is so complex—and so rewarding—is that we host two major components simultaneously. The cactus and succulent show takes place alongside the sale, each running at full throttle. They sit adjacent to one another at the Garden, connected by a short walkway. I can't imagine a better pairing. Coordinating two dynamic events at once requires thoughtful organization to ensure each runs smoothly. While the events are independent, each builds momentum for the other. What could be better than discovering a new cactus or succulent at the sale and then walking 30 feet down the pathway into the show in Dorrance Hall, only to stumble across a stunning, mature specimen of that very same plant?

I remember attending my first show here and spotting a beautiful cactus I had never seen before. Later, when I visited the sale at Boppart Courtyard, I was amazed to see how completely different the small seedling version looked. Had I not asked for help, I might never have realized they were the same plant.

One of my favorite aspects of any sale over the years has been the opportunity to meet plant experts face to face. This year, we will have more experts at the sale than ever before. Our vendors and sellers truly enjoy connecting with buyers. I've had many conversations with vendors traveling from California who say Arizona is one of their favorite destinations thanks to our friendliness and the solid plant knowledge of our community. I am consistently told that Arizona customers are well read when it comes to their cacti and succulents.

Speaking of California, we'll welcome six vendors from California this year, along with five vendors from Tucson. In total, we have 24 vendors plus one stand-in vendor helping while his friend is out of the country. Bringing us to 25 vendors overall. Please refer to the list of vendors below.

There are 64 tables rented, along with two one-day tables available each day of the sale. These one-day tables turn over daily, giving vendors the opportunity to experience what it's like to participate for a single day. It's no small task. The preparation, setup, sales, and then packing before exiting require real dedication. I had no trouble finding six people eager to give it a try.

About two-thirds of our vendors are plant vendors and one-third are pottery artists. In my opinion, I believe we have some of the best handmade artisan pottery for desert-ready plants that you will find at a weekend event in Arizona. (continued)




Central Arizona Cactus and Succulent Society

2026 Show & Sale

VENDORS

MARCH 27-28-29 Friday: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. | Saturday: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. | Sunday: 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

25 Vendors with 1000's of Exceptional Plants for Sale

Hand-made Artisan Pottery Created by Local Arizona & California Potters

LARGEST Collection of Cactus & Succulent EXPERTS in CACSS History

Click on the vendor name for more information.

Arid Adaptations Astroforma, LLC Blue Sky Plants Botanic Wonders The Cactus Lab(Sat. only) Colibri Ceramics Cookie's Cacti(Sun. only) Corona Cactus Nursery	Crazy H Cactus Desert Vessels(Fri. only) LA Succulents Petrichor Pottery(Sun. only) Orcutti Putty(Sat. only) PW Plants Pretty Prickly Designs Prickly Prospects Cactus Nursery	Prickocereus The Schoolgirl Antiques Shirley Arsenault Starr Nursery(Fri. only) Strictly Exotics T. pottery Veronika Countryman Yellow Dog Makers
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Buy a plant and a pot, and we'll plant it for free at our Potting Station.



Get expert advice to help your collection thrive.



All plants in our Show & Sale are *horticulturally propagated*—they are not taken from the wild.

Even more exciting, 15 of our 25 vendors are CACSS members this year. That makes me incredibly proud of our club. It speaks volumes about the passion within this community. Many of our members serve on committees and/or on the board of directors, attend PEG meetings, and help with the silent auction at monthly meetings. We are fortunate to have such committed and engaged members.

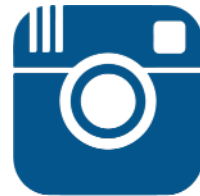
If you've been around for a while, you know that life moves in cycles. It may not be your season to be fully entrenched right now, but I do hope you'll stop by at some point over the weekend of March 27–29.

Say hello to an old friend. Meet someone new. Talk with a vendor and ask a few plant questions. Maybe you can tune in to a live Instagram feed from one of our vendors, such as Peter Walkowiak, while you're at the show. Be sure to wander through the various plant categories to place your bean—handed to you by the ambassador greeter—into your favorite plant cup.

I truly can't imagine you'll regret time spent surrounded by beautiful plants and passionate people. Can you?



