

CENTRAL SPINE

Newsletter of the

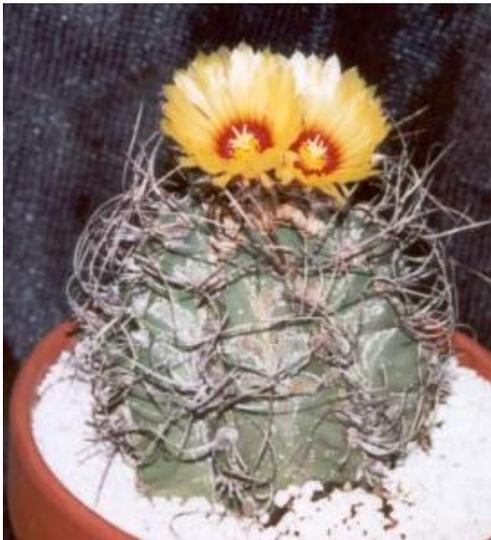
CENTRAL ARIZONA CACTUS AND SUCCULENT SOCIETY

AUGUST, 2001

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT—AUGUST 2001

We welcome Ken Schutz to the Directorship of the Desert Botanical Garden and to membership in the CACSS and CSSA. I met with him early this month and outlined the history of our club with the Garden, explaining what we do and how. He is eager to see us succeed in bringing our hobby to the attention of the public, and he was pleased to learn how we help the DBG at the Plant Sale Festivals. He is also planning on going on our Saturday, November 3rd buying trip to Tucson (*more later.*)

This summer hasn't really been that bad. There have been hot days, but there have also been periods of relatively cooler weather. Except for a spell of almost a week of hot, humid weather last month, the weather hasn't bothered the plants much.



Astrophytum capricorn: yellow with red throat

I'm learning that there are some plants, dormant in the heat, that do best when just brought into the house and left unwatered in a bright window (not sunny.) I did this with most winter growers: members of family Crassulaceae like *Crassula*, *Dudleya*, and *Echeveria*; members of family Asteraceae (the daisy family) like

Cotyledon, *Othonna*, and *Tylecodon*; and quite a few mesembs. The few mesembs I have lost were winter growers that got soaked by summer monsoons during days on end of humid weather, or *Faucaria*. Though they are supposed to be summer growers, I find this last genus needs a strict dry rest here during hot and humid weather. They then grow the rest of the year for me—the ones that survive from mid July to late August, that is.

Most of my cacti have continued growing this summer, even the *Mammillaria* that usually go dormant. *Pilosocereus* and various members of subfamily Opuntioideae grow fast when it's hot. *Selenicereus* do too, as well as *Cereus*, *Peniocereus*, and *Monvillea*. *Echinopsis* hybrids bloom a few days after a cool night, buds formed this spring and lying dormant so long as I keep watering them, that is. The few *Lobivia* in my collection keep blooming as well. The *Turbincarpus* bloom on and off during warm weather, beginning in February and lasting through November. And *Cleistocactus tupizensis* blooms from February to December each year, even on a plant only 18" (46 cm) tall. *Frailea*, *Notocactus*, *Parodia*, *Rebutia*, *Sulcorebutia* are all resting.

On the succulent side, the cucurbits are in their vining glory. (See the article in the July, 2001, issue.) Succulent morning glories (*Ipomoea* species) grow rampantly all summer, too. And most *Euphorbia* in my collection are in active growth or flowering.

I have had trouble this year outside with spider mite on my *Pterodiscus* plants. Never happened before. The treatment is to spray with water every day, making sure to douse all the undersides of the leaves. After a few days the mites will have drowned. For a severe infestation in a rampant grower like *Pterodiscus*, just snap off the stems at the tuber and keep the new growth sprayed with water daily. This works in the winter as well for plants in a warm, dry sunroom or greenhouse. Spider mites love hot, dry conditions. Humidity or cold is their bane.



Adenium 'Candy Stripe' pink flowers continue blooming through the summer

I still think most people don't water enough. The goal is to have the soil mass damp for 3–5 days before it is completely dry. For typical large-chunk mixes in 4" (10 cm) or smaller clay pots, two days of dampness or less is probably the rule. I find myself watering many things every other day. If I didn't, they would stop growing. And, if flowers are desired, fertilizer is required. Here we have such bright sun we don't have to worry about plants growing lax and soft from too much fertilizer. Go ahead and stuff your plants with nitrogen, as much or more than you stuff your pets and yourselves.

Cathy B says CACSS members might arrange hard hat tours of the new buildings on weekdays, preferably in the mornings. Cathy also wants to part with (that is, sell) a large *Aloe suzannae*.

