

## April Succulent of the Month

Echo Pang

Scientific name: *Alainopsis schooneesii*



**Family:** Mesembryanthemaceae/Aizoaceae (Commonly Mesembs; fig-marigold; Midday flower; Ice plant; Vygie)

**Habitat:** *Alainopsis schooneesii* is endemic to South Africa (in Eastern Cape). Its habitat climate varies from the west to the east, and from the north inland to the south coast. The west is more arid with sparse rain during winter or summer; frosty winters and hot summers. Further east, rainfall becomes more plentiful and humidity increases. The climate is subtropical along the coast with summer rainfall. The interior has cold winters with snowfalls occasionally occurring in the mountainous regions. Compare to Houston climate, it almost never has blasting hot summers or freezing cold winters. Weather data shows that the average high in summer is about 23-25 °C (74-77°F) ; average low in winter is about 6-7°C (44-46°F). Annual average precipitation is about 86.31 mm (3.4 inch). Similar to Houston, the humidity is quite high. The average relative humidity is 69.71% (in forms of fog or dew during the nights and early mornings).

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**Description:** *Alainopsis schooneesii* has stone-like, highly succulent leaves with textures forming rosettes on top of a tuberous root system. They camouflage to their various surroundings by mimicking the appearance of the stony soil in which they are found. You can expect to see brown species from brown ground, gray from gray ground; white or bluish leaves from quartz fields or limestone areas.

They bloom in winter months on sunny days under direct sunlight. Flowers are daisy-like, usually

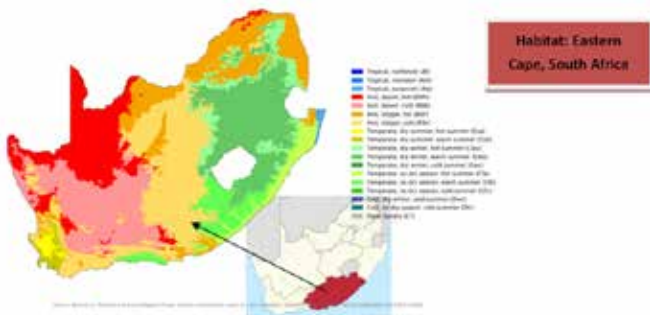
yellow, measured around 1 inch in diameter (large and showy compared to their leaves). The flower pedals have a silky texture, decorated with red to orange stripes in the center of each pedal. Buds will not open if the weather is cloudy. The growing season is late winter into spring until it turns hot. In habitat, the plants will pull down into the ground to expose less of the leaves to the sun.

**Cultivation:** *Alainopsis schooneesii* is a relatively easy to grow and quick to flower Mesembs. A deeper pot with rocky and sandy substrate to provide excellent drainage is recommended to accommodate the thick tuberous root. Although in nature the taproots are usually all hidden under ground, in cultivation, the plant can be gradually raised above the ground to reveal some of



S. Hammer-Mesembs: The Titanopsus Group

Köppen-Geiger climate classification map for South Africa (1980-2010)





Steven Hammer-Mesembs: The Titanopsis Group

the roots when it is potted up to create a “bonsai” look. They are winter growing, summer dormant in Houston. The thick leaves and taproots make this plant very drought tolerant, but they seem to be very forgiving about a bit of over or under watering, especially during their growing season. This plant will prefer full sun to part sun from fall to spring with adequate watering (allow potting media to dry out before you water again in Houston), but it should be protected from excessive heat and sun in summer dormancy with restricted watering. *A. schoonesii* is very cold resistant. It will not be harm by Houston winter temperatures with a rain cover. In summer, you need a shade cloth underneath the rain cover with excellent ventilation.

Mr. Steven Hammer, the author of the book “*Mesembs: The Titanopsis Group*”, mentioned that “the more water it becomes accustomed to, the more water it craves, and vice versa. It’s worth nothing that long-desiccated plants are highly prone to red spider attack, and plump ones are not.”

**Propagation:** This plant can be propagated by division or from seeds. Mr. Steven Brack, the founder of Mesa Garden comments that “*A. schoonesii* is very easy to grow from seed and should be sown in the fall into early winter so they can grow well during the cool months. Germination is best when cool (like 55 to 68 degree F); heat discourages growth. Young seedlings should be protected from too much hot sun.”

**Collector’s notes:** “*Aloinopsis schoonesii* is not all that common, but a bit of a specialist plant.... Architecturally it is a real stunner. When the caudex shape of the raised roots is adequately in evidence this plant is incomparable.”

#### References:

1. Steven A Hammer- *Mesembs: The Titanopsis Group*
2. Fred Dortort- *The Timber Press Guide to Succulent Plants of the World. A Comprehensive Reference to More than 2000 Species.* (Chapter 13. Dwarf Mesembryantheums- Aloinopsis, Deilante, and Titanopsis)
3. Habitat weather data: <https://tcktkctck.org/south-africa/eastern-cape>
4. Köppen climate classification of South Africa: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate\\_of\\_South\\_Africa#/media/File:Koppen-Geiger\\_Map\\_ZAF\\_present.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate_of_South_Africa#/media/File:Koppen-Geiger_Map_ZAF_present.svg)
5. Location of the Eastern Cape in South Africa: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern\\_Cape#/media/File:Eastern\\_Cape\\_in\\_South\\_Africa.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Cape#/media/File:Eastern_Cape_in_South_Africa.svg)
6. [https://www.cactus-art.biz/schede/ALOINOPSIS/Aloinopsis\\_schoonesii/Aloinopsis\\_schoonesii/Aloinopsis\\_schoonesii.htm](https://www.cactus-art.biz/schede/ALOINOPSIS/Aloinopsis_schoonesii/Aloinopsis_schoonesii/Aloinopsis_schoonesii.htm)

#### Photo credits:

1. *Aloinopsis schoonesii* in Echo’s collection in late winter (mid February of 2023).
2. Steven A. Hammer- *Mesembs: The Titanopsis Group.* (Habitat pictures)
3. [http://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/SUCCULENTS/Family/Aizoaceae/766/Aloinopsis\\_schoonesii](http://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/SUCCULENTS/Family/Aizoaceae/766/Aloinopsis_schoonesii)