Be sure to visit CACSS on the web at:
centralarizonacactus.org, Facebook, Instagram and
YouTube at: CentralArizonaCactus, and members only
at: CentralArizonaCactus Swap and Shop.



**CONTACT INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS WILL NO LONGER BE PROVIDED
IN THE NEWSLETTER AS ISSUES HAVE OCCURRED.**

To contact a board member, committee chair, specialist, or others use the Contact Us form on the club website. When filling in the form, put the name of the person in the subject field that the message is intended for so it can be forwarded to the appropriate person.

Just click on the direct link: centralarizonacactus@gmail.com

NEW PROOFREADING ASSISTANT JOINS THE NEWSLETTER TEAM

By Candy Briney



Candace (Candy) Briney was raised in a rural area of northeastern Indiana. She earned her degrees from Ball State University where she majored in mathematics and minored in business. After graduation, she moved to the west side of the state where she met and married Jerry and taught middle school math. She was also involved with Girl Scouts, and a crisis phone help line, coached middle school volleyball, and helped to negotiate teacher contracts.

Candy and Jerry lived on a lake and participated in many boating activities, golfed regularly, attended Purdue University basketball and football games, were involved in the local garden club, and went to the Indianapolis 500 every year.

In 1999, Jerry sold his family grocery store, and the two moved to Peoria, AZ. Candy taught honors math classes at Centennial High School; Jerry earned a master's degree and taught science in the Dysart district.

Candy and Jerry continue to travel internationally as they have for over fifty years. They create stained glass projects and, of course, spend time with their plants. Candy writes journals of each trip they take, crochets and works all kinds of puzzles, including jigsaw and sudoku.

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COCHINEAL: THE INSECT THAT HELPED WIN A WAR By Tom Gatz

Cochineal is a tiny scale insect found on prickly pear cacti. The insect secretes a cottony substance for protection from predators and the elements. The female insects' bodies contain carminic acid, used to produce the red dye carmine. It was once so valuable it was worth more than gold. Carmine is still used today in food, cosmetics and even nail polish (listed as "carmine," "cochineal extract," or "Natural Red 4").



Prickly pear cactus with cochineal scale insects and red carminic acid on a hand.
Image courtesy of Wikimedia.

Cochineal dye played an unexpected role in the American Revolutionary War. While British officers wore coats dyed with the vibrant red of cochineal, infantrymen had less expensive, muted coats dyed with madder plant extract. The distinctive scarlet uniforms made officers easy targets for colonial forces, who often aimed

to eliminate leadership by shooting officers first. This insight was highlighted in Ken Burns' documentary on the Revolutionary War.

While cochineal dye likely helped the colonists identify officers, other visual clues, such as the officers' position in battle, swords, sashes, and epaulettes, also contributed to their identification. Still, every advantage, no matter how small, could influence the outcome of a battle. It's fascinating to think that such a tiny insect, through its vibrant dye, may have played a part in shaping history.

Note: Many brands switched from carmine to beet or berry-based dyes after 2012 due to negative media attention, but carmine remains common in premium and natural products because of its color stability. (continued)



Unlike infantrymen, British officers could afford to purchase the more expensive, brighter red uniforms, making them easier targets for colonial troops. Image generated by Chat GPT.

COCHINEAL CONTROL TIPS

While small infestations are mostly cosmetic, heavy buildup can weaken cactus pads over time. Control is straightforward and chemical-free.

- Blast with water: A strong spray from a garden hose dislodges insects effectively. Spray should be strong enough to dislodge insects but not so strong as to damage the pads. Repeat weekly as needed.
- Prune heavily infested pads and discard them to reduce insect spread.

Healthy prickly pears usually rebound quickly once cochineal numbers are reduced.

TUCSON CACTUS NURSERIES By Editor Sue Hakala

In early February, I was in Tucson and went to some of my favorite cactus/succulent nurseries. I've been going to B & B Cactus Farm since 1980 and have never seen the nursery look as fabulous as it did that day. It was filled with many blooming plants, pots, yard art, fun T-shirts, and gifts galore!



Left above are the B & B Cactus Farm ladies that will help you find what you need. Right above is the cactus house, and you won't want to miss the succulent house.



