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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



Pilosocereus azureus
by Karla Halpaap-Wood



Houston Cactus and Succulent Society
Founded in 1963
Affiliated with the Cactus & Succulent Society of America

From the Editor

Karla Halpaap-Wood

Happy New Year, 2024. I want to thank everybody who contributed to this edition of the KK. Pictures and articles are always welcome.

As the editor I receive newsletters from a few other clubs. If you are interested to receive those directly send me an email and I will forward to you. That is mostly from Austin and Fresno, CA, but also Fort Worth and North Texas.

Membership

Sara Ortiz

On September 27, 2023, HCSS met at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center. There were 28 members in attendance, and two guests. The program of the evening was presented by Josie Watts and Bruce Moffett. The program was named “Puerto Vallarta Botanical Garden”

The Cactus of the Month was presented by Jeff Boggan, *Stenocactus obvallatus* subspecies *caespitosus*.

The Succulent of the Month was presented by Kristi Schmidt, “Sharkskin Agave”.

We had two boxes of cacti and succulents that were free to the members in attendance. The estate of Grant Wells gave our club many books on cacti and succulents. These were also on the “free to a good home” table. Thank you again, Mr. Grant Wells.

Calendar:

January 10, 2024 7:00 pm Board Meeting via Zoom

January 24, 2024 7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
 Program: “Strange Mesembs” by Steven Brack, founder of Mesa Garden and CSSA fellow.
 Unusual leaf shapes and odd symmetry are on display to show how Mesembs have adapted to all sorts of habitats in nature. One trait of Mesembs is the unequal size in the pair of leaves, this feature is called anisophylly.



February 28, 2024 7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
 Program: “The most famous genus of all: *Astrophytum*” by Gierayl Clepper, grower and owner of Madam Cacti *Astrophytum* farm.
Astrophytum is a genus of cactus native to south Texas and northern Mexico. The genus was listed as endangered species in the early 90’s. The program aims to spread awareness against collecting from the habitat by learning about how to grow these beautiful cacti from seed and maintaining your own collection.



March 1, 2024 Deadline for submitting articles for the KK.

2024 President's Message

Happy new 2024 everyone!

2023 was a wonderful year for our club. In July we celebrated our 60th anniversary. That is a monumental accomplishment for any organization, especially one that is made up strictly of volunteers. A commemorative pot was commissioned and available to our members to celebrate this occasion. As president, I am here only because of the presidents that preceded me and their hard work. On the shoulders of giants.....

Our membership has grown from 34 members last January to 94 members in December. The board voted to bestow the honor of a lifetime membership for 2023 to Karla Halpaap-Wood and Josie Watts and Bruce Moffett. The 2024 lifetime memberships were given to Dave Thomas and Wally Ward. This is the highest honor that we as a club can give to an individual member or to a family. These members had contributed a great deal of time and effort to the club over a long period of time to earn this commendation.

In 2023, we had our biannual sale in May and September. The cactus show took place in September. The Dead Cactus Society was also resurrected for this occasion. We had seven vendors at each of the sales and also potters from Clay Houston. A productive relationship was established between our club and Clay Houston. The September sale was our largest to date.

We had a number of fun cactus events throughout the year. In February, we had a white elephant valentine cactus exchange. We had two "Intown" field trips to the Mercer Greenhouse and to Fred Reyes Nursery. In July, we had our anniversary dinner to celebrate 60 years. This summer we also had the honor to rescue the cactus and succulent collection of Mr. Grant Wells. Mr. Wells was a past member of our club. He had an extensive collection in his greenhouse. This memorial collection comprised our club table at the September sale. His memory lives on in every cactus from the collection. The Bromeliad Society of Houston participated in a crossover event and gave a presentation at our monthly meeting. The board and then the membership approved an updated version of our governing bylaws. This fall we had our first open garden party at one of our member's house to view and enjoy their personal collection.

