



# CENTRAL SPINE

NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL ARIZONA CACTUS & SUCCULENT SOCIETY

ON THE WEB AT <http://www.centralarizonacactus.org/>



## *President's Letter...*

*Lee Brownson*

Congratulations to the new Officers and Board Members for 2006. I know it will be a great group of people leading the CACSS forward in the year ahead. I especially wish Kathy B. the best as my successor as President. It is a big job and I know she is up to the task.

I do not know what direction she will take the Board and the Society. Each person who is willing to serve comes with certain ideas and interests. Those ideas and interests represent other members of the Society who feel the same way. It is through discussion, dialogue and compromise that the Board determines its priorities and the direction it feels the majority of members want to go.

The December meeting was my last as President. I hope that, during the past two years, the Society has become more meaningful to its members. Membership has grown from about 150 members in 2003 to over 230, about a 50% increase. A large majority of the increase has come from people interested in the Cactus Rescue Program.

I have ambivalent feelings about this. I believe the Rescue Program has struck a cord with the public and, as the program becomes more active; more people will be attracted to its goals. At the same time, I feel I have let everyone down by not being able to concentrate on securing additional opportunities to rescue the plants that are being destroyed each and every day. The truth is that I spread myself too thin. I could not be the President and Rescue Committee Chairman at the same time. I had to choose. I chose the Rescue Committee. My goal is for a dramatic turn-around in the program, securing more rescue opportunities than we can handle. That is a problem I would like to face.

Of course, I do not plan to abandon the rest of the activities of the CACSS. I love collecting plants and will always want to be on the next Bus Trip to Wherever to find new plants. I love winning ribbons at the Annual Show. I love the fellowship at monthly meetings and Open Gardens. I have learned an incredible amount about cacti and succulents from fellow members.

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## *Officers*

President—Kathy B.

Vice President—Leo M.

Secretary—Sue D.

Treasurer—Tom B.

Past President—Lee B.

## *Directors*

Lee B.

Ray D.

Denise D.

Laurence G.

Celeste G.

Dana H.

Cynthia R.

Lois S.

Ingrid S.

Robert T.

Librarian—Erik A.

Newsletter Editor &  
CSSA Affiliate Representative  
Cynthia R.

## *Calendar*

### January 8th, Sunday

Open garden at Cliff's home

10:30 am to 3:00 pm

There will be something for everyone; *Euphorbias*, *Gasterias*, *Haworthias*, African bulbs, Cacti, Caudiciforms & a lot of *Mesembs*. Many of the plants are seedlings or young plants. Everyone & their guests are welcome.

### January 29th, Sunday

Regular club meeting

Dorrance Hall, Desert Botanical Garden

2:00 pm

Kathy Rice of the Desert Botanical Garden will give an overview of ongoing conservation efforts at the Desert Botanical Garden.

CENTRAL ARIZONA CACTUS AND SUCCULENT SOCIETY



JO

Interested in one of the name badges you see other members wearing? You can have one of your very own! Talk to Jo D. at the meeting or send her a check for \$7.50.



*Publication of the material in the Central Spine does not imply agreement with the ideas expressed therein by any portion of the membership of the CACSS, nor does it constitute an endorsement or support for any portion of such material by the CACSS, or the Central Spine, regardless of any position or office held by the author(s). All such material represents a comment and/or personal opinion of the author(s).*

## *CACSS Board Meeting minutes for November 20, 2005*

As Tom B. was absent for this meeting, he sent in a Treasurer's report. As of October 31, there was \$16,132.83 in the general account, \$3,927.36 of which was in the plant rescue fund. For the CSSA Convention, the Club was showing a profit of \$376.48 as of October 31.

The Tucson bus trip was a success. The nurseries visited had prepared delicious goodies and interesting presentations, for which we are most grateful. Unfortunately the bus was not filled to the usual limit of about 40 people, so, the trip will end up costing the Club some money.

Eric A. has the keys for the Library, however he was not present for this meeting.

