

Central Spine

February, 2012

Newsletter of the Central Arizona Cactus & Succulent Society

An Affiliate of the Cactus & Succulent Society of America

On the Web at www.centralarizonacactus.org

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Sunday, February 26, 2012, 2 PM

Webster Auditorium

Desert Botanical Garden

**Presentation: Wendy Hodgson:
Agaves and How They Changed the Way
We Look at Landscapes**

Articles

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Agave parryi, located at a site which is probably the northernmost and coldest locality for the range of the species--- west of Flagstaff. See more photos with Gard Roper's article on page 4. Photo by Doug Dawson

March Newsletter Deadline: March 10, 2012

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Steven Mack has resigned from the board.

Welcome to New Members

**Sandy Siegel
.Elane Headley
Mary Ann Jorgenson
Jo Baker
Lee Trachtenberg
Anne L. Thomson
Carolyn Stout**

2012 Meeting Schedule

Webster Auditorium (note location change)

February 26 Wendy Hodgson: Agaves and How They Changed the Way We Look at Landscapes

(See Gard Roper's article about Wendy's 35 years of experience, p. 4)

March 25--Dr. Bob Torrest, Columnar Cactus



CACSS Show and Sale April 20, 21, 22

See page 3 for more details



Volunteers are needed for annual Show and Sale Committee. Committee chairs: Gard Roper and Steve Martinez. Please contact Steve or sign up at the February meeting.

President's Letter

Well I must say that I am happy that spring is on the way, but as I think about it, I realize that I enjoy almost every month for one reason or another. Sure, in winter I worry about plants freezing and will my heaters keep working, and in the summer I worry about plants cooking and will my coolers function properly.

However, in all months there is usually something cool happening with some plant(s). The reason for this is that I grow many types of plants, with varying growing seasons. I have plants that are winter- dormant, plants that are summer-dormant, plants that have growth spurts in spring and fall, and plants that have no requisite dormancy.

With all the various cacti, African bulbs, mesembs, asclepiads, and myriad other succulents, there is usually something in bloom, or sprouting pups, or looking especially good with new growth. This is what I find so rewarding about this plant hobby; every day is a new picture,..things don't stay the same as with some other hobbies. A coin will look the

same every day, but I understand that the numismatist still likes owning and looking at it. Plants require more care, and one of the keys to becoming successful with difficult plants is to look at them regularly and carefully, and learn to recognize their needs. (Basically I usually learned by killing a few or more of

them at first- but don't give up too easily!) I will also start thinking about what to enter in the upcoming CACSS Show. I hope all of you are enjoying your plants as much as I am, and are thinking of Show entries as well.

...
See you at the meeting. Steve M.

CACSS Members Needed to Help with the DBG Plant Sale in March

The Horticulture Department at the Desert Botanical Garden would greatly appreciate your assistance once again during our upcoming plant sale, March 16-18. We need people to help answer questions about cacti and succulents, as well as plants in general, regardless of your level of experience. Being on hand to talk with customers takes a lot of the pressure off our staff, especially during the busy morning hours.

If you can help, please email the day(s) you can be there to Starr Urbatcsh at surbatsch@dbg.org
Thanks!



Please Enter Plants in the CACSS 2012 Show

We want to make Show entry easy for you this year. The Show committee will call you and answer questions on how to advance your skill level with desert plants. Our purpose is to learn, not to compete. I will bring an agave—I'm uncertain about species--and ask Greg Starr. Technical names do not matter in terms of Show entry. You can get suggestions from master growers like Julie Plath on your plant's presentation at any time during the Show. One little tip is to use new, clean top dressing.

You can print a copy of plant categories from our website. If you're having any problems at all with printing it, we will have copies at the February meeting. Greg Starr, a judge last year, gave newer growers a tip: Increase most of your sun exposure moderately for a longer time during each day. Do it now before the sun is too hot.

I received valuable tips on shade house construction from Steve Plath and Scott McMahon. If you want to ask me, I can share these tips that totally improved my plants. Please enter show dates on your calendar now: April 18—bring plants; April 20, 21 and 22, Show and Sale. Invite your friends to our Show.

by Gard Roper



Wendy Hodgson's Contributions to the Plant World

by Gard Roper

Wendy Hodgson, Desert Botanical Garden's Curator of the Herbarium, has seen everything change in agave availability since she started at the Desert Botanical Garden in 1977, 35 years ago. Seventy-five percent of agaves in nurseries today weren't available to buy in 1977 and in some cases weren't discovered.