We headed to Mesquite Valley Growers Nursery next, probably the best overall nursery in Arizona. They have a fabulous succulent house that left me in awe looking at some of the plants. The gift shop is amazing. Also enjoy a huge greenhouse with thousands of blooming annuals right now, and lots more.

Then it was on to Bach's Cactus Nursery (left the cactus house) where there

were gorgeous plants everywhere. The grounds contain a huge selection of pots, specimen cactus and succulents and landscape plants.

Make time and go now and don't miss the massive show of spring blooms at each place.

LIBRARY 2025 ANNUAL REPORT By Co-Librarian Diana Rogers

LIBRARIAN NEEDED: Long time Co-Librarian Nancy Mumpton retired in December 2025. Diana Rogers will retire in 2026. We are seeking one or possibly two members for this volunteer opportunity. Please consider supporting the club in this needed position. Attention to detail is necessary and previous library experience would be helpful, but not critical. Please reach out to Diana for additional information.

PURCHASES: One book was purchased for the library at a cost of \$38.08. Two smaller replacement book bins and a flatbed cart were purchased at a cost of \$123.07.

EXPENSES/PERIODICALS: The yearly subscription for the *CSSA Journal* and our affiliate membership to the Cactus and Succulent Society of America was renewed for \$55. The total expenses in 2025 were \$216.15.

LIBRARY GENERATED REVENUE: No donated or withdrawn materials were sold in 2025 as these materials were placed in the monthly Silent Auctions for the benefit of the club. Going forward, all such materials will be handled in the same manner.

BOOK REVIEWS: Three book reviews appeared in 2025 written by our newest member of the Library team, Sylvia Lee. Sylvia is a book carrier and part of the monthly Library team at meetings. Look for more reviews from Sylvia in 2026.

DONATIONS TO THE LIBRARY BY MEMBERS AND OTHERS: A total of 28 items were donated in 2025. Our club thanks the following members for their generous donations: Margie Green, Nancy Mumpton and several other anonymous donors.

HOLDINGS AND NUMBER OF ITEMS CHECKED OUT: Diana maintains the library holdings database; we have over 500 books in our collection. She tracks all materials checked out and notifies members before the next meeting when items are due or overdue. The library was available at nine meetings in 2025, allowing 80 members to borrow a total of 111 books or periodicals. The busiest month was March with 14 members checking out 20 books, and the slowest month was June when four members took out seven books.

BOOK CARRIERS: Diana coordinates our book carriers. We currently have 11 active carriers, an inventory of ten carts, 11 regular bins, three red bins and one heavy, unused flatbed cart in storage. Any member interested in becoming a library carrier should contact Diana.

CACSS LIBRARY CELEBRATES 50 YEARS By Editor Sue Hakala

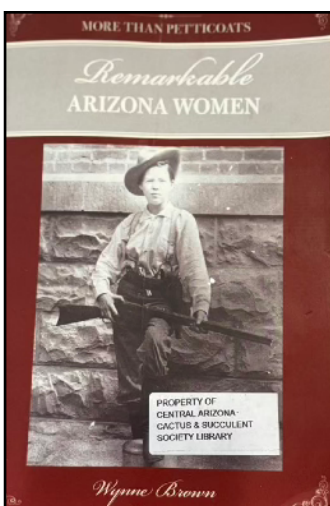
It's hard to believe, but true. The CACSS lending library has been in existence for 50 years! Read more about it in the article below that is in the newsletter archives.

https://centralarizonacactus.org/newsletters/Central_Spine_2023_11.pdf

A special thank you to all the members who have helped grow the library through the years, and that bring the books to every meeting. The great thing about being a book carrier is that you can take a whole bin full of books home for a month. Talk to current Librarian Diana Rogers about helping out.



Mamacita hybrid by Kakteen Niess.



I am curious as to why a book with this title is in the CACSS library. Perhaps some of the women were active in somehow developing or working with cacti or succulents. The author's Introduction chapter is no help. In that chapter she writes, "Writing the first edition of this book was both a review and an exploration of the state's history. It was a way to set my anchor in this particular island of the world. One goal was to bring Arizona's narrative to life through the experiences of its women. I thought my task would be an easy one—after all, how many remarkable women, born before 1900, could there have been? Many, it turns out. My long list, which is still growing, includes more than 120 worthy candidates..."

