

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, March 25, 2012, 2 PM

Webster Auditorium

Desert Botanical Garden

Presentation by Bob Torrest:

***Great Underused Cactus
for Landscaping***

Articles

Don't Miss the March Presentation

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Euphorbia Latex Dangers

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Gertrude Webster's Cactus

by Tom Gatz, p. 5



Haageocereus multiangularis, from the Desert Botanical Garden's collection.
Photo by Scott McMahon, DBG's Cactaceae Collections Manager, and CACSS member

April Newsletter Deadline:

April 10, 2012

(The newsletter will be sent to members before the April CACSS Plant Sale.)

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

2012 Meeting Schedule

March 25, 2 pm.: Bob Torrest: *Great Underused Cactus for Landscaping*

(See more information on page 3)

Webster Auditorium

**April 20, 21, 22 CACSS Show and Sale
Dorrance Hall and Boppart Courtyard**

Tight Quarters

For those of you who attended our January and February general meetings, you are aware of the cramped space in Webster Auditorium. The good news is that it is very clear that we have outgrown Webster as an ideal meeting place.

Newer members may not know that we used to always meet monthly in Webster. We will be meeting in Webster in March. In April, instead of our general meeting, we will, of course, have our annual Show/Sale held at Dorrance Hall and Boppart Courtyard. Good news: In May we will be back in Dorrance for our meetings.

To minimize the crowded quarters at our March meeting, we may not be able to accommodate as many Silent Auction entries and "freebies" as normal. We may have to set up the silent auction out on the patio at Webster. This will just be for March, because I know that many of us really look forward to those plants and therefore look forward to the more spacious facilities in Dorrance Hall. Thanks for your patience.

Doug Dawson



Please Volunteer for the CACSS Show and Sale

**To make the 2012 Show and Sale a success,
more volunteers are needed on
Friday, Saturday and Sunday,
April 20, 21, and 22.**

**Please call Jo Davis as soon as possible.
480-839-3792**

**Leave your name and phone number
so she can return your call.**



Welcome to New Members

Monica and Brian Zacher
Robert Scholle and Jane Lucien-Scholle
Sue and Patrick Glenn
Katja Lehmann
Carol Schmidt
The Smith Family--Christopher, Ann Marie, Lily, and Ben
The Ross Family--Rebecca, Bob, and Polly
Kathryn Kovach
Kelly De Petro
Chris Conway
Lois Lorenz
Mike and Medelice Wirtz

President's Letter

I've been able to spend quite a bit of time caring for my collection, and I must say I never get tired of looking at it. I often (almost every night) go outside into my home greenhouse with my chai tea soy latte and sit on the tall stool towards the back, light a stick of my favorite incense, and just unwind as I reflect on the day, on tomorrow, on whatever. I don't move my plants around so I have the same view every night, and as I said, I never tire of it.

This also helps me spot changes (and sometimes trouble) very early on. I am able to try to fix the problems in the initial stages and thereby have a better chance of saving the plant. I can also follow all the stages of growth, of flowers budding and opening, and learn to understand the cycle(s) of dormancy, if any.

Many novice collectors buy an unusual plant and don't research the growing conditions or habitat associated with the plant, and failure may occur if they are watering when the plant is not taking up water (leading to rot), or allowing the plant to be unprotected in temperatures for which they are not suited.

Don't give up on the first failure: if you like a difficult plant, check with some of the growers in the Club, or online, for cultivation advice. We have members that are experts in their various areas of special interest. Ask around and find out who grows what. That is one of the many benefits to belonging to a club like ours. Don't forget – it's time to start picking out and preening the plants you will enter in our show. Let's have fun!!

See you at the meeting!

Steve M.

Don't Miss the March Presentation

Bob Torrest's topic is "Great Underused Cactus for Landscaping." Bob's collection is outstanding and his knowledge of landscaping plants is uniquely good.

When I visited Bob's home, I saw not only good cactus plants but also the best *Aloe ramosissima* I have seen in Arizona gardens. This aloe is a plant you want in your collection. Two Tucson nurseries,

Arid Lands, and Plants for the Southwest, have this aloe for sale.

Take good notes at Bob's presentation. Your notes will turn into a super shopping list. My visit to his house also gave me a New Year's resolution. I want to do as good a job as Bob does at potting up the offsets from my collection to give to other people in our cactus and succulent society.

Gard Roper

Euphorbia Latex Dangers

by Sue Hakala

Euphorbias and other plants exude milky “latex” when cut. The plant uses this as a deterrent to herbivores. It’s not something you EVER want to get in your eyes, mouth, or a cut. I know this. I’ve taught others this. I’ve repeated it so often to my husband Terry that he says he can hear it in his sleep: ALWAYS wear eye protection and gloves, and wear long sleeves when handling *Euphorbias* or anything with a milky sap.