I would like to give a big thank you to everyone who contributed to our society in every way this year. We are unable to function without your knowledge, dedication and your gift of time. I look forward to another year, as your president. This year, we are planning an out of town field trip to the Big Bend National Park. The park will be in full cactus bloom. We will continue with the fun activities and field trips. I will work to establish more relationships with our local clubs and the horticulture departments at the local colleges.

Sincerely, Andrea Varesic

CSSA News

Liliana Cracraft

Thanks to all of you who voted for the directors positions. The three newly elected Directors positions were filled by the following candidates: Jackson Burkholder (Littleton, CO), Kelly Griffin (Carlsbad, CA), and Jeff Moore (Solana Beach, CA).

Board members are currently interviewing candidates for a Business Manager to fill Gunnar Eisel's position.

Remember that a \$55 per year membership provides:

The Cactus and Succulent Society Journal, published four times annually

To the Point newsletter, also published four times annually

Participation in the CSSA Biennial International Convention

Participation in the CSSA Webinar series

Participation in the CSSA's members only Field Trips

Access to the Seed Depot

A one-year \$20 year supporting membership provides access to the CSSA Seed Depot, to the Point newsletter, and access to the CSSA convention.

To join CSSA visit <https://cactusandsucculentsociety.dreamhosters.com/membership/>

Also, many thanks to Tom Cardinal for his generous donation to the CSSA Seed Depot. The donated seeds included *Opuntia lindheimeri subarmata*, *Opuntia orbiculata*, *Echinopsis mirabilis*, *Astrophytum myriostigma*, *Astrophytum asterias*, *Melocactus albicephalus*, *Melocactus violaceus*, *Melocactus bahiensis*, *Parodia magnifica*, and *Mammillaria nejapensis*. Great additions to the Depot!



January Cactus of the Month**Jeff Boggan**NAME: *Aztekium valdezii* (2013)

Discovered by: Mario Alberto Valdéz Marroquín in 2011

SYNONYMS: None

COMMON NAME(S): None

HABITAT/DISTRIBUTION: It is native to a region called Rancho Guadalupe in Nuevo Leon Mexico on the North facing cliffs of the Sierra Madre Oriental mountains.

Initially it was thought to only exist in less than a square mile area. The original site was heavily collected by a few people anxious to exploit the new discovery.

However, humans are not the only threat to the plant. In fact if the plants had not been collected they may have been destroyed by nature. A hurricane hit the area soon after the discovery and caused the loss of over 5000 specimens. This was referenced in *Xerophilia* - Vol 2, No. 3 (6) - September 2013, ISSN 2285 - 3987 on page 28. In the article Mr. Marroquin explains that it was the torrents of rain that caused the destruction of the cliffside washing away the plants. The few seedlings that were left are now repopulating the cliff. It is my hope that further exploration will reveal another population exists on nearby cliffs.

**DESCRIPTION:**

STEM: Mature specimens are between 1 and 2 inches wide and tall. They typically have 5 ribs. They produce pups from the areoles along the ribs. The stem is textured with horizontal ridges similar to the shape of a step pyramid. In habitat the plant body is more bluish-gray to almost a teal color. In cultivation the plants are green with a yellowish hue in some cases.

FLOWERS: The flowers erupt from the apex of the plant in the spring and early summer. There are between 7 to 9 petals. The petals are fuchsia to magenta in color on the outer edge of the petals and transition to a bright white towards the center. The flowers are between $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in diameter.

FRUITS: The fruits are small red skinned rounded to irregular shape. The seeds are very small looking like ground pepper.

CULTIVATION/GROWTH:

Growing the grafted specimens are similar to *gymnocalycium mihanovichii*. The propagation by grafting the pups is the same. You can also degraft the mother plant and get them to grow on their own roots. However, you may just want to keep them grafted because the natural growth is VERY slow. I would not degraft one until it has matured to the size you desire. It will probably not grow much larger once it is on its own root system.

I have tried growing them from seed without success. Some of the seeds I received did germinate but just disappeared after a few weeks.