Problems concerning the Central Spine were discussed. No November issue was sent out. Cynthia R. has volunteered to take over the editorship if Galyn doesn't want to do it any longer. It was decided to create a Newsletter committee whose members are Galyn (if he wishes to continue), Cynthia R., Ingrid S., and Leo M.

The Nomination Committee presented the following slate: Kathy B. for President, Leo M. for Vice President, Tom B. for Treasurer, Sue D. for Secretary and Celeste G., Ray D., Laurence G., Lois S., and Cynthia R. for the new Board Members. Returning Board Members are Lee B., Ingrid S., and Bob T.

THERE WAS NO BOARD MEETING PRIOR TO THE DECEMBER HOLIDAY PARTY, however some business was discussed after the feast:

Lee B. thanked all of the 2005 officers and board for their participation in the year's activities and he thanked the Holiday Party planners, especially Jo D., for their hard work. Doug D. thanked Lee B. for his service as President.

A discussion was held concerning our annual donation to the DBG. It was decided to give the Board authority to contact the DBG regarding a donation of up to \$2,500.

The new slate of officers was elected by a show of hands with Lee B., as past President, now being a voting member of the board, which is a change in procedure.

As of December 10, there was \$18,984.25 in the Club's account, \$4,167.36 of which is in the plant rescue fund.

Happy Holidays to all!

Sue D.



## *Sprouting Cactus Seed...*

*Leo A. Martin*

Some people are intimidated at the thought of growing cactus from those little tiny seeds. Although it is somewhat slower than growing cabbage or sunflowers, it is not much more difficult.

Because they are small for quite some time, a hundred seedlings can easily be kept in an 8-ounce styrofoam cup for two years before they are crowded enough to need transplanting. Almost everybody has space for an 8-ounce cup on a home windowsill or near the light in their cubicle at work.

Cactus seedlings need the same things needed by all other seedlings: light, water, soil, and warmth, in the proper quantities, and a place to grow. Each of these needs is easy to meet.

First, I'll tell you how I do it. Then I'll explain each of the factors. Some excellent growers do this very differently, but this is how I do it.

Start with 8-ounce styrofoam cups. Write names on the cups with a ball-point pen. Don't poke holes in the cups. Fill cups about 3/4 with desert soil or even sharp builders' sand. Never, ever, use potting soil in any proportion or any added organic matter like peat moss or coco fiber, because this junk carries eggs of fungus gnats, which eat seedlings. The seedlings are small and thin, and appreciate a little help standing upright at first. Top dress with one layer of larger gravel or pumice.

Get the soil almost completely wet with tap water, not filtered or distilled water. The chlorine in the tap water will inhibit algae growth long enough for the cacti to get started. Sprinkle the seeds on the surface. They will drop down between the top dressing onto the soil. A hundred seeds would be fine in a typical 8-ounce cup. They love being crowded. If you have less seeds, that works just fine. Use a spray bottle to soak the soil thoroughly, to the point that the top dressing is standing under a few millimeters of water. Let the cup sit overnight on the kitchen counter or until the water has evaporated and the soil is glistening wet.

Cover with plastic wrap, and secure with a rubber band. Place in a bright spot with temperatures in the 70s or higher.

Check every few days. They should begin sprouting within a week or so. When the soil dries out somewhat, use a spray bottle to rewet. It is better to use distilled or reverse osmosis water for subsequent waterings to prevent salt buildup. Replace the plastic cover. About once a week spray with a one-quarter dilution of water-soluble fertilizer. Remove the plastic when the seedlings are pushing up against the cover. This will be months to perhaps a year or more.

Do not transplant out until the seedlings are so crowded you no longer can see the soil. This would normally be at least two years. You can have a collection of a thousand cacti on your kitchen windowsill!

If cottony fungus or thick moss appears, take off the cover for a day or so until it dries out. If you start with tap water, this will not be an issue until the seedlings are big enough to stand a day or so without the cover.

After two years or so, during warm weather, when the cacti are easily big enough to handle (2" or so for columnar types) and the pot is so crowded it looks like a jumbo single scoop of green ice cream, transplant to individual pots.

