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Kaktos Komments

*a bimonthly publication of the Houston Cactus and Succulent Society
to promote the study of cacti and other succulents*



Saguaros from near Q Mountain in Quartzsite, AZ
by Milton Pierson

From the editor

After a cold winter Spring is in the air. In the morning hours of January 17th the temperature fell to 22° F at my house, and I am sure that was the warmer part of town. My cactus and succulents were protected, but some nice tropical plants froze. It is always sad to lose a plant we tended for a long time. But now there is room for more.

Karla Halpaap-Wood

Membership

Kathy Fewox

The January 24 meeting of HCSS was attended by twenty-five members. We were joined by two guests: Thomas R. Bacon IV, and Jane Littell.

On February 28, twenty-one members attended our meeting. Also attending were three guests: John Pruitt, Albert Howell, and Kelly Shields (who is an officer in the Houston Chapter, Native Prairies Association of Texas). For the door prize, Karla Halpaap-Wood donated a very nice jade plant (*Crassula ovata*), which was won by Rolando Ontiveros.

At the end of January Kathrin Schaaf and her family moved back to Germany after twelve years in Houston. Kathrin's husband Christian accepted a position as Professor for Clinical Genomics and Medical Director of Human Genetics at the University of Cologne. I am sure they are happy for this opportunity to return to Germany, but we will miss having Kathrin in the club and watching her children grow. What a beautiful family, in every way!

I am still in the process of moving to Blanco, making my usual slow progress. Blanco hasn't moved, and I refuse to go the whole way on I-10, so it takes me about four hours to get to Houston from my Blanco place (including necessary pit stops at two Buc-ee's). Once I move, although I hope to make it to many HCSS meetings, I probably won't be able to come every month. Therefore, I am searching for someone to take over duties as Membership Chairperson. It is a fun job that doesn't come with many responsibilities or pressure. This is the easiest job in HCSS, and you still get credit for being involved. All you need is a willingness to attend the meetings regularly, a pen, some notebook paper, and the membership notebook which I will hand over to you. You will need to write the KK Membership Report every two months, but that's fairly easy. Please let me know if you would like to volunteer to be my successor. Email kathyfewox@aim.com, or speak to me or another HCSS Board Member at an upcoming meeting. Your club needs you!

Please send news of HCSS members and their families to kathyfewox@aim.com.

Calendar:

March 14, 2018	7:30 pm Board Meeting at Metropolitan Multi-Service Center.
March 28, 2017	7:30 pm Membership Meeting at Metropolitan Multi-Service Center. "Practicum on raising succulent plants" by Josie Watts, HCSS
April 25, 2018	7:30 pm Membership Meeting at Metropolitan Multi-Service Center. "My Travelogue seeking Texas Cacti" by Matt Buckingham
May 12-13	Spring Sale at Metropolitan Multi-Service Center

The Lizard Pen or Fake Desert

David Van Lngen

The Lizard Pen - the Fake Desert. This creature was somewhere in the back of my mind since I was a kid. Since a very young age I have been fascinated by several things-- two of which were Reptiles and Cactus! A couple of small books about reptiles introduced me to a couple of lizards that lingered in my mind forever. Chuckwallas and Desert Iguanas !! Both from the Sonoran Desert-- both ate plants !! One picture showed a Chuck eating some prickly pear fruit. A visit to a deer lease introduced me to prickly pear cactus -- I was maybe 6-7 years old. Visits to my Uncles dairy near La Grange Texas introduced me to more prickly pear and a couple of other critters !! Texas Horned Lizard, Texas Spiny and Whiptail lizards ! And once I had a drivers license I found things like Escobaria, Horse Crippler and other native plants !! I was hooked and the hook set in deep. By my early to mid teens we made family vacations out west-- Big Bend and Davis Mnts to mention the most influential ! 1974--- my first trip to Arizona !!! Woo Hoo !!! The Big Stuff !!