The first woman is an Apache warrior and medicine woman named Lozen. She is known to have been a child in 1837. As she comes to maturity, Lozen is able to use some psychic abilities and tell the tribe when enemies are approaching, thus giving them time to prepare. The author comments: "Lozen is almost as much of a challenge for contemporary historians as she was for the soldiers. Not only did the Apaches leave no written record of her, but the white men of the time were unable to imagine that any woman could have held as powerful and vital a role, so they never mentioned her." But, the Apaches, being a people who moved around a lot, would need to know the dangers and useful properties of cacti and succulents. Lozen was well versed in the subject of using plants for treating ailments.

The book progresses in order through time. The second woman described in the book is Sister Mary Fidelia McMahon who came to Tucson in the 1893, and became the chief administrator (the "superior") of St. Mary's Hospital. Under her supervision the hospital grew in size and quality.

During this period, one factor "that kept Arizona's new hospital solvent was the railway. At eleven o'clock on the morning of March 20, 1880, the first train pulled into Tucson, and not long afterward, St. Mary's and the Southern Pacific Railroad reached an agreement. The sisters did what they could to provide health care, and the railway supplied an average of twenty patients a month..."

The reader unknowingly and painlessly studies and learns history while reading this book.

The third woman is an African American who, with her husband, arrived in Wickenburg in 1897. They bought and renovated the Hotel Venetta. Yes, you have probably heard about this African American woman who owned and ran a hotel in the early years in Arizona. She died in 1935, "leaving an estate of \$50,000 roughly equivalent to

\$600,000 today.” This statement was made in 2012; the estate would obviously be worth a lot more than \$600,000 today in 2026. This chapter talks about racial discrimination, and includes the failure of the Walnut Grove Dam on February 22, 1890 which killed “seventy to a hundred people, more than any other dam disaster in the state’s history, before or since.” I had never heard of this dam failure. As you read this book, you will find out where in Arizona this dam and disaster occurred. But where are comments about cacti and succulents?

Sharlot Hall is featured, of course. To tickle your memory, in case you don’t remember who she was, here are a couple of sentences from the book. “After Sharlot’s death, the governor’s mansion and associated buildings and grounds, that meant so much to her, were officially named the Sharlot Hall Museum” in Prescott.

Jumping to the last, but not least, is the story of Luisa Ronstadt Espinal. She seems to be a close ancestral relative of the famous singer Linda Ronstadt, although the author does not mention Linda.

The closest the book comes to talking about people who would have dealt with cacti and succulents were things like a story about Caroline Rebecca Jacobson Richardson and Mary Kidder Rak, and also about other families who were farmers and ranchers. The Richardsons had emigrated from Scandinavia to Colonia Diaz in northern Mexico. The author mentions that this family had to flee from that house (after turning all their animals loose to fend for themselves) on July 28, 1912, but does not state why. Perhaps you remember that date.*

The author has an axe to grind. She is a strong supporter of equality for women. But in most of the book the bias is subtle and is never offensive.

I have left the best paragraphs about these women out of this review for you to read when you peruse the book.

I am glad to have been given the chance to read this book. I know many members will enjoy reading it, but I am not sure why it is in the CACSS library. Perhaps some of you who are reading this book review know why or how the book came to be in the CACSS library and will educate me.

*Google AI says: “On July 28, 1912, a significant event in northern Mexico was the mass exodus of American Mormon families from Chihuahua and Sonora, fleeing revolutionary violence and crossing into the U.S. at places like El Paso, Texas, and Hachita, New Mexico, creating a large refugee crisis, while New Mexico itself became a U.S. state just months prior. This massive influx of Mormon refugees, often well-armed, marked a dramatic reverse of their earlier settlement in Mexico, highlighting the intense instability of the Mexican Revolution.” (I had thought this was the year when Pancho Villa was raiding the borderlands, but he was in prison in Mexico City in July of 1912.)

CACTUS MONTH ACTIVITIES AT FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE By Kathi Metzger



The CACSS Outreach Committee recently carried out a cactus identification project at Friendship Village, a senior living life-plan community in Tempe. This initiative was organized as part of the February 2026 Cactus Month celebration at Friendship Village. During the event, residents engaged in a variety of activities, including helping to identify different types of cacti, participating in art workshops, sampling cactus-inspired foods and beverages, attending a presentation led by ASU Professor Ken Sweat, and joining a docent-led tour of Desert Botanical Garden.