### **Light**

Newborn baby humans can't handle a day at the beach in a swimsuit very well. Neither can cactus seedlings. They need bright light but not direct sunlight. Eight to twelve inches from a fluorescent lighting fixture works well for most. Light from a north window also works well, if you keep the afternoon sun from shining onto the seedlings. The top shelf in most well-lit cubicles will also work. Not enough light leads to skinny, light green, weak seedlings. Too much light leads to red but living seedlings and slow growth. Far too much light leads to white, dead seedlings. Different species have different requirements. Most *Opuntia* can take almost full sun from the start.

### **Water**

This is where most people make mistakes. Adult cacti are succulents. Baby cacti are not. Cactus seedlings must stay moist for the first one to two years of their lives. Especially during the first few months, drying out completely - even

for an hour or so - will usually be fatal. Some people get around this issue by looking at their plants every day, and watering almost daily. The rest of us use sprouting pots without drainage holes, and stretch plastic wrap over the tops to hold in moisture. Evenly, lightly moist is what we want; a swamp will lead to algae and moss overgrowing the cacti. An excess of water is needed at the very beginning to wake up the sleeping seeds and wash away chemicals in the seed that inhibit sprouting.

### **Soil**

Fungus gnat larvae in potting soil are the second leading cause of failure. They eat tiny seedlings. Don't use potting soil. Yes, you can sterilize it by cooking in the microwave or in the oven, and you can use insect poison - but why go to all this trouble? Besides, they will find their way back in from the other plants you have in that nasty stuff.

### **Warmth**

This shouldn't be a problem here at any time of the year. Inside during winter, and outside in the shade during summer, are just fine for cacti to sprout.

### **A Place to Grow**

The commonest cause of loss is drying out. So, don't use a container with drainage holes. And, cover with plastic. If you avoid nasty organic matter in your soil, you won't have to worry much about fungus or insects. Small containers work just as well as larger ones, and the seedlings stay in the first pot for two years or so; therefore, I settled on 8-ounce (or even 6-ounce) styrofoam cups. You can fit more into your growing space.

### **Too Much Is Never Enough**

If you want to go into mass indoor production, warehouse stores sell a 4 foot long x 6 foot high x 18 inches deep shelf rack with 6 shelves for about \$80. Two or three 4-foot fluorescent shop light fixtures (\$8), holding two tubes each (\$1 per tube in bulk), can be attached under five of the shelves. (Six if you put cups on the floor under the first shelf.) The cheapest plain white tubes work as well as expensive grow lights for seedlings. About 50 cups fit under each of the 6 shelves. Let's see... 6 shelves x 50 cups per shelf x 100 seedlings per cup equals 30,000 seedlings.

## ***President's Letter...*** continued from page 1

***Lee Brownson***

I do have a few parting thoughts as President:

- I would like to see more people from out of Arizona brought in as guest presenters at our monthly meetings.
- I think the person who assumes the position of Newsletter Editor should be financially compensated for his/her time and effort.
- I think the Board of Directors should meet on days other than those of the General Membership Meeting.
- I believe only good can come from strengthening our relationship with the Desert Botanical Garden.
- I think our CACSS Library is a vastly under utilized resource. We should figure out how to make books more available to the membership.
- I would like to see a Project Committee created with the responsibility of finding ways to utilize the funds we have to further our stated purpose - education. Three months ago, the membership came up with many ideas for new projects. We need a group of people who will investigate those suggestions and make recommendations as to which ones would best serve our mission.

I wish all of those things had been accomplished while I was President. They weren't. But that does not mean they cannot or should not be addressed in the future.

In closing, I would like to say that this club is not the President or the Board of Directors, it is the Membership. It is up to each and everyone member to participate, to let their wishes be known. If you have a complaint, express it to a Board member. If you agree with any of my suggestions, tell a Board member. If you like what is being done, tell someone.

I wish everyone a Happy Holiday Season and a prosperous New Year. May all your days be hot and your nights cool.