And of course during most of these trips I managed to sneak one of these and a couple of those-- Lucky I did not get caught but thats what you do when a kid-- dumb stuff!! No matter what I did--- the weather here in Houston did not like my cactus as much as I did !! And most died! Some soon-- some sooner!

Fast forward to 1999 ! I found an old ugly male chuckwalla at a Pet Smart and like a fool--- I gave em \$100.00 bill for him. I kept him inside for several months but knew I had to do better ! I did manage to find a few books about their habitat and needs-- so I was able to keep him alive !!! But I needed something bigger. And I also had a few nice cactus plants that I was dragging around to keep em dry-- drag em back to give em sun. They needed something bigger and better too !! It was not feasible to put a top over my cactus / rock garden out front -- and it was not worth a hoot to try to build a wall around it to keep lizards in and predators out. So what else was there to do but do something weird and crazy !! I had something like this in my mind since I was much younger but now-- I had the reasons and easy access to build the walls!! Sheet Metal !! And guess what -- I work in the sheet metal industry !! So i found a spot way in the back-- as far away from any shadows of taller trees up front. I hauled in dirt and stuff. Started out with two large dump trucks of sandy soil and Lord only knows how many dozen pick up loads of assorted dirt/ gravel etc from Lord only knows where. I have guessed that me & my brother brought in close to 15,000 pounds of rock from a friends deer lease. Plus I collect soils / rock / gravel and seed every trip west of here. I finally closed this thing in and wound up with a 30 ft x 30 ft pen ! Walls are 40" high and added some hardware cloth and bird netting. Me and my bro built a clear corrugated plastic top over 20 x 30 ft of it--Now I had an enclosed desert!! I left some of it uncovered to make it easier to grow local plants that the chucks would eat. I studied and read. Once I discovered the WWW --most questions had answers!

Plants that desert iguanas and chuckwallas eat in habi-

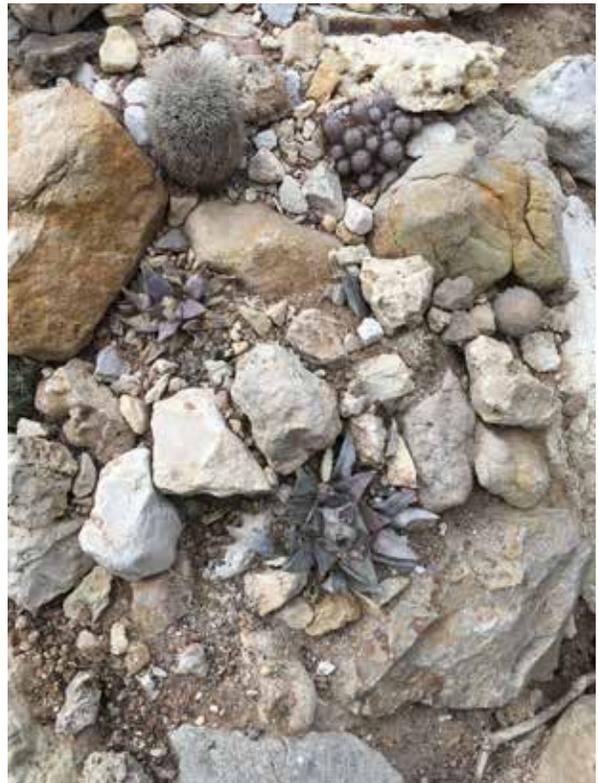


tat. I found lots of substitutes locally and am always trying to grow true desert weeds and stuff! I also found many online growers of cactus !! And from any part of the world!! And now the WWW showed me info on where they grew- what type of rocks they live on and all the info needed to help keep em healthy. What it boils down to is-- now I can grow Ariocarpus in the ground!! And large Barrel cactus !! How else can you grow Creosote Bush in Houston !! And Turbinicarpus and anything that can take the temps!