AVAILABILITY:

It is illegal to collect in the wild.

Aztekium valdezii is not listed in CITES because it is not considered by taxonomists as a true species. (Cact. Us.Com <https://cact.us.com/plants/cites/>)

Within a year after the plant's discovery it was available for sale on eBay from vendors in Ukraine and Czechia.

Grafted specimens and seeds are now, 2023, available from plant vendors in the US. It has been propagated in nurseries and collections in Europe, Asia, and other places in the world. The captive population may now outnumber the wild population. It is this artificial propagation that will help reduce the pressure of collecting from the indigenous population.

REFERENCES:

Articles -

Cact.Us.Com - <https://cact.us.com/plants/cites/>

Xerophilia - Volume 2, No. 3 (6) September 2013 - <https://xerophilia.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Xerophilia-nr-6.pdf>

How to care for Aztekium Plants - <https://desertplantsofavalon.com/uncategorized/how-to-care-for-aztekium-cactus/>

How To care for Aztekium valdezii -

LLifle.com - https://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/25623/Aztekium_valdezii

YouTube videos

<https://youtube.com/shorts/rLeBtZCgz6s?si=ocUMPkdb9vShZr3V>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4W71MXCUcw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AH9XweSReY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EitgimpYy7M>

<https://youtube.com/shorts/eKqhU5O4ImQ?si=hujoBqhEbfOReBf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7YfRDw56TQ>

Aztekium valdezii grafting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OwbnejJG1o>

We found the most difficult cactus to see in nature, in Nuevo León, MX: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kspapL6suw0>



January Succulent of the Month

Liliana Cracraft

Euphorbia lomelii

Synonyms: *Pedilanthus macrocarpus* (1844), *Hexadenia macrocarp.* Klotzch & Garcke (1859), *Tithymalodes macrocarpoum*, Kuntze (1891), *Tithymalus macrocarpus* Croizat (1937).

Common names: Lady slipper, Slipper plant, Gallito (little rooster), or zapato del diablo (devil's shoe).

Euphorbia lomelii was previously called *Pedilanthus macrocarpus*, and was re-named in 2003 by V. E. Steinman and published in *Acta Botánica Mexicana* 65:49. The *Pedilanthus* genus was folded into the *Euphorbia* genus based on DNA analysis, and the designation of the species as *lomelii*, was made to honor Mexican Botanist José Aquileo Lomelii Senci3n, a specialist in Euphorbiaceae from the Botanical Garden of the University of Guadalajara in M3xico. We have two plants growing in pots.

Despite the new name given to this plant 20 years ago, the new name has yet to gain widespread acceptance.

Habitat/Distribution: *E. lomelii*, a true desert species, can be found naturally along washes and on plains and rocky slopes of the Baja California peninsula, on several Gulf of California islands, and on the Mexican mainland from Sonora to Colima.

Description: This is an upright perennial succulent with thick, jointed, and sometimes branched light green stems. They are often coated with a thick waxy film, and can measure up to $\frac{3}{4}$ in in diameter. The stems can grow up to 6 feet tall from a woody root crown, especially if it's grown in the shade. When cut, the stems exude a milky sap, which can be toxic to humans and animals if ingested in quantity. The leaves are small, oval-shaped, and they drop quickly as they are drought deciduous, usually leaving the thornless stems, which are capable of performing photosynthesis, bare and leafless, as is characteristic of *Euphorbia* species.

The flowers, ranging in color from red, to pink to yellow, appear in clusters at the tip of the stems, with a single female flower, surrounded by several more conspicuous male flowers in each cluster.

This flowering structure is known as a cyathium or an involucre, and is composed of a lower pair of bracts, and an upper, more complex part called the spur, which is formed by a gland chamber that secretes nectar. The flowering structure is said to resemble shoes or slippers,



or birds, and the fruit, which develops from the female flowers, are red and oblong, and appear in the fall.