Saturday, November 3, 2001, we will take a bus trip to Tucson to visit nurseries. The itinerary will probably be finalized in time for me to announce it at the August 26 meeting. We will leave early, with pickup stops at Metrocenter and in Ahwatukee, and return just after dark. Cost will be \$20, and will be nonrefundable unless we fail to attract 20 people and have to cancel the trip. We already have firm commitments from 11 members.

Next month, on Sunday, September 30, we will hear Mark Kiah speak on Cycads for Arizona. Mark manages Pacific Palms Nursery in Phoenix.

This month's speaker, on August 26 at 2 P.M., is Patrick Quirk, Horticulturalist for Cacti at the Phoenix Desert Botanical Garden. Patrick notices things while he's looking at his charges and he is here to tell us about it and how we can learn to pay attention.

Leo M

PLANTS OF THE MONTH — GYMNOCALYCIUMS

Gymnocalycium are South American plants, exclusively from the eastern side of the Andes. Some are from inland areas, some from coastal Argentina and Brazil. The name means *naked flower tube* and, if you look at a bud, you will see smooth scales without a trace of hair or spines. They are globular plants, sometimes solitary, sometimes clumping, but never getting very large. Spinination can be sparse to ferocious.



G. intertextum: white with brownish-red throats

Habitats range from grasslands to scrub to subtropical forest, generally from 1500–3500 feet (457–1067m) in elevation; most are in the dry thorn forest zone called Chaco, with summer rainfall and clay soil. They seem to grow well for me in any soil, but I like using fine-particle granitic soil dug from my garden, because there is no organic matter to break down and get rancid, and I don't have to repot until they've outgrown the pot. With proper watering and fertilizing this can be just a year or two.

The green-bodied ones require some shading from Phoenix sun, growing under bushes or grasses in habitat. I grow them on the bottom shelf of two-shelf tables. Most of the brown-bodied ones take a lot more sun but they haven't been happy with full Phoenix sun. I grow them on the sunny side of the bottom shelves so they get about a half-day's shade and a half day's full sun. Most will not take any frost at all [*but they do fine under a canopy in winter*: Ed.].



G. netrelianum's yellow flowers

They flower young, easily, and often several times a season with flowers large for the size of the plant body. To ensure plenty of flowers, keep them moist during warm weather. I try not to let mine dry completely from the time they start growing in January or February until it gets cold in mid December. That's right, I don't let them dry out. I think they could almost stand in a dish of water during warm weather without trouble. They will easily survive drying out during warm weather but growth will be halted for some weeks. And, if I had time, I would fertilize them weekly with full-strength fertilizer such as Peters or Miracle Grow at normal concentrations, or ammonium sulfate 1 tablespoon a gallon of water.

They are easy to propagate from seed or from offsets kept moist until growing. Clones lacking chlorophyll, revealing the other pigments ranging from red to pink to brown, are often sold grafted onto *Hylocereus undatus* stalks, the whole thing looking like a lollipop.

I like flowers. So, favorites have lots of flowers: *G. bruchii* is always the first to bloom, in January. Some clones have flowers with a fragrance like roses. It clumps and fills a pot rapidly. It has small bodies, rarely more than 2" (5 cm) in diameter, and has tiny and harmless spines with areoles arranged in tight lines, looking a little like a small Arizona rainbow cactus. *G. eurypleurum* blooms most of the summer with big white flowers that have a strange bluish luminosity. It offsets sparingly and many clones have just a few areoles with few, short, wavy brown spines. *G. mihanovichii* and kin are small solitary plants with prominent red and brown pigment and sharp angles to the ribs. They flower when less than an inch in

diameter and flower all summer on new growth. Flowers are anything from lime green to white to light to dark pink. The red, purple, and orange lollipop grafted cacti are clones of this plant lacking chlorophyll, and can only be propagated by grafting. For those liking spines, search out *G. cardenasianum*, now properly known as *G. spegazzini* subspecies *cardenasianum*. The spines are very long and thick, often obscuring the body. Sometimes they are wavy as well.

Some information came from *Gymnocalycium: A Collector's Guide* by John Pilbeam, A. A. Balkema, Publishers, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 1995.

Leo M

[The editor took all the pictures in this issue this summer; plants were from his or Russ H's collection.]

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Deadline for insertion in next issue of the *Central Spine*: September 18, 2001.

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CALENDAR

August 26 Patrick Quirk: Learning to be a Better Gardener Through Field Observations
September 30 Mark Kiah on Cycads for Arizona
October 28 Silent Auction
November 18 Woody Minnich
December 9 Holiday Party & Annual Elections
Meetings are at 2 P.M. in Webster Auditorium, unless otherwise noted. All meetings include a question and answer session on growing plants.



G. valnicekianum's pinkish-brown flowers

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