During construction I put in several underground tunnels and rock structures-- a lizard can slip under some rocks and come up 4-5 and even up to 7 ft away !! I managed to create something that is self sustainable!! Chucks eat, sleep, breed, lay eggs, babies pop up in September and they brumate through the winter with almost no help from me !! I match up the correct soil / rock with the cactus as close as possible with their native habitat. I come home from work and go on a mini vacation most every day!! I check this-- I water that (rain water of course)-- I make sure some critter did not accidentally dig up a baby Button Cactus. Does the Candellia need more water than you think-- yes it does so I give it a drink.

Now with winter being amount us--- I have way too many of these & those cactus and many are in pots!! Well--- they go in the pen to keep em dry of course !! There are only a few places that can be walked on without being careful. I have rocks I step on all the time-- with lizards under them!

Step from rock to rock and almost step on a rare little cactus or worse yet-- fall into cholla or some Ferocactus! It is all fun and I would not give up my Fake Desert for anything !!



FROM THE KK ARCHIVES**LILIANA CRACRAFT**

Now that I'm retired, I enjoy reading the old KK's. There is so much information there! I like learning more about the plants, but it's also nice to read stories about the people who were once the pillars of our organization. Their love for cactus and succulents, and enthusiasm for the club was obvious. Everyone participated in the different activities, and many long-lasting friendships were developed among the members. I invite you to explore the archives. We do have a wonderful treasure for our reading pleasure at www.hcsstex.org With spring upon us, I thought that it was worth to reprint this funny article. It was originally published by the Omaha Cactus and Succulents group in January 1989, and included in the 1992 September-October issue of the KK. Here it is.

NURSERY ADJECTIVES

This is the time of the year that we all have gotten catalogs in the mail. Terry and Jane Clarke have compiled a list of the 'ambiguous descriptive phrases' we all find in nursery catalogs. They've also included exactly what the terms mean. So here below is:

'THE POETRY'

Unique
Rare
Very rare
Mature plants
Anyone can grow them
One of our favorites
Nice foliage plant
Spectacular flowers
Foliage takes autumnal tints
Well worth a visit
Never invasive
Popular at the nursery
Always admired
Always in flower
Fragrant
Compact
Pastel shades
Virgin white
Own strain
Low-growing
Dwarf
Not to be missed
Porous soil in full sun

'THE REALITY'

We don't know what it is!
Did you bring the check book?
Did you bring the loan officer?
We've had them for years!
Nobody wants to!
We've grown too many this year!
We can't get it to flower!
Just visible with glasses
The leaves fall off!
Three miles up a dirt track, entrance fee, no toilets!
Until planted!
We like it!
We like it a lot!
You should have been here yesterday!
If you think I'm getting down on my hands and knees
Pot bound!
Off-white!
Verging on white!
Found under the potting bench!
It's the cat's favorite seat!
Under 6 feet!
You're standing on it!
The children's sand-pit will have to go!

March Cactus of the Month

Jeff Boggan

Dedicated in remembrance of Leroy Kellogg (1936 – 2017) – see September 1998 Cactus of the Month