There I was doing a bit of garden clean-up and decided to just cut those two straggling ends of the *Pendalanthus macrocarpus* (lady slipper) hanging over the sidewalk. I was not wearing gloves or long sleeves when the rusty serrated saw-like tool I was using just seemed to jump off the cut plant stem and make a ¼” cut on the first knuckle of my thumb. I froze. Then dropped everything and ran for the house. I washed the small cut that had just **two drops of blood** for a full minute under running water with soap. It stopped bleeding. I sprayed it with alcohol, let it dry and covered it with a Band-Aid. Then yelled and swore at myself for being so foolish.

By bedtime, I thought everything was fine and that I had escaped any serious consequences. At about 2 a.m., I awakened with a throbbing in my hand like a kettledrum resonating in my body with every heartbeat. My thumb, index finger, hand and four inches of my arm below my wrist was swollen to over twice its size and hot. I didn’t go back to sleep.



Euphorbia rigida

Photo by Sue Hakala

It was Saturday morning and Terry took one look at me and said, “You’re going to urgent care now.” The doctor there didn’t know anything about “milky sap plant reactions.” I told him what I knew, asking him to just numb it if he could. He couldn’t. My tetanus shot—good for ten years—was due this year so I got that done, too.

I went home and put on some ice, elevated my arm and wanted to scream from the pain. It is not an exaggeration to say that it felt like every cell in the affected hand part had a razor blade on the end of it and was cutting me constantly under my skin (this lasted about a month). I couldn’t even let water run on it for 2 days it was so excruciating.



Pendalanthus microcarpus

Photo by Sue Hakala

Really. I often think of a pain scale as 1 to 10. This was a 50. The pain continued at this height for 5 days. Slowly, ever so slowly over the next 4 weeks, the pain decreased and the swelling **started** to go down. I really couldn’t use my hand during this time. Four months later the ¼” cut was still very red, swollen and inflamed. I could not imagine what would have happened if I had gotten this in my eye.

You can read about what has happened to other people who have gotten the latex in their eye on the web at the Amateur’sDigest.com and other sites. Many have gone blind. Others have died from not washing hands thoroughly enough and then handling food. Greenhouse workers have had

eye and throat irritation just from the vapors of the cut plants.

There are about 2,000 species of *Euphorbia*. Some that many have in the landscape and collections include: *E. antisyphilitica* (candelilla), *E. maculata*, *E. obesa*, *E. pulcherrima* (poinsettia), *E. rigida* (gopher plant), and *E. horrida*, *E. suzannae*, *E. virosa*, *Pendalanthus macrocarpus*, to name only a few. (I don't grow many *Euphorbias* as they have always scared me.)

Others to be wary of: *Crassula*, *Tylecodon*, *Cotyledon*, *Adromischus*, *Kalanchoe*, and *Adenium obesa*. I'll bet there are more.

Know what you are handling. You will not know how you will react to the irritants in these plant tissues until it is too late. ALWAYS wear eye protection, gloves and long sleeves when handling these plants.

Gertrude Webster's Cactus

by Tom Gatz

A few months ago I wrote about the early days of the Desert Botanical Garden and mentioned that the Garden's founder, Gertrude Webster, had donated hundreds of plant specimens from her landscape to the Garden way back in 1939. It got me wondering how many are still growing here and where they might be located in the Garden.

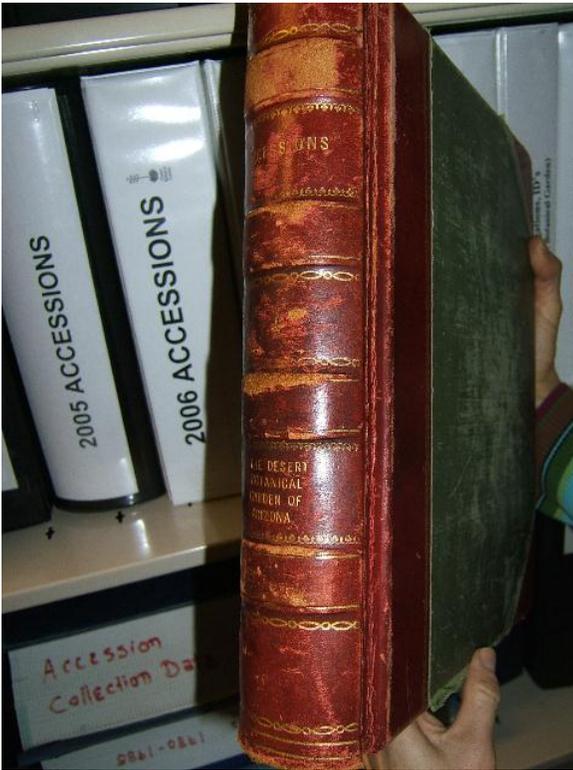
During lunch, Joni Ward, one of the Garden's two plant registrars, suggested that I start by looking up the accession numbers of Gertrude's plants. The accession books are kept under lock and key, along with other rare volumes and illustrations in the Becker Library Archives, a climate-controlled room within the library. Escorted in by librarian Beth Brand, I felt like I was entering the inner sanctum of a sacred place. Adding to that illusion, Beth produced a time-worn volume with the number '1' embossed on the peeling spine of the tome that would look right at home in a Harry Potter movie, perhaps full of recipes for magic potions and secret spells.

