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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*



Euphorbia punicia
by Liliana Cracraft



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.

I want to thank all contributors to this first edition of 2021. Special thanks to Liliana Cracraft for her interesting and useful articles.

Please sign up for plants of month here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1aJgFu3q5SEW2gZyx-D9UWtZJF98pdRK9Fd0CRHFH_w04/edit?usp=sharing

Membership**Kathy Fewox**

The HCSS Zoom meeting of November 18, 2020 was attended by sixteen people. We enjoyed a very interesting program on Agave plants and the spirits distilled from them, which was presented by Liliana Cracraft. Sarai Ramirez and Michael Ramirez gave informative Cactus and Succulent of the Month presentations.

Due to the pandemic, we were unable to have our yearly holiday party in December, which was a big disappointment to many of us who look forward to celebrating the season with our friends.

It is time to renew our HCSS memberships. I hope some of the many people who have been enjoying the Facebook page will consider joining the club. Someday we will be able to resume meeting in person, and when that day comes it would be wonderful if Houston-area Facebook members would get involved with our meetings. The in-person meetings are a fun way to learn about cacti and succulents, and often a chance to pick up plants, cuttings, or seeds for little or nothing. It's a great way to add to your collection, and to meet people who share your interest.

Link to membership form: <http://www.hcsstex.org/HCSS%20membership%20application%202021.pdf>

Also, until we are able to meet in person, I wish more people who attend the Zoom meetings. It might not be as much fun as getting together in person, but it's still a wonderful way to learn more about these fascinating plants.

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

Calendar:

January 13, 2021	7:30 pm Board Meeting via Zoom
January 27, 2021	7:30 pm Membership Meeting via Zoom Program: <i>Haworthia splendens</i> by Richard Stamper
February 24, 2021	7:30 pm Membership Meeting via Zoo Program: Plant Neurobiology: Toward a multidisciplinary approach to botany by Chaden Yafi
March 1, 2021	Deadline for submitting articles for the KK.

2021 Presidential Address

By Josie Watts

Hello, fellow intrepid cactophiles,

Well, 2021 is almost here, and 2020 is almost over!!! It has been a very difficult year in every way. I hope everyone is well. I don't know about anyone else, but my plants and my yard have never looked better due to all the time at home.

Many of you know this, but for those who don't, the Board of Directors voted to keep the same officers until we are again able to meet in person. We also voted to withhold charitable contributions for this year as we had to cancel both of our plant sales, thus limiting our funds.

We have been having board meetings and regular membership meetings, along with plant of the month and program, via Zoom, but attendance has been small. We don't yet know when we will be able to be together again. I, for one, will be so glad to see you all and resume our activities, including meetings, field trips, potting parties, the spring sale, and the show and sale. We have an active facebook group to share information, show off blooms, get assistance with id's, etc. But it is so much more fun when we can also do it in person.

I am so grateful to Karla Halpaap-Wood, who has held us all together and managed all the Zoom procedures, as well as to David VanLangen and Wally Ward for carrying on with your duties through thick and thin.

Meanwhile, take care of yourselves, wear your masks, and get vaccinated when you can. I know we have all been affected by Covid, and my condolences go out to those who have lost friends and loved ones or suffered in other ways. You are all loved and missed.

Sincerely,
Josie

HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR EUPHORBIA PULCHERRIMA (POINSETTIA) AFTER CHRISTMAS

by Liliana Cracraft

Most people discard their Poinsettias after Christmas, but there is no need to do get rid of these beautiful plants. Here are some things you can do to continue to enjoy them for many years.

Place your plant in light-medium light areas, but they can also tolerate low light. Avoid full sun to prevent burned leaves.

- Water when the soil surface becomes dry. Leaves should be sprinkled gently with a mist.
- Keep temperature between 60 and 70 degrees F.

- Pots should not be in direct contact with the floor. They should be placed on a bed of gravel or another pot.
- The soil should be sterile, and free of weeds and insects, toxic elements, herbicides, heavy metals or soluble salts. Humus can be added.
- Poinsettias require high levels of nitrogen and potassium, but do not use manure, superphosphates, or ammonium fertilizers.

An old Mexican tale states that plants facing north will always do better.

Don't be afraid to plant them on the ground in a corner or a place where they can get protected from hard freezes. Both, the Houston Chronicle and Brenda Beust Smith's Lazy Gardener newsletter have previously reported the sightings of Poinsettias growing happily on the ground around Houston.