- **NAME:** *Pelecyphora strobiliformis*
- **SYNONYMS:** *Encephalocarpus strobiliformis*, *Ariocarpus strobiliformis*
- **COMMON NAME:** Pinecone Cactus
- **HABITAT/DISTRIBUTION:** The Chihuahuan Desert is its home. It is found in San Luis Potosi, Tamaulipas, and Nuevo Leon Mexico. It grows at an altitude of about 6,200 feet above sea level. The soil is mostly limestone and calcium carbonate. It has a large population that is spread over many areas. The plants are well camouflaged in their habitat. They reproduce by seed in the wild and are quite prolific. Until recently there were no major threats to the population. At the 2017 TACSS Seminar Woody Minnich, noted lecturer, educator, explorer, and proprietor of Cactus Data Plants, announced that the known populations of this plant had been plundered by illegal collection. Heart breaking news for all cactus fans. Hopefully, seeds and seedlings will grow back to replace the plants that were lost. This is a very slow growing plant, so it may take a century or more for the habitat to recover. Perhaps there are undiscovered patches that were spared the harvest.
- **DESCRIPTION:** The tubercles are triangular shaped and hug flat against the stem of the plant. It really looks like a small greenish pinecone. There is some wool-like growth on the areoles along with a few small spines. The wool and spines drop off the older tubercles. These plants can live to be over a century old. Mature healthy plants are from 2 to 3 inches in diameter and have been observed to grow up to 8 or 10 inches tall. Most are between 2 to 4 inches tall. Plants of great age will also produce branches that make the plant look like a tiny Saguaro. I have seen such plants at the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute, CDRI, near Fort Davis in West Texas. The specimens had been confiscated from cactus poachers at the border and donated to the center for research and education. The flowers are small, about 1-1/2 inches in diameter. Magenta in color with spear-shaped petals. The flowers erupt around the growing apex of the plant. I have noticed that mine have tended to flower in the spring and fall. It produces a small tuberous taproot maybe about 1-1/2 to 2 inches long. The feeder roots branch off from the main root.
- **CULTIVATION/GROWTH:** The plant is grown from seed. The seeds are very small. They are slow growers and will require 5 to 10 years to get to a nice size. It sometimes produces multiple heads. The heads are not off-sets but branches. If you cut one off and to dip it in some root hormone it might grow roots. However, I have not had any luck doing that with this plant. The other option is graphing the cutting on a healthy stock plant. *Harrisia justbertii* is a good stock for larger scions. Graphing seedlings on *Pereskia spathulata* is often the most successful route. This is a tricky plant to grow for a beginner. Mainly because it really likes a dry climate and plenty of light. In the Houston area, they need to be in a greenhouse or kept inside an airconditioned house on a sunny window sill. Additionally, please use rain water to water these plants. Tap water usually has calcium carbonate added to it to help protect the plumbing from corrosion. The calcium carbonate will cake around the roots and prevent the plant from absorbing moisture and nutrients. Growing Chihuahuan desert plants in the humid Gulf Coast area is tricky. You will need to time your watering to a period when it is sunny and low humidity. The plant does not do well if it stays wet for long. In the heat of the summer when the humidity is high do not water. The

warm air has a greater capacity to hold moisture than chilly air. The lower the humidity the faster the plant and the soil can dry.

You should also change the soil mix if you purchased a potted specimen from a grower from a dryer climate. That soil will stay wet longer in the Gulf Coast area and lead to the plant rotting. You want to have a well-draining soil that can dry out in a couple of days. You also want to have an active bacteria compost in the mix. The bacteria will allow the growth of nitrogen-fixing microorganisms that help feed the plant roots.

- **AVAILABILITY:** *Pelecyphora strobiliformis* seeds and specimens are available from cactus nurseries that are in arid climates. Mesa Gardens, Miles2Go, Cactus Data Plants, and Paul's Desert are a few notable growers that sometimes carry this species. However, they are a specialty plant that is not always available. eBay is an alternative place to shop for one. Be sure that you only order during the warmer months of the year. Getting a shipment in the winter the plant is likely to freeze in route.

- **REFERENCES:**

1. The Nitrogen Cycle - <http://www.backyardnature.net/econitro.htm>
2. *Pelecyphora strobiliformis* - http://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/1545/Pelecyphora_strobiliformis
3. The IUCN List of Threatened Species - *Pelecyphora strobiliformis* - <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/152234/0>
4. *Pelecyphora strobiliformis* - http://www.cactus-art.biz/schede/PELECYPHORA/Pelecyphora_strobiliformis/Pelecyphora_strobiliformis/Pelecyphora_strobiliformis.htm
5. Cactus and Alkalinity – Elton Roberts - <http://ralph.cs.cf.ac.uk/Cacti/Cactus%20and%20Alkalinity.pdf>



March Succulent of the Month**David Van Langen*****Agave stricta* “Nana”**

Agave stricta “Nana” is a dwarf species of *Agave* found in the Mexican states of Puebla and Oaxaca. It is a well behaved dwarf *Agave* the seldom exceeds 10-12 inches in height and width. The green to pale green leaves are very narrow and stiff and have no spines or hooks on the leaf edge but the end is armed with a stout sharp spine. In time clusters can form from rhizomes to create neat little clusters. A single tall flower stalk is produced and as most always-- the main plant soon dies. The name “Nana” has been coined to single out the smallest of the *stricta* species.