Approximately 125 cactus plants were identified throughout the Friendship Village grounds. Informational signage will be placed on each plant, and a walking tour map will also be created to help residents explore and learn about the different species present within their community. Many thanks to Diane Delaney, a resident of Friendship Village, for organizing this cactus celebration.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE By Don Begley

We are always glad to see our friend Greg Starr. Nadia Whiteside did a fantastic job arranging for Greg to be our speaker for the February 8 CACSS meeting.

During the meeting we recognized Tristan Davis for his ten years of leading the Propagation Education Group (PEG), an especially important educational activity of our club. Sue Hakala presented Tristan with a commemorative T-shirt that was designed by Bob Hopfner. The shirt includes a beautiful blue agave on the front and the agave taxonomy on the back (picture on page 17).

For our library's 50th anniversary, Diana Rogers recognized Nancy Mumpton for her 11 years of service as the club's co-librarian as she now begins her retirement. Also recognized were the 12 library carriers who bring the books to each meeting. Our library started with two books in 1976 and has grown to over 500 books today.

Kathi Metzger provided an update for the 2026 Annual Show and Sale, including a presentation of the QR code that takes members to the Volunteer Sign-Up webpage on our phones. How easy is that! Tom Fruciano explained the exhibitor sign-up process, as he again takes charge of this important function leading up to the plant drop off date of March 25.

Education Co-Chair Desi Kovacs provided information on two webinars that he and Co-Chair Stephanie Halcrow organized for February and April. Our Education Committee continues to expand our educational offerings as Stephanie and Desi complete their first year as co-chairs of the Education Committee.

In the last few weeks, your board held two key meetings with Desert Botanical Garden. The first was a "stakeholders" meeting with the key members of the Garden's Events, Horticulture and Marketing Teams to discuss communications in support of the 2026 Annual Show and Sale and future events. The second meeting was with Chris Kline, the new president and CEO of the Garden; it introduced Chris to CACSS, and ensured the door is open for ongoing collaboration including participation in the Garden's 15-year plan, 2040 Compass.

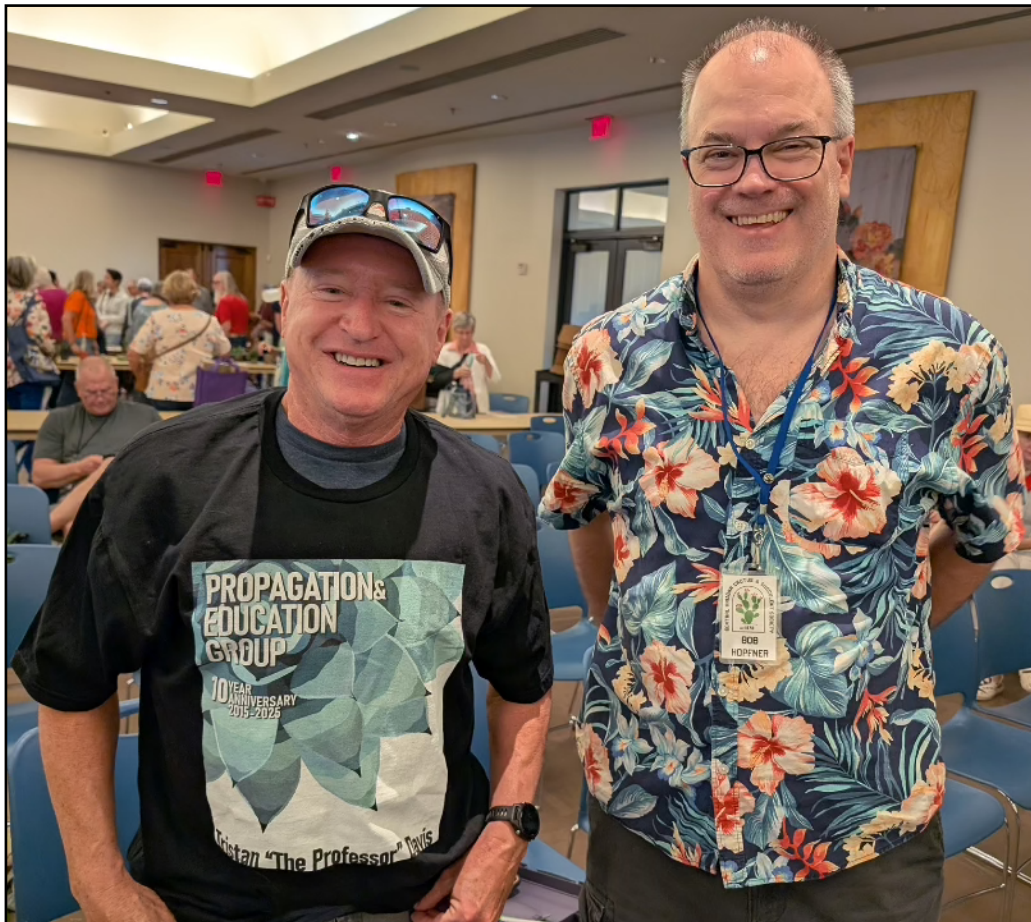
We confirmed space at the Garden for our major activities through the end of 2027 and are now beginning the planning for 2028. The Garden is loaning their point-of-sale equipment for our use during the March 2026 sale. Members of CACSS and the Tucson Cactus and Succulent Society, along with one guest, will be admitted free to the Garden to attend the 2026 Annual Show and Sale. This support from the Garden is greatly appreciated as your board continues to work to maintain this solid relationship for the benefit of both of our organizations.