## *Around My (Or Your?) Desert Garden...*

**Bob Torrest**



October 31 - Finally maximum temperatures below 90F. Part of the reason for these articles was to see how the plants handled the summer. I've been surprised at how many plants flowered during those hot months (near record hot!). And now it gets even better.

The month began with flowers on yellow bells, *Acacia aneura*, red bird and San Marcos hibiscus. By mid-month there was Baja *Ruellia (peninsularis)*, *Calliandra californica* and desert willow. After that there was Coulter's hibiscus, cape honeysuckle, *Salvias*, cascalote, *Chorisia* and *Acacia salicina*.



*Coryphantha elephantidens* continued to produce carmine flowers as it has for months (most unusual for cacti). Several of the tall *Cereus* cacti flowered again as did a few *Ferocactus*. There were also flowers on *Notocactus magnificus*, *Cochemias*, *Ariocarpus fissuratus* and *agavoides* and *Pilosocereus alensis*. Boojums, *Pachycormus discolor* and the Baja ocotillo (*Fouquieria diguetii*) are leafing out. Some *Aloes* flowering include *rauhi*, *somaliensis* and *krapohlina*. A large aloe with a showy multicolor candelabra like flower stalk that flowers several times during the year still remains unidentified...(several of you have it.....any ideas?)



Thanks again to the 15 to 20 members who came by to pick up to 10 plants in one gallon pots and thereby saved most of over 200 plants that were up for grabs. While here, their most common questions were about soils and handling cactus cuttings (we also had a sale going on). For tough plants that don't need to be coddled (e.g., senitas) we usually screen out rocks and caliche (and sometimes debris like cement pieces) over 3/8 inch. If the soil is fine grained add some gravel (up to 1/4 inch) to improve drainage. For *Aloes*, *Agaves*, etc., we usually add some topsoil or potting soil (about 25% by volume) but be sure to retain good drainage. This kind of enriched soil is fine for pots usually with some added pumice and a bit of time-release fertilizer. If you experiment a bit with your yard soil you will soon find a good mix.

Columnar cacti cuttings can make an immediate landscape impact and root readily up to about 4 or 5 feet. Larger cuttings often take much longer to root and start growing again. After the cut is dry (a week when warm), up to a foot can be buried for larger cuttings. You may need to stake thinner columns for a while and shade cloth will prevent sunburn.



There were also questions about *Trichocereus* which seem to be unfamiliar and confusing to some and aren't grown as much as they should be (we had about 10 varieties at our sale). The flowers are large and relatively frequent. Only a few do well in full sun... They include *terschekii* (cardon grande), *candicans*, *spachianus* and *huascha*. You will see commercial landscapers put *pasacana* (San Pedro), a dark green almost spineless column in full sun. Don't do it... They may survive for a while but really need some shade. Most of the others; many of which get up to a foot or two before snaking around, prefer some light shade as, for example, under a creosote bush or desert tree. Give some a try!

## *Mini Bits...*

*Ray Daley*

MINI BITS.....next time I complain about how far it is from home to the DBG, remind me about how far members Maury & Carol have to come (Tucson) or how far members John & Thelma have to come (Prescott) - and they're hardly ever NOT at the meetings/shows/auctions/parties.....it was good to see Sundee at the holiday party apparently recovered from her recent hospitalizations; Electra was at the November meeting with her new knee; Damon is recovering nicely with his new hip, and for those of you not at the party, Leo has apparently really gone to the dogs (in a non-professional sense).....don't forget Cliff's open garden on Jan 8th - directions were available at the Nov meeting and at the party....and for future reference, Ken & Deanna and Sue & I are planning to open our gardens to the club on Sat. Apr 1 - we're about a mile apart so you can get a Sun City twofer.....and by the way, the board meeting minutes that appeared in the last SPINE (October) were NOT the July minutes as the title would have us believe, but were actually for the September meeting and were submitted as such.....the following is from a book titled "A New Look at Some Old Thing - Selected Nature Articles" by Warren R.Wells, Chief Naturalist for the Hamilton County (Ohio) Park District, published by The Board of Park Commissioners of the Hamilton County Park District. We bought the book in 1979, so the articles in it aren't new, but maybe, like me, one or more of you missed the original research reported herein the first time around.