Cultivation: This plant is easy to grow and maintain. Use any commercially sold cactus mix to grow this plant, or prepare your own mix of 50% potting soil plus 50% of aggregate. You can also add some perlite. If the plant is grown in a pot, fertilize it occasionally. It grows well in full sun, which means it needs to get direct sun light for at least six hours on a daily basis. It can also grow in the shade, but the stems won't be as erect, and can tend to become long and floppy. Since *E. lomeli* grows actively from spring to the fall season, provide the proper amount of water, making sure that the top two inches of soil are never dry. This means watering once week during the growing season, preferably in the morning. Avoid watering during dormancy.

This plant can be propagated by seeds or stem cuttings and requires little maintenance. Plant the seeds in in a mix of coarse sand and a commercial potting mix. If the weather is warm, you should see growth in a couple of weeks. For cuttings, get a clean and sharp knife and collect the cuttings near the plant's branching points. This is the easiest way to propagate the plant.

Ethnobotany: Native peoples cooked the stems to obtain wax to make candles. This is still practiced in Mexico, but the preferred plant for candles in México is *Euphorbia antisiphylitica* (Candelilla). The wax is used in cosmetics, varnishes and lubricants. The sap has also been used by native people to treat chapped lips, cuts, and burns. Studies have been undertaken to determine if *E. lomelii* can be turned into a large scale crop.

Remarks: I had the pleasure to meet Dr. Lomeli when I was an invited professor of microbiology at the University of Guadalajara Medical School every semester. I had the opportunity to visit the university botanical garden numerous times, and he was always generous sharing C & S seeds. I also once submitted a proposal to HCSS to support his research projects, and he was the recipient of one of the small grants we provide.



Interestingly this plant has been presented as the Club's Succulent of the Month, only once before, and that happened in 1969!!

Photos: Liliana and Mike Cracraft

References:

<https://apps.cals.arizona.edu>

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euphorbia_lomelii

Dortort, Fred. The Timber Press Guide to Succulent Plants, 2011.

The Euphorbia Journal Vol. 2 and 3. Strawberry Press, California, 1984.

February Cactus of the Month

John Weistroffer

Name: *Astrophytum Myriostigma*

Synonyms: *A. prismaticum*, *A. stellata*

Common Names: Bishop's Cap Cactus

Habitat: Central and northern Mexico (states of Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí and Tamaulipas). It grows at elevations ranging from 750 to 1500 metres (2500-5000ft) above sea level.

Description: Typically a globose shaped plant but can become columnar with old age. Usually 5 ribs but 3, 4, and 6, ribbed specimens exist. Areoles are small and inconspicuous, virtually nonexistent in some cultivars and 100% spineless. But the skin is densely covered with fine white scales/flecking that make the surface appear similar to the limestone among which it grows. Flowers are entirely yellow and mildly fragrant. They last a day or maybe two.

Cultivation: In nature it grows on stony, calcareous soils. Its distribution is limited by its need for stony, calcareous or lime soils. This calcicole also needs carbonates to integrate calcium and make itself more rigid.

In cultivation I've found that it grows very well, although slowly, in the typical well draining, sandy/rocky substrate that all my other cactus are grown in. I have made no special effort to add limestone to the soil so I question whether this is necessary or not.

Availability: Widely available from any "craft" or "hobbyist centered" cactus retailers. However, I have never seen this (or any *Astrophytum* species) available in the big box stores.

Other Comments: There is a considerable amount of physical variability present within this species regarding the shape of the overall plant, shape of the ribs and their ridges, number and spacing of areoles, as well as the amount and characteristics of the flecking. There are several interesting and beautiful cultivars of this species that have been developed:

- Onzuka has especially heavy and dense flecking that is often patterned. Each specimen of Onzuka looks unique.
- Tricostatum (3 ribs), Quadricostatum (4 ribs)
- Kikko has pointed tubercles
- Nudum has no flecking at all
- Variegated
- Khoyo has changeable color! Much like autumn leaves it flushes red/orange/yellow in cold weather and bright sunlight
- ... and so many more and combinations thereof!