The climate of this plant's origins is what could be called a sub-tropical desert of moderate to high elevations. There are many columnar cacti in the area and it seems summers are mild with cool nights. *Agave stricta* is known to be hardy down to 20 F and my one potted plant has seen that through the ten years or so I have been growing it. I did place it in an unheated shed during the last big freeze just in case! This cute little *Agave* needs no extra water here in Houston but does best with a little afternoon shade.

It is a real close cousin to *Agave striata* which lives farther north in the Chihuahuan Desert and has longer leaves. *Agaves stricta* and *striata* are often confused and at times have been considered as a species and subspecies. *Agave striata* has some nice red colored forms which are occasionally seen in the trade. *Agave stricta* “Nana” and *Agave striata* are not very common in the landscape trade but deserve a place in the collection. Little “Nana” is well suited for long term pot cultivation and should at least be part of every avid collection!!!



April Cactus of the Month

Liliana Cracraft

NAME: *Notocactus haselbergii*

SYNONYMS: *Parodia haselbergii*

COMMON NAME: Scarlet Ball

HABITAT/DISTRIBUTION: Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, Brazil. It grows at 200 to 1500 meters above sea level, on rocky outcrops, grasslands (or pampas), plains, and walls. This plant has a relatively wide range, but several subpopulations have been depleted.

DESCRIPTION: A greyish-green, globular and solitary plant about 4 in. wide with 30 or more ribs, and a woolly crown set at an angle. The white aeroles, which almost completely cover the plant, bear 20 or more white radial spines with a yellowish tip. They are soft and bristly and can measure up to ½ in. long. The 3-5 central spines are yellowish and slightly longer. Mature plants measure 8 cm/3¼ in wide and tall. Flowers are diurnal, yellowish red, or orange-red (scarlet), measuring 2/3 in. They appear at the end of the winter, or in early spring, and each can last from one to three weeks, to up to two months. Two subspecies are recognized; *haselbergii* and *graesnerii* (green flowers).



CULTIVATION/GROWTH: Needs bright light. Normal cactus compost. It can grow to flowering size in about 18 months. It does poorly in intense sun or heat. Minimum temperature 50°F. It will tolerate brief exposures to frost. It is grown from seeds.

COMMENTS: A nice/easy to care plant to have in every collection. Listed in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (version 2017-3) as vulnerable. I purchased my plant at Cactus King a few years ago. It was labeled as *Rebutia wessneriana*. I knew it was not a *Rebutia*, because the flowers were located on the crown. It was presented once before as the cactus of the month in 1988.

REFERENCES:

Innes and Glass: *Cacti*. Portland House. New York, 1991.

Anderson, Miles: *The Ultimate Book of Cactus & Succulents*. Lorenz Books. London, 1998.



April Succulent of the Month**Paul Stricklin****Kalanchoe tomentosa**

Common names: (Chocolate Soldier, Teddy Bear Cactus, Panda Plant, Panda Bear Plant, Cocoon Plant, Velvet Leaf Kalanchoe, Pussy Ears, Plush Plant)

Family: Crassulaceae, Subfamily: Sedoideae, Tribe: Kalanchoeae, Genus: Kalanchoe

Origin: Madagascar

Lighting: Variable - Bright light, sunshine, and partial shading.

(This plant has done well on east side of greenhouse on top shelf)

Temperature: 60-75 DF

(In greenhouse the plant tolerated repeated dips to 47 degrees in high humidity levels)

Flowers: Rare in cultivation.

Watering: At soil levels when dry. (Once a week watering has kept the plant growing well).