Speak Softly To The Plants, Please!

We've known for years about "sensitive plants" that grow in the parks (in the general Cincinnati area).

We've studied the various tropisms in botany and learned that some plants kept their flowers always facing the sun. We learned that wild grape tendrils reacted to touch. Those which the wind blew against twigs caught hold and hardened while those never touching anything withered and died.

Then we learned that plants, most of them, bloomed according to the number of hours of sunlight per day - that nettles could sting and thus fight back if molested. We learned that tomato vines don't like being touched - don't ask us how; and we long ago decided that it almost looked as though some plants could think.

Now comes no less an authority than the Wall Street Journal with an article that gives a wee bit of creepy feeling to those of us who so blithely picked, dug, trampled and otherwise destroyed plants down through the years.

According to this article, a scientist working with a polygraph machine (lie detector), just for fun hooked his electrodes to a freshly watered flower and amazedly watched the instrument register a pattern closely resembling that of a person under emotional stimulation. He decided to burn a leaf and no sooner than his mind registered the thought of fire, the polygraph needle popped right off the chart - he says.

He attached electrodes to three fresh vegetables, had someone chose one and drop it into boiling water. The one chosen even before it was touched, showed a sharp jump on the chart and then "fainted" as evidenced by a smooth straight line on the chart.

He says, this Cleve Backster, that eggs also "faint" when they are about to be picked up and broken, and that other eggs around the chosen one get nervous. He reads it all on the polygraph chart.

I can remember my grandmother and several aunts who used to talk to their flowers as they tended them. We always kept it pretty quiet, figuring the old lady was a little "teched in the head," but maybe she knew something we didn't. Even one of our most interesting newspaper columnists recently told of a lady who swore at a never blooming shrub, threatening to destroy it if it missed this year. It bloomed!

We occasionally "frighten" non-blooming house plants by putting them in the refrigerator for an hour or so, or "drowning" them for an hour in water. Usually they start blooming quickly.

We'll have to be careful of what we say and where we walk when hiking through the woods in (the local parks). Just think of the several thousand plants listening to every word and watching every motion, and also the terrible anguish caused by careless hikers crushing the plants!

(RD: not to mention those poor plants behind that tree we just used for.. umm...'an emergency').....RD



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ARTICLE SUBMISSION DEADLINE FOR NEXT  
CENTRAL SPINE ISSUE IS: JANUARY 16, 2006

### ***Plant Questions???***

### ***Who To Contact!!!***

Many CACSS members have experience with different kinds of succulent plants. I hope they will add their names to the following list (just call or e-mail Bob Torrest). For now, with the first four, the list is simply alphabetical with principle interests. When more members add their information, the list will also be cross-referenced by topic.

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|-------------------|---|
| <b>DOUG D.</b>    | Specialization includes Flora of Namibia, Growing from Seed, <i>Lithops</i> , other <i>Mesemb</i> s & <i>Melocactus</i> .   |
| <b>MIKE G.</b>    | Specialization includes <i>Aloes</i> , <i>Haworthias</i> , Columnar Cacti & <i>Turbincarpus</i> .   |
| <b>CYNTHIA R.</b> | Specialization includes Flora of Madagascar, Growing from Seed, Caudiciform & Pachycaul Succulents, <i>Aloes</i> , <i>Apocynaceae</i> , <i>Burseraceae</i> , <i>Euphorbiaceae</i> , <i>Fouquieria</i> , & Succulent Bonsai. |
| <b>BOB T.</b>     | Specialization includes Desert Landscaping, Unusual (including Rare Fruit) Trees & Shrubs, <i>Aloes</i> , <i>Agaves</i> , Columnar Cacti, <i>Trichocereus</i> & <i>Opuntia</i> .  |