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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*



Acanthocereus pentagonus
by Karla Halpaap-Wood

From the editor

Karla Halpaap-Wood

I want to thank everybody who contributed to this edition of the KK.

On the regular webpage <http://www.hcsstex.org> and Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Houston-CactusSucculentSociety/> you can find information about the club, programs and events. We now also have an active Facebook group https://www.facebook.com/groups/1049635895242129/?source_id=254317392276 for you to discuss anything related to cacti and succulents.

Membership**Kathy Fewox**

HCSS celebrated its anniversary on July 24, 2019 by having a potluck dinner. Seventeen members attended the meeting. There was lots of wonderful food to enjoy, and good company. Cindy Gray donated four Tephrocactus plants, two for the raffle and two as door prizes.

Our meeting on August 28 was attended by nineteen members who braved the threat of rain and flooding to reach the Multi-Service Center. Most of us managed to get there with little trouble, as the worst of the rain had moved south of the 610 loop by about 6:30 p.m. However, Robert Smith got stuck in rain-delayed traffic on his trip in from Highlands, and didn't arrive until the meeting was officially over. Also attending were four guests: Chris Balshaw, Aditi Nabar, Ziona Burkett (a Florida friend of BonnieJean Grady's), and Mariela Hiraldo (daughter of Alan Schachter). Dave Thomas donated a *Carnegiea gigantea* (Giant Saguaro) as a door prize. It isn't giant yet, but winner Frank Lee is hoping it will grow into its name. BonnieJean Grady donated several nice cuttings of *Euphorbia tirucalli* (Firesticks) to the Plant Exchange, but since we didn't have it, they went first come, first served to several happy people.

Josie Watts got home from France, went outside the next day to water her plants, and fell on the wet concrete, fracturing a vertebrae. She spent about a week in the hospital, then several days at Holly Hall for rehab. She is now back home, rehabbing on her own. Get well soon, Josie, we miss you!

On a sad note, two members of the club suffered losses in their families. David Van Langen's mother passed away, as did Imtiaz Bangee's father. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

Please email any news of HCSS members and their families to July Olson at saint.juniper@gmail.com or Kathy Fewox at kathyfewox@aim.com.

Calendar:

September 7, 2019 Show and Sale at Metropolitan Multi-Service Center. 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

September 8, 2019 Show and Sale at Metropolitan Multi-Service Center. 9:00 am - 3:00 pm

September 25, 2019 7:30 pm Membership Meeting at Metropolitan Multi-Service Center.
Program: Cacti in Habitat, Part 2 by David VanLangen, HCSS

October 5, 2019 TACSS hosted by SACXS San Antonio
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-texas-association-of-cactus-and-succulent-societies-2019-fall-seminar-tickets-62119085858>

October 23, 2019 7:30 pm Membership Meeting at Metropolitan Multi-Service Center.
Program: Propagation of *Haworthia* by Wally Ward, HCSS

November 1, 2019 Deadline for submitting articles for the KK.

September Cactus of the Month**July Olson****Weberbauerocereus winterianus**

In the scenic splendor of the Peruvian Andes many cacti find their home, and a German botanist named August Weberbauer was determined to document them all.

That's how this particular genus got its name. In the early 1900's, in the high altitude of the mountains, Weberbauer recorded this treelike columnar cactus growing to heights of up to 20ft.

In the brushy wilds of the Andes you can see the *Weberbauerocereus winterianus*' slender, yet sturdy, trunk protruding out to catch the sun in its golden yellow spines, and let me tell you, it packs some prickle power! From its somewhat tuberculate shallow ribs there is a proliferation of prominent woolly areoles surrounded with thick stout spines.

Though this specimen tends to be unusual in collections it seems to be thriving in the wild, and is listed under the "least concern" category on the IUCN Red List. Likely, most specimens found in collections now were introduced by Friedrich Ritter through his sisters seed firm, Frau Winter's in Germany in the 1960's.