We blew off the imaginary dust and carefully opened the ledger. It was filled with page after page of Latin plant names written in cursive, one on each line. But first I just had to double-check something we docents have been telling visitors for years. And sure enough, the very first plant listed on the first page was the creeping devil cactus (*Stenocereus eruca*) brought to the Garden from Baja, Mexico, still growing next to Webster Auditorium. It was the first plant officially accessioned by the Garden in 1939. Back then its Latin name was *Machaerocereus eruca*.

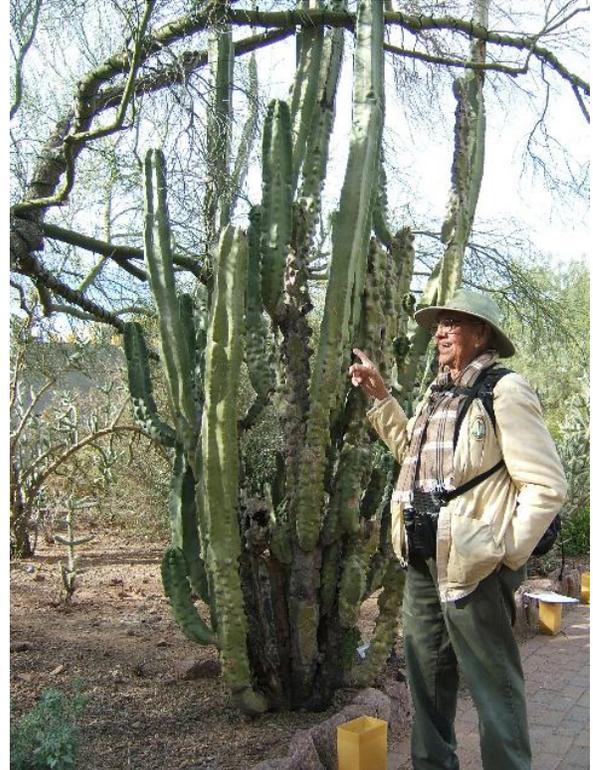
A few pages later, after perusing accessions entered or donated by other Garden luminaries such as George Lindsay and Gustaf Starck, I found two lists of plants that Gertrude had given to the Garden. Once again, Joni Ward came to the rescue and offered to check the current database to see if any of Gertrude's specimens were still here in the Garden. It turns out that several of her cactus specimens donated back in 1939 are alive, certainly showing their age, but holding their own.

One cactus in particular caught my attention since some of us docents like to show it to visitors on our tours. It is the large, gnarly form of senita cactus known as totem pole cactus (*Lophocereus schottii* fo. *monstrosus*) on the west side of the main trail just before you get to the cardons near Webster Auditorium. I imagine it was just a little plant when Gertrude donated it to the Garden 72 years ago, and that brought to mind something I read about the vision of Gertrude Divine Webster and her colleagues. They were planting a garden that they would never live to see mature, but that future generations would enjoy.

So when we volunteers help to plant small, start-up specimens in the Garden's new exhibits, we can take satisfaction in thinking about all the visitors that will appreciate them as mature specimens, perhaps long after we are gone.



All of the plant accession records at the Desert Botanical Garden, starting with this Volume I from 1939, are stored in a locked, climate-controlled room. Photo by Tom Gatz



Two old-timers in the Garden: A totem pole cactus (70+ years old) donated by Gertrude Webster; and volunteer Charlie Brenner (90+ years old) donated by his wife, Betty Brenner. Photo by Tom Gatz

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**Real Gardens for Real People
Master Gardener Tour
Saturday, March 31,
9:00 am - 4:00 pm**

**For more information:
Contact Beth Kirkpatrick.
480-993-5141**

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 on p. 2)

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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BOB TORREST

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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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