Here is the **Holiday Calendar** to care for your **Poinsettia** throughout the year

- New Year's: Apply an all-purpose houseplant fertilizer, water as needed, and keep the plant in bright light.
- St. Patrick's Day: Remove dried parts. Add more soil, preferably a sterile mix.
- Memorial Day: Trim off branches to encourage side branching. Repot if necessary. Move the plant outdoors.
- 4th of July: Trim the plant again. Keep in sunlight and fertilize.
- Labor Day: Move the plant indoors, where it will receive six hours of direct light.
- First day of fall: Give the plant 14 hr. of darkness and 10 hr. of bright light each day. Keep night temperatures in the low 70s. Rotate the plant daily so that all sides receive light.
- Thanksgiving: Discontinue day/night treatment.
- Wait for December to enjoy them again

January Cactus of the Month

David Van Langen

Escobaria missouriensis

Escobaria missouriensis is a low growing clustering cactus found over much of Texas. Its range includes Texas from near Dallas down thru College Station to near Columbus to near Victoria to Beeville and then north through western central Texas. Further north its range includes most of Oklahoma and Kansas and then goes even further north to include North and South Dakota and much of Montana. It is truly a cactus of the rolling short grass Great Plains. Its name comes from being found near the very upper part of the Missouri River in Montana. It can also be found in eastern portions of Colorado and New Mexico with a couple of subspecies being found across northern Arizona and northwestern New Mexico. There are also subspecies found in northern Mexico and Cuba. It is probably the most widespread cactus, other than *Opuntia*, in North America.

The growth habit is low growing-- seldom more than a few inches high and can form clusters, depending on locale, of many stems to over 12 inches across. It can be found on sedimentary rock, limestone based soils, sandy soils and tight dark calcareous clay based soil. It is most commonly found growing on fence lines, low growing grasses and under the outer edges of trees. The seeds are rapidly consumed by birds-- and "deposited" by birds-- hence the edges of trees and fence lines ! The clump grows and expands by offsets growing out of the upper part of the lower tubercles

The body of this *Escobaria* is made up of tubercles much like *Mammillaria*. The juvenile form usually does not develop central spines for many years but at a certain age a short stout downward curved central spine can form. The flowers form near the apex of the plant-- I believe on the growth of the previous season and are composed of many slim petals-- maybe an inch or so long and less than half an inch wide. The color is a yellowish green with maybe a slight hint of pale pink. One nice trait of the Missouri Pincusion is that the bright red round fruits are ripe at the same time it is blooming !! That gives it a special look- I love it !!

Other than *Opuntia*, this was one of the first cactus I saw in habitat. It grew on several places on my Uncle's dairy between Fayetteville and La Grange Texas- and on adjacent ranches. I was maybe 10-12 years old--and was once again hooked ! Of course I dug some up way back then but they just did not adapt to Houston even though they can be found within 75 miles of here. It seemed like between the rain, snails and pill bugs-- they always rotted. Even now in the Fake Desert they just can't outlive the pill bugs !! I have seen these plants on many locations in the Fayette County area but as grazing land is divided and sold as residential land, they always disappear in time. One location I used to go visit, take pics of and collect seeds was at a small cemetery outside of La Grange. There were several very low growing clusters over 3-5 foot across that were mowed enough to keep the plants from getting tall but not killing them-- forcing a wide spreading plant that was almost like a ground cover. There was also one !! Fine Looking Cluster !! on gravel near a headstone. It was there for years-- then about 5-6 years ago we were out there and the cemetery had been cleaned up and manicured ! I want to cry so I just cussed !! Most all the cactus were gone - including the marvelous large cluster !! I sure hope someone took it home and took care of it !!

One last note-- this cactus can easily be confused with *Cortphantha sulcata*- which shares much of the same



habitat and are often found growing together . It also is easily confused in cultivation with the south Texas native *Mammillaria sphaerica*. Final note-- if you are out and about from Columbus to Austin---from Brehnam to Austin- walk fence lines and you might find *Escobaria missouriensis* growing in the grasses !!!!



Cedar cemetery FR 609 south of LaGrange, TX



picture from internet

January Succulent of the Month

Aditi Nabar

Graptopetalum Purple Delight

NAME: Graptopetalum 'Purple Delight' syn. G. 'Snow White'

COMMON NAME(S): Graptopetalum Purple Delight, Graptopetalum Snow White

Family: Crassulaceae

Genus: Graptopetalum

Description: Succulents in the Graptopetalum genus are native to Mexico and Arizona, and the surrounding region. There are officially, approximately 19 species in the genus, though there are likely some hybrids also appearing in the market for succulent enthusiasts as well. The plant is categorized by grey and/or tan, plump leaves that have curved edges which meet in a point at the end of the leaf. Exposure to cold weather encourages the plant to exhibit hues ranging from light blue to purple to pink, primarily around the newest leaves in the rosette. The rosette of the Graptopetalum Purple Delight typically ranges from 8-10 cm wide, with a full height of about 25 cm at maturity. The leaves of the plant are dusted with a light farina, which is the namesake for the plant's alias, Graptopetalum Snow White.



Cultivation and Growth: Similar to most other succulents, the Graptopetalum Purple Delight enjoys bright light and medium temps. From experience, extreme high temperatures will cause the plant to undergo stress and will thus inhibit growth. This plant also enjoys deep waterings with brief drought periods in between. Akin to the terrain in which the Graptopetalum Purple Delight originates, the plant thrives in rocky and well-draining soil.



The Purple Delight goes dormant in the winter months, from September to February, and resumes its growing period in March