Due to its scarcity in collections finding information on ideal growing conditions is hard to come by, but most sources, including my personal experience, agree on general details. The soil should be well draining. Watering should be regular during spring, and summer, but slow down in fall, and stop in winter. Full day sun with some evening shade is ideal. It seems to tolerate temperatures as low as 20F, but covering it is recommended below freezing to keep moisture off.

It can be easily divided by cutting with a clean knife at the joints, and letting the bottom dry before putting it in the soil, but it is a slow grower. If a joint is cut, usually a new bud seems to pop out along the edge of the healed cut on the parent plant. It blooms a lovely pink and white, and the seeds can be collected.

This cactus is truly one of my favorites, with it's beautiful golden spines, and the unique texture of it's pale green skin, it stands with a regal simplicity among it's fellows in my collection. Well worth the trouble of finding a specimen!



September Succulent of the Month

BonnieJean Grady

This plant was already presented at the August meeting.

Euphorbia tirucalli

(Pronounced: you-FOR-bee-uh teer-ooH-KAL-eye)

Name: Euphorbia tirucalli

Synonyms: Arthrothamnus bergii Klotzsch, Garcke Arthrothamnus ecklonii Klotzsch, Garcke Arthrothamnus tiruca

Common Names: Pencil Cactus, Pencil Tree, Naked Lady Plant, Fire Sticks, Sticks on Fire, African Milkbush, Aveloz, Finger Tree

Family: Euphorbiaceae

Genus: Euphorbia

Habitat/Distribution: Semi-Arid tropical climates – originally from Africa, but has spread to most of the Middle East and South America

General Plant Information:

Euphorbia tirucalli, the Pencil Cactus, is a fast growing, multi-branched succulent that can be grown as a bush or a tree – depending on the care of the plant. Usually a single ground trunk that, with age, will turn to a woody bark of varying colors between gray and brown. Branches will grow from any part of the trunk (even close to the ground to form a bush-like appearance). If a more tree-like appearance is desired of the plant, branches can be cut from the plant, close to the original trunk, and replanted elsewhere. The single trunk can branch close to the ground, giving it a multi-trunk appearance.

Branches are varied in color from yellow, red, orange, green, or a combination of any/all of those colors. Branches are long, thin, and smooth; cylindrical in shape - giving them a pencil look. New branches are twig-like (about ¼" diameter), but quickly thicken to pencil thickness and continue to branch to form clusters of branches until the plant is a crazy tangle of colorful pencils. Hybrids of these plants can also be purchased and enjoyed.

Small oval shaped leaves (about ¼" to ½" long) appear on the newer branches and usually only last a few days or weeks before they fall off. These tiny leaves are what gives the plant their false cactus look and name, since at a distant they look like thorns on the plant. Tiny dents are left on the branches when the leaves fall off, but will blend into the woody bark once the branches age. The dents are also areas where more branches will form in the future of the plant.

Tiny, inconspicuous, clusters of flowers, of pinkish yellow, bloom at the apex of the branches or between the split of branches. Flowers are similar to those on poinsettia, pretty, but not the showiest part of the plant. Flower time of these plants is unclear – some websites and books say Spring to Summer, while others say Summer to Early Winter. (Apparently the flowers are so insignificant that even their blooming season is overlooked.) Only one website mentioned that this plant also has fruit that appear in November and December, after the flowers have been exhausted. Seeds can be harvested from the dried fruits and sown.



The Pencil Cactus can grow to about 30' tall (taller than a normal two-story house) and can get about 10' wide. The outer branches easily break or snap off while they are still smooth and non-woody. Plant has a latex-based sap that is toxic, so extreme care should be used around this plant.