REFERENCES:

www.llifle.com



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Astrophytum_myriostigma_\(5699845918\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Astrophytum_myriostigma_(5699845918).jpg)

February Succulent of the Month

Kristi Schmidt

NAME: ALOE BREVIFOLIA

Asphodelaceae Family

COMMON NAME(S): “Crocodile Plant”, “Short-Leaved Aloe”

Origin: Western Cape, South Africa

DESCRIPTION: Aloe Brevifolia is a vibrant and hardy member of the Aloe family. It is a one of a kind showstopper with teeth like spikes that line each leaf and create a spine resembling crocodile teeth. The plant has a distinctive light green color with hues of blue/gray. It is currently listed as Vulnerable on IUCN’s global Red List, as it is threatened in its natural habitat.



CULTIVATION/GROWTH: This aloe is mildly toxic and it is not advised to be ingested by humans or pets. When the plant is stressed, the leaves’ tips blush in shades of red, orange. Mature size can reach 12” wide and tall. This compact size makes it perfect as a container plant or as an ornamental accent plant. When left alone it will grow in clumps with plenty of new offsprings which can be removed from the parent plant.

REMARKS/COMMENTS/MY EXPERIENCE:

It is important to plant them in porous, well-draining soil. Succulents require little watering, but don’t like to sit in wet soil. To create an adequate cactus mix, simply add pumice, perlite, or grit to cactus soil to provide the proper drainage.

References:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aloe_brevifolia

<https://planetdesert.com/products/crocodile-plant-aloe-brevifolia-short-leaf-aloe>



<https://hscactus.org/resources/digest/plant-care/i-wish-i-knew-then-what-i-know-now/>

This article is reprinted with permission from the newsletter of the Henry Shaw Cactus and Succulent Society, St. Louis "From the Digest"

This is a personal story from one of it's members, but the lesson learned applies to us all.

I Wish I Knew Then What I Know Now

By Eric Driskill (December 2021)

When I heard about and joined the Henry Shaw Cactus and Succulent Society, I wasn't new to growing and collecting cacti, but I had no idea how little I knew. Joining our local society, I was immediately amazed that there were even a couple of other people who enjoyed these plants enough to collect them, much less join or participate in a "society."

Up until that time, my collection was about 35 rather large cacti that I had been growing for the last 15 years. At that time, I lived in a duplex, and being summer, I had all my plants, except two, out on my front porch and in among the landscaping hedges. One morning when I was leaving for work, I opened my door to find every single one of my plants had been stolen. To say I was bummed at work that day would be an understatement. Little did I know that the succulent gods were smiling on me that day. I worked at a college, and at the time I had a calendar on my office wall with pictures of iconic cacti on display for each month. I spent that day advising students who were registering for the upcoming semester. My last appointment was a young lady who, after sitting down and noticing my calendar asked, "Oh, so you like cactus?"

I told her about my entire collection being swiped that very morning, and she told me I should join the cactus society to which her grandmother belonged. Maybe the society members could help me rebuild my collection. As I write this, it occurs to me that I never found out who her grandmother was or thanked that young lady for informing me about our local society.



Don't be afraid to manipulate your plants by altering how the roots grow, or trimming and wiring to achieve a certain look.

grow, I sought out weirder and rarer plants, and began to purchase some larger, more expensive specimen plants. Some of those plants were the ones that society members referred to as "difficult to grow" or "temperamental" or "easy to lose." Here is where I wished I knew then what I know now.

Fear and Caution

More Plants, More Variety

After talking with members, I was gifted with some cuttings and a few pity(?) plants, and learned there was a nursery, Drummond, not too far from town that specialized in succulents. I quickly began to rebuild my collection. With one trip to that nursery, I saw more variety of cacti and succulents than I knew existed. Not only did I rebuild my plant collection with more plants, but with a much wider variety.

I began checking out books from the society and buying some of those same books for myself. My plant wish list rapidly grew, and is still growing to this day.