Fertilizer: Water with a weak solution once a month from spring to the end of summer growth.

CAUTION: Reported to be toxic to dogs and cats.

Drought resistant when established, growing to 1.5 feet forming a thick stem with multiple branches tipped with groups of leaves. Planted in well-draining soil and treated with benign neglect produces a tightly packed growth. Multiple leaf shapes and color patterns are cultivated. This succulent matures into a shrubby plant covered with pale green long oval shaped leaves covered with a fine dense fuzzy felt like texture touched with a dusting of white. The leaf tips tend to form small stubby fingers touched with a brown "chocolate" colored edges. The plant is a slow growing and can easy remain in the same container for two or more years.



ACIDIC WATER**PHYLLIS AND DICK McEUEEN**

At the January meeting David van Langen asked Dick about adding vinegar to the water for cactus and succulent plants. The question interested some of the newer members so we felt it was a good time to revisit the issue.

In the March/April, 2011 issue of the KK we had a short article on using acidic water to water our plants. This idea was the result of three articles in the CSSA Cactus and Succulent Journal (Ref. 1,2,3). These articles suggest that by using city water the soil of potted plants becomes more and more alkaline and as a result plant growth is more restricted.

City water is routinely altered to reach a pH of around 8 because lower pH values tend to erode the inside of metallic pipes by dissolving things such as lead. The way to counter the high pH is to change the water by adding acidic material to the city water. One easily available product to do this is vinegar which requires a small amount to alter a large amount of water. Initially the authors suggested adding one tablespoon of vinegar to three gallons of water and observing the results.

A more scientific method would be to lower the pH to 5.5 which is the pH of rainwater. This requires testing the city water and adding the proper amount of vinegar to reach that level. We looked through our CSSA Journals and found that from 2005 through 2008 Elton Roberts, one of the authors, had 14 articles in CSSA Journals and that the article titles referred to him as a Master Grower. That convinced us to try adding the vinegar to our water.

We found a good pH Test Kit and went to work. It turns out that Sugar Land's water has a pH of 8.0 and one tablespoon of vinegar per gallon gives us a pH of 5.5. We began mixing our water this way sometime in late 2010. We also add a small amount of fertilizer and a few drops of fungicide. By spring of 2011 we felt the plants were responding well to our watering regimen and have been using it ever since.

Our system of watering plants in the greenhouse, the house and the sunroom is that Phyllis actually does the watering. She waters once a week from spring to fall and much less the rest of the time, decreasing through fall and increasing through spring. I mix the water and it takes from four to six gallons each time we water.

The third article cited includes a great deal of information on how to mix the water for large enterprises as well as an analysis of which source of nitrogen is the best. Their conclusion is that ammonium is the best and includes tables showing the contents available for several different products..

We won't attempt to write on this subject, however our previous comment about Elton Roberts' recommendations being acceptable due to his publishing history still applies to the nitrogen issue.

In researching for this article we also searched for the cited CSSA Journals. There are none available on the Internet, however HCSS gave our library to Mercer Arboretum and they could be available at that location.

REFERENCES:

1. Acidic Solutions, Malcom Burleigh, Elton Roberts, D. Russel Wagner, CSSA Journal 80/5 Sept-Oct 2008, pp 245-250.
2. Ammonium, Nitrogen and Acidic Water for Xerophytic Plant Growth, Elton Roberts, Malcom Burleigh, CSSA Journal 82/4 Jul-Aug 2010, pp. 176-181.
3. Watering Systems for Success in Growing Plants, Using Low pH and Ammonium Nitrogen, Elton Roberts, Malcom Burleigh, CSSA Journal 82/6 Nov/Dec 2010, pp. 266-275.

Springtime Flowers

by Karla Halpaap-Wood



Mammillaria prolifera



Mammillaria guelzowiana



Mammillaria magnimamma



Mammillaria elongata

Errata:

Photo credit for the Christmas party pictures that appeared on p. 3 of the January/February edition goes to Paul Stricklin.

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