Plant History, Uses, and Warnings:

While it is usually called a Pencil Cactus, it is not a true cactus but instead is a succulent. (All cactus are succulents, but not all succulents are cactus. Cacti have areoles, which are small, round, cushion-like mounds of flesh where spines, hair, and flowers grow from the cactus. Also, most cacti do not have leaves or branches. Many Euphorbia are mistaken for cactus because of their thorns, but without the areoles, they are not true cacti.²⁾

Placed under the family Euphorbiaceae because of the belief that it had medical properties, the Pencil Cactus has been used for generations for everything from curing a cough, stomachache, sexual dysfunction, snake-bites, cancer, to removing warts and poisoning fish. Since the 1970's this plant was promoted as the cure for cancer, but research in the US has found that the latex and other chemicals in the sap actually suppress the immune system and cause the growth of tumors to accelerate. Research has found that it has a link to causing Burkitt's lymphoma in countries that the sap is drank for medical purposes. Unfortunately, the sap (Called "Aveloz Sap") is still sold in Brazil as a cure for cancer and is used heavily in Africa for a gambit of medical cures³.

Like all Euphorbias, this plant has a milky white latex sap that "bleeds" from any cut given to the plant. When clipping or trimming a pencil cactus, take caution by using heavy gloves and even eye protection. Sap on your skin can cause Contact Dermatitis (burning rash), swelling, and even blisters. Contact with eyes can cause temporary to permanent blindness. Swallowing sap can cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. And in extreme cases (usually with people allergic to latex) it can cause anaphylactic shock, and even death. Due to this caution, pencil cactus should not be planted where there is heavy foot traffic. (Be warned that there may be a delay in reactions to the sap, even by hours.)

Plant Care and Propagation:

Pencil Cactus can be grown in direct full sun to bright light, indoors and outdoors. For full colors of the branches, full sun is required. Plant can be placed in a pot, so it can be moved around or brought in during cold spells. Pencil Cactus are hardy to about Zone 9A and can stand a few hours in the mid 30s. If in the ground, plants can carefully be wrapped to stay warm during extreme cold spells. The true colors of these plants are displayed during the cooler months and "Sticks on Fire" is in true form at that time.

If the plant becomes too big or leggy, simply clip the desired branches off with plant shears or pruner (make sure to have gloves and glasses on). This plant will bleed its toxic white sap for several minutes (both the main plant and the clippings), make sure to have something to place the clippings in, otherwise the sap will drip everywhere and look like a crime scene.

To propagate clippings, make sure to leave about 3" of stalk before the first branch. Allow the clipping to callused for about 2 days (making sure the cut area is dry and browned). Rooting hormone can be applied to the cut area, but is not required. Place clipped end into moist soil (Cactus soil mixed with perlite 75/25 or any

sandy mix) about 2" deep. Keep soil moist, but not wet – wet will cause the clipping to rot and die. The new plant will root quickly and within a month new branches and tiny leaves will sprout from your clipping.

Plant doesn't mind the heat and is drought resistant, once established. Though to keep your plant growing and beautiful, once a week watering (if it isn't raining) is recommended in the hotter months. During the cold months, restrict watering to early morning once a month or every three weeks (depending how dry the soil gets). Pencil Cactus does well when rootbound and doesn't need to be replanted very often. Potting it will help to keep it fairly small (less than the top of a one-story house). A Cactus or liquid fertilizer is recommended in spring, after all frost warnings are gone. Pencil Cactus does better in soil that is quick draining and has low organic content. There are no serious disease or insect problems for this plant. However, all dead or discolored branches should be clipped and disposed of quickly.



References:

1. <http://pza.sanbi.org/euphorbia-tirucalli>
2. <https://leafandclay.co/blogs/blog/the-difference-between-succulents-and-cacti>
3. <http://www.rain-tree.com/aveloz.htm#.VC8AybGYfyU>
4. <https://pfaf.org/user/Plant.aspx?LatinName=Euphorbia+tirucalli>
5. http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?taxonid=280091&isprofile=0&s_cid=queue-2



October Cactus of the Month**Paul Stricklin**

Cleistocactus strausii (Snow Pole) Silver Torch Cactus – Native to high mountain regions of Bolivia and Argentina above 3000 ft.