During the first several years of collecting plants, I mostly purchased smaller, less expensive plants.

As time went on and my collection continued to



Try staging plants in different pots and orientations.

From that time and continuing for eight to 10 years, I continued to grow my collection and ultimately built a greenhouse. During that time, I grew most of my plants well. Well ... I kept most of my plants alive and grew some of them well.

As my collection grew and I began to purchase some of those more “challenging” (expensive) plants, I was often scared to do anything for fear I would do the wrong thing. I may have wound up killing one of the “be careful how much you water that one” plants for lack of water. A few of the “be careful when you repot that one because it is touchy about being repotted” plants may have been left in the same pot for many years – where they may have lived but didn’t thrive. Being overcautious can sometimes be just as detrimental as not being cautious enough.

Try New Things

Ultimately, I established a raised free-root-run bed in which to grow some of my plants during the summer. In April or May, I would begin to unpot plants and transfer them into the raised bed, where they grew roots unrestricted until the fall. Each year, I find a delicate balance between leaving plants in there to grow just a bit more, versus getting them out and back in a pot before temperatures dip low enough to damage or kill the plants. With my raised bed, I began to see the results of trying new things and not being so cautious as to not try anything at all.

For years, I hesitated to trim, shape, prune or otherwise manipulate my plants for fear of killing them. With my raised bed, I began to manipulate roots to grow a certain way. I also began to do a lot more with my plants as far as pruning, shaping and sometimes slashing. I learned that very often these plants are very forgiving and respond quite well to manipulations. I sometimes wonder what some of my plants would look like today if I had started doing this earlier.

Have a Goal

With my new mindset, I often study a plant, come up with an image of what I want the plant to look like in the future and then begin to manipulate it toward that goal. It is nice to not only have a goal, but to play a much more active part in what my plants look like and how I grow and shape them. Trust me, it is so nice to have that ownership and satisfaction of knowing you played such a big part in what plants looks like.

There are temperamental, “difficult” plants, but those tags usually mean you really need to educate yourself about the plants and how they grow in habitat to determine their needs. Find out what wiggle room you have to adjust any certain parameter to accomplish your goal for a plant.



This succulent tree is highly trimmed and staged with petrified wood.

Do take advice from other growers, but don't be so overcautious that you don't risk finding new and more enjoyable approaches to this hobby and your plants. Start off manipulating the smaller or cheaper ones. Buy two or three, and try something different with each one. I bet you will be surprised what you can accomplish and how you can shape and mold your collection in ways you might not have thought possible.

I Wish ...

In a nutshell, here is what I wish I knew then that I know now:

- When you buy a plant, repot it right away. Check the roots, inspect the plant and repot.
- Learn ways and to what extent you can manipulate your plants by altering how the roots grow, or trimming, shaping and wiring to achieve a certain look.
- Look for ways to better stage your plants in different pots, at different angles or orientations, and with additions such as rocks to achieve a look more like habitat.
- Don't be afraid to think outside the box, take some risks and try some new things. When you stumble upon something that works great, share it with others in the hobby.
- Try experimenting in varied ways by altering the amount or frequency of watering, light and temperature. Try different growing media, pot sizes, etc.
- Be sure to take photos to see your results and share them more easily.
- Take good notes so you can reflect on what results you get and be better prepared to continue to adjust.

TIME TO RENEW YOUR ANNUAL HCSS MEMBERSHIP DUES

Your Membership Renewal is due on January 1st. It's \$20 for Individual, \$25 for Family and \$35 for International. You can mail your check payable to HCSS to Cindy Gray, send payment through Zelle at hcsstreasurer@gmail.com (include your name and Membership Dues for 2024) or pay Bruce Moffett at the January membership meeting. Please advise if you have a new email address, address or phone number. New members please complete the membership form (<http://www.hcsstex.org/HCSSmembership.pdf>) and email to grayco60@hotmail.com if using Zelle. Members who have not paid by January 25th will be dropped from Membership and will not be included in the Yearbook.

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