TRISTAN DAVIS HONORED FOR ORGANIZING THE PROPAGATION EDUCATION GROUP (PEG) FOR OVER TEN YEARS

By Editor Sue Hakala
Photos by Natalie Fruciano

While updating the newsletter Indexes for 2025, I came across the oldest listing for a PEG meeting: It was 2016. Ten years, WOW!

I contacted President Don Begley suggesting we create a T-shirt or something for Tristan to recognize his contribution to the club. He asked me to lead the effort and work with Kim Andrews, representing the board, and club graphic designer Bob Hopfner.



Above left Tristan with the shirt designed for him by Bob on the right.

I was honored, as I've been a member since around 1979 and have attended lots of workshops offered by the club through the years. Even if I don't grow the plant featured, I always learn things and enjoy seeing the plants. No one person has done more to help educate us than Tristan Davis.

He has organized/led every PEG meeting, or invited other club members who are more knowledgeable than he to present the program. He asks other club members:

- to bring specimens so participants can see more mature plants in-person.
- to donate beautiful plants for a members-only raffle.
- to donate cuttings or seedlings so that all attendees get to leave with something.

Just some of the topics featured at PEG workshops include:

- *Agave Extravaganza*
- *Agave Extravaganza* vs. *Aloe Smackdown*
- *Agave Relatives* (Tristan has done *Agave* field research, and discovered a new one, and has gotten to name it.)
- *Cacti and Cephalia—Why More is Better*
- *Cactus with Leaves*
- *Epiphytic Cacti*
- *Euphorbia*
- *Growing Bromeliads in Arizona*
- *Hand-Pollinating Stapelia Plants*
- *Plants that Shrug off Summer*
- *Propagation for Conservation*
- *Sansevieria to name only a few*



Bob prepared several designs for us to choose from for the shirt. He, Kim and I agreed on a design, and Bob created and got the shirt produced. It was presented to Tristan at the February meeting. Left, is the back of the shirt with *Agave* taxonomy.

A TRIP TO HIDDEN AGAVE NURSERY By Ed Sieckert, MS



Jeremy Spath at his nursery.

A few years ago, I met Tristan Davis at his garden and was amazed at his collection of *Agaves*. He invited me to the PEG group to learn more about *Agaves* and their culture. At a meeting, I met Gregg Starr, owner of Starr Nursery in Tucson, and was given a relatively new *Agave* discovery (*Agave qurotepecensis*) from Oaxaca, Mexico. I wanted to learn more about them from visiting other nurseries in California. Jeff Moore grows unique succulents in Solana Beach. He recommended I see Jeremy Spath of Hidden Agave Nursery in Escondido, California.