A columnar plant, readily forming offsets, reaching 4 in in diameter and 2 to 3 feet in height in cultivation, but reaching 6 Inches in diameter and almost 10 feet in height in native habitat. The white spines form a dense cover providing good protection from sun damage. In dry cold conditions the cactus is reported to withstand temperatures down to 14 degrees. Coming from high elevations the plant can easily handle bright light but prefers lower summer temperatures.

This hybrid of the plant blossoms easily producing Red to light purple blooms from early spring into early summer in the Houston area. The cultivated plant appears to produce smaller blooms much earlier than the reported 10-15 years old and 3 feet height. Cool winter temperatures from 50 to 59 degrees help to prevent growth when lighting is too low for healthy plant formation.

A well-draining potting medium helps to avoid root damage due to excessive moisture retention. The general consensus is to let the potted plant dry until visible wilting or the top 1 inch of potting medium is dry to the touch. This cactus is easily cultivated in good conditions and offsets easily. Reportedly an 8 inch pot can produce a 5 foot tall plant with multiple stems. Growing from seeds is the recommended propagation method even though it is possible to propagate from cutting offsets and drying them for a week. Cuts typically form visible scars.

October Succulent of the Month**Ron Chadick*****Euphorbia leucodendron***NAME: *Euphorbia leucodendron*SYNONYMS: *Euphorbia alluaudii*, *Tirucallia alluadii*

COMMON NAMES:

Cat Tails Euphorbia, Large Pencil Cactus, Milk Bush, Pencil Cactus, Stick Plant and Stick Cactus

HABITAT/DISTRIBUTION:

Euphorbia leucodendron is found in subhumid, dry or subarid south-western bush areas of Madagascar, as well as the rock faces of the southern central high-plateau.

DESCRIPTION:

Euphorbia leucodendron is a dioecious succulent shrub or small tree

STEMS - made up of clusters of cylindrical, jointed, spineless branches.

Most of its branches rise erectly from the base and then arch outwards to form a mass as wide as tall. Tiny, green, leaves reduced to scales at near the growing tips on new branches, but they quickly fall off. The joints are dotted with brown marks where the leaves were previously attached and also have some relatively large stoma or pores that give them a somewhat speckled appearance. Develops bark grey, smooth, much delayed. Massive quantities of sap are poured out when a stem is cut. The sap quickly seals and protects the cut surface making subsequent fungal growth less likely. Contact with this sap may cause dermatitis in some people, and in the eyes the sap can cause temporary blindness which may last for several days. It can ultimately reach to 12 feet tall though in containers it more commonly grows to a more like 4-6 feet tall.

FLOWERS - At the tips of the stems, small yellow flowers appear in the spring and summer.

FRUIT - developing fruit is red and somewhat heart shaped. Fruits are capsules or pods, always erect, green thin and smooth, with ridges tinted with purple, 3 seeds per capsule.

CULTIVATION/GROWTH:

Euphorbia leucodendron is an easy species to grow that is suited for any well drained soil in full sun. Young plants are happy growing indoors, where they can easily reach the ceiling. Use preferably a cacti and succulents fertilizer with high potassium content including all micro nutrients and trace elements or slow release fertilizer. Water regularly during the active growing season from March to September. No water should ever be allowed to stand around the roots. Keep almost completely dry in winter. Cold hardy for brief periods to 20-25 degrees. It is a moderately fast grower, and will quickly become large landscape masterpieces in just 3-5 years. Once established, it will be content in its position and with its soil for years. Rot is only a minor problem with euphorbias if the plants are watered correctly with proper soil. If they are not, fungicides won't help all that much. It is very unlikely to lose this plant from root rot from excessive water.

Propagation: The plant can be reproduced by seeds or cuttings. Seeds can only be harvested when the capsule is light brown in color. The seed will lose viability in storage, and may not be viable the following year. Use a well-drained sowing medium. Germination usually occurs within about a week or two.

Cuttings are relatively easy. If you remove an offset, remember to let it dry for some days. Cuttings planted too soon easily rot before they can grow roots. Try to keep the cutting somewhat upright so that the roots are



able to grow downward. It is better to wash the cut to remove the latex. The newly planted stems take a few weeks to establish, and then start growing. The best time to grow cuttings is spring.