Dr. Howard Gentry, the first Ph. D. in Botany to work at the Garden, was Wendy Hodgson's supervisor. Dr. Gentry, with Wendy's help, totally replaced prior taxonomy which was described in the 1968 Cactus and Succulent Review as error-filled, useless, and worse than nothing. (Yes, it was that bad.)

The new taxonomy allows for better nurseries, such as Greg Starr's in Tucson, and Jim Elliot's Arizona Cactus Sales in Chandler. Now we can potentially give a reliable name so we can understand issues of cold tolerance, sun tolerance, and where the agaves have grown in the wild.

Excellent European taxonomists prior to Gentry and Hodgson for numerous reasons could not make sense of agaves by doing a quick study even as they often made progress on some other genera. To crack the genus, Gentry needed 52 years of field work (1933 to 1985). In the last 35 years, Wendy Hodgson's biggest contributions have been as a resource to others in the field, leading on Arizona research on agave hybrid cultivars, and putting a health context around agaves.

Wendy's book, *Food Plants of the Sonoran Desert* (2001), is the best resource in this area. The book provides insight into diabetes risks of the modern American diet with too much white sugar, corn syrup, white flour and prepared and packaged foods. Agave nectar in contrast has a glycemic index of only 13 and is sold at Costco. Large organic sugar molecules of the

Agave are absorbed slowly and do not spike blood sugar or wear out insulin response.



Agave parryi Photo by Doug Dawson

agaves and also opuntias have great nutritional value and tap into the wisdom of the diet of the grandparents who lived in the Sonoran Desert. Research shows that back through history, agaves often equaled corn as a diet source. Wendy understood diet history by interviewing 80-year-old Native Americans. Today you can see caves in the Sedona area where agaves were stored as winter food. Cooled, dried agave was a major exchanged item up and down the trade routes. These native people described pit baking fires that cooked the agave. Standing on the hills at night, one could see hundreds of these fires burning.

and other experts will be available to educate attendees on topics such as pruning techniques, container gardening, attracting birds and wildlife, water gardening, and gardening with children. A unique aspect of the tour is that labels will identify plants in the gardens, and attendees will receive lists of the plants in the gardens. A select group of vendors will be at various locations on the tour.

Tickets sales are limited with purchase in advance at \$25 and \$30 on the day of sale. Tickets can be purchased now at <http://cals.arizona.edu/maricopa/garden/gardentour.htm> and at a range of local nurseries and merchants around the valley, including the following: A&P Nurseries in Gilbert, Mesa, and

Queen Creek; Baker Nursery in Phoenix; Berridge Nursery in Phoenix; Black Mountain Nursery in Cave Creek; Desert Gardens Nursery in Phoenix; Harper's Nursery in Mesa and Scottsdale; Linden Tree Nursery in Sun City; McKeown Landscape in Peoria; Melrose Pharmacy in Phoenix; North Scottsdale Nursery and Cactus in Scottsdale and Southwest Gardener in Phoenix. Tickets are also available at the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Offices at 4341 E. Broadway Rd. in Phoenix and 13815 Camino del Sol in Sun City West. On the day of the tour, tickets will be sold at Copper Ridge Elementary School, 10101 E. Thompson Peak Parkway, Scottsdale.

Beth Kirkpatrick



Bob the Cat takes a drink of water from a pool of water in one of the gardens. Maybe you'll see him (in the distance!) on the Master Gardener tour.

**Contact the
Central Spine Editor**

Diana Decker
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for article and photo submissions, and
to suggest topics you'd like to see included
in the Central Spine.

PLANT QUESTIONS??? WHOM TO CONTACT!!!

Many CACSS members have experience with different kinds of succulent plants. I hope they will add their names to the following list. Call or e-mail Diana Decker, *Central Spine* editor. (See contact information above.)

For now the list is simply alphabetical with principal interests. When more members add their information, the list will be cross-referenced by topic.

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Specializations include Aloes, Haworthias, Columnar Cacti, and *Turbinicarpus*.

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Specialization in softwood stem cuttings, plant division and seed starting (rooting cacti, agave and aloe)

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Specializations include General Propagation and Desert Revegetation, *Ariocarpus*, *Astrophytum*, *Cyphostemma*, *Echinocereus*, *Fouquieria*, *Thelocactus*, .

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Specializations include Desert Landscaping, Unusual (including Rare Fruit) Trees and Shrubs, Aloes, Agaves, Columnar Cacti, *Trichocereus*, and *Opuntia*.

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