So here the story begins... I was on a stay in San Diego and was able to meet Jeremy Spath (at left) at his nursery, which is open by appointment only. You can contact him by email at

DeepOceanCurrents@gmail.com. The nursery is located 30 minutes north of Rancho Bernardo where I was staying off of I-15. As you take I-15 north to

Escondido, follow the guidelines he will give you. The road off of I-15 winds through the rocky hills until you drive up to his parking area.



Shade house at Hidden Agave Nursery.

Climbing the steps up, you will see the six acre planted *Agave* garden; then on to the 2,500 square foot shade house filled with *Agaves* of various stages. Off to the right you will see the tissue culture lab where he isolates and selects certain tissues to grow multiple plants of the same genus and species or hybrids to increase his plants for sale. He has had a lifelong passion for plants and started his career at San Diego Botanical Garden. He then moved on to Rancho Soledad Nursery doing field work and hybridizing. Later he went on to xeric tissue culture where he learned tissue culture techniques. In 2018 he moved to Escondido where he started Hidden Agave Nursery.

This nursery is unique as it has an excellent climate, soil and rainfall to grow *Agaves* outdoors. The hillside is full of *Agaves* he has planted. One can walk the winding paths and observe them in a habitat similar to what is found in Mexico and other locales. Next is a visit to his 2,500 square foot shade house that you can walk through where plants line the growing benches. Some of the species/hybrids are pictured below.



Left, *A. yucatanensis* with large toothed leaves and right, *Agave titanota* x'Blue Glow'.

Do you want to learn more about *Agave* culture, location and species, hybrids, tissue culture, pest management, and identification? Then look no further than the book *Agaves: Species, Cultivars and Hybrids* by Jeremy Spath and Jeff Moore. It is hard to put down and contains many excellent habitat photos of the various growing stages of the genus. In summary, the visit to Hidden Agave Nursery and Jeremy Spath was a memorable trip.

Walking by the benches at the nursery, I saw an unusual *Agave* with what appeared to be small tufts of cotton on each spine. It is unusual in the world of *Agave* species. Jeremy identified it as *Agave albopilosa*, endemic to Huasteca Canyon in the Cumbres



Agave albopilosa has white tufted spines.

de Monterrey National Park, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. It grows on almost vertical limestone cliffs at an elevation of 3,500-5,000 feet. It was discovered by Professor Armando Verduzco of the University of Monterey during field trips in the Sierra Madre Oriental area. Its scientific description was published as a new species in 2007 by Ismael Cabral, Jose Angel Villarreal and Eduardo A. Estrada.

The plant is small in stature, 10-16 inches high and 12-16 inches in diameter at maturity. The leaves are triangular, 4.7-9 inches long, thick ridged and upturned. At the end of the leaf is a spine covered with white hairs (trichomes) which are thought to collect moisture from fog, and then transport it by gravity downward where it is absorbed by the roots. In situ, it is a slow grower and hardy to 20-25 degrees (USDA Zone 9).

It is also thought to be polycarpic (a plant that does not die after flowering). The flower stalk is lateral, blooms in the spring and is 2-4 feet long.

Flowers are greenish-purple on the upper half of the spike. Like most *Agaves*, it is prone to rot if overwatered, and mealybugs like it. It is listed as critically endangered.

How will it grow in the Phoenix area? It needs morning sun and filtered afternoon shade. It needs good draining soil with some limestone in the mix of native soil, perlite and cactus mix. It should be lightly watered in the summer months. It is planted in my garden with morning sun and partial afternoon filtered shade from a palo verde, *Parkinsonia* hybrid 'Desert Museum.'

I hope you enjoyed this tour through *Agave* land.

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SPECIALISTS TO CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS

- **Tristan Davis** Manages the Seed Depot. Specializations include plant propagation and heading PEG (Propagation Education Group).
- **Doug Dawson** Specializations include growing from seed, flora of Namibia, *Lithops*, other mesembs, *Melocactus*, and miniature cacti and succulents of Arizona.
- **Tom Gatz** Specializations include *Adenium*, *Agave* and growing succulent trees as bonsai (*Bursera*, *Portulacaria*, *Ficus*, *Operculicarya*, *Pachycormus*, etc.)
- **Dean Patrick** Specializations in softwood stem-cuttings, plant division and seed starting, rooting cacti, *Agave*, and *Aloe*.

Direct any comments, questions, ideas to
Editor Sue Hakala.