AVAILABILITY:

I purchased this plant at Home Depot probably 5 years ago and have not seen them there since then. I found another plant that is very similar but as it grew, it developed more branches and leaves. I suspect it may be the same plant but the opposite gender.

REMARKS/COMMENTS/MY EXPERIENCE:

It has taken full sun and gone through a lot of wet spells that have taken out lots of my favorite plants. It has had very few leaves over the years and they go away quickly. Mine never flowered or produced fruit. I never tried to propagate, although intend to try.

REFERENCES:

Matts Landscape

http://www.mattslandscape.com/detail/?plant_name=Euphorbia%20leucodendron

San Marcos Growers

https://www.smgrowers.com/products/plants/plantdisplay.asp?plant_id=3719

The Encyclopedia of Succulents

http://www.llifl.com/Encyclopeia/SUCCULENTS/Family/Euphorbiaceae/27010/Euphorbia_leucodendron



Our Recent Two-Day Adventure In Austin, Texas

by Liliana Cracraft

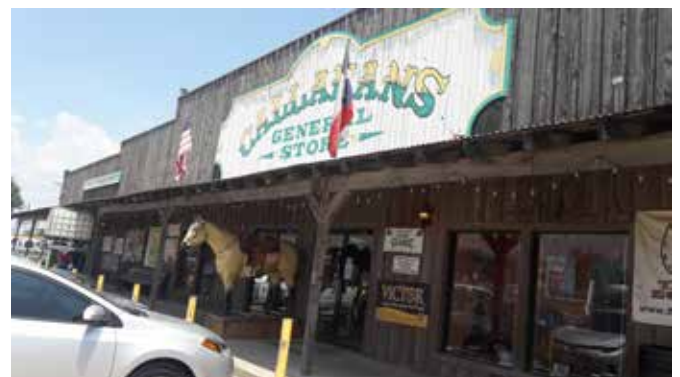
A few months ago, I got invited to be a speaker for the Austin Cactus and Succulents Society (ACSS) for Thursday August 15th. I gladly accepted since every time we visit Austin we have a great time. This invitation would mark the third time I have given a presentation to ACSS members in the last 12 years.

On the morning of August 15, we headed toward Austin after the morning rush hour had past. We took I-10 towards Columbus, then 77 to Austin through La Grange. This is my favorite scenery route, as opposed to driving on 290.

When we got to Bastrop, we stopped at Buc-gee's. As they advertise it, they have the cleanest bathrooms, although not the cheapest prices. As soon as we landed there, I spotted a potential purchase; a wonderful set of wine glasses with a sequined saguaro decoration on the front. Only to soon realize to my dismay that they were \$22 each! Thank you, but no thank you.



Our first stop in Austin was at Callahan's General Store (501 S. Highway 183). We never miss visiting this interesting store. They have a large variety of items including western wear, hardware, houseware, books, as well as animal feed and veterinary supplies. Among the unique items found there were the Coyote Urine, to ward off unwanted visitors from your yard, such as raccoons or opossums, and everything you may need for successful beekeeping. Usually we browse the entire store, but only purchase one thing, pumice, which we use a lot for our cactus & succulents potting soil mix. The price for a 50 lb. bag is \$30. They issue a receipt at the cashier's, and then you drive through their warehouse and someone helps you load the big bags on your vehicle. On occasion, Callahan's offer free composting classes, or live C&W music.



Form there we headed toward East Austin Succulents, an excellent large nursery with thousands of plants, pots, and many other items for serious gardeners. The place is also inviting, and beautifully decorated with cactus & succulent plants. My main goal was to purchase at least one of the plants that had belonged to the late Leroy Kellogg. During our last trip to Austin I had seen a beautiful *Ariocarpus fissuratus*, but I didn't get

because it was priced at \$95, and I thought it was too much. Now I was determined to get it regardless of the price, but sadly, I found out that all his beautiful plants had been sold/ I had to come back home empty handed.



Later that afternoon we were graciously invited by Mike Rupe and other folks from the Austin group to dinner at a place near Zilker Park Botanical Garden, where the group usually has its monthly meetings. My talk, entitled "The Many Prehispanic Uses of Cactus and Succulents Among Mexican Indigenous Groups," was well received by an audience of about 100 people. I was pleasantly surprised to see many Millennials, and according to Gloria Stamper, "they were taking notes" during my talk." After my presentation, there many interesting questions and comments from the audience, and I was invited to write an article on the subject, to be later published in their newsletter.



Myself with Sara Sturtevant, ACSS president, and Tori Rosser, newsletter editor

On Friday morning right after breakfast, we headed towards Oracle Gorge Nursery, owned by Bob Barth. Bob is one of the founding members of ACSS and has been an officer ever since. He has also served as an officer of the Texas Association of Cactus and Succulent Societies (TACSS) on occasion. Bob was a member of the board of directors of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America (CSSA) from 1997 -2008. His nursery consists of several greenhouses housing thousands of plants including his private collection. Being there was a delight as he owns many rare plants from all over the world. We came home with several new plants. His place, located on 602 Terrace Mountain Dr. West Lake Hills Texas, is open by appointment only. If you are interested in visiting his place, first give him a call at (512) 217-3174.





To conclude our visit to interesting places, we headed to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, also called the Botanic Garden of Texas. Their mission is to use native plants to restore and create sustainable, beautiful landscapes, and they inspire the conservation of native plants through their gardens, research, education, and consulting & outreach programs. In doing so, they improve water quality, provide habitat for wildlife, and enhance human health and happiness. This is a great place to visit. You can find many wildflowers. Native trees, creeks, and cactus too!





Lastly, Friday night we got together with several members of the Austin Society for dinner at Fonda San Miguel, a wonderful restaurant founded in 1975 by the late chef Miguel Ravago. It was the first restaurant in Texas to focus exclusively on authentic regional Mexican food. Miguel was well known for his culinary expertise, and back in the 1980's I had the opportunity to take one of his cooking classes using the prickly pear cactus and its fruits (tunas) as the main ingredients.



On Saturday morning we returned to Houston again taking highway 77 towards La Grange, and later 71 to Ellinger and Hillcrest, TX. This road is much more scenic, and we were able to spot deer, an outdoor museum of classic cars, as well as a bison ranch.

It was a wonderful trip and we hope to return soon. The only downsides of our trip were the endless construction on many of the main highways, and the bad traffic, just like in Houston.

POTTING PARTY

Kathy Fewox

On Saturday, August 17th Karla Halpaap-Wood and her husband Chip (Hubert) Wood hosted a potting party at their home. There were nine of us present: Karla and Chip, Sarai Ramirez, Andrea Varesic, Cindy Gray, Paul Stricklin, Wally Ward, Imtiaz Bangee, and myself (Kathy Fewox). Before and after potting, we got to look at Karla's plants in her greenhouses and around the yard. Most impressive!

Despite a temperature in the nineties, during the actual potting we remained comfortable in the shade, with a fan blowing on us and often a pleasant breeze. Constant conversation made the job of potting enjoyable. We potted a lot of plants for the club's table at the upcoming Show and Sale.

Imtiaz had to leave right after we finished potting. The rest of us sat down to a feast at the dining room table. Karla and Chip provided delicious smoked chicken and sausage, and potato salad. Other side dishes were provided by attendees. For dessert, Karla had made a wonderful blueberry pie.

Everyone had a great time. Thank you, Karla and Chip, for welcoming us into your home and providing us with a wonderful meal!



Anniversary Dinner in July



The Garden Club of Houston is pleased to announce its 77th annual Bulb and Plant Mart, October 3-5 at Church of St. John the Divine, 2450 River Oaks Blvd., Houston, Texas. Mart hours are 9:00 a.m.- 5:00 p.m. Friday and 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Saturday. Early Bird Shopping is available for \$20 Thursday 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m. All sales are tax-exempt. Admission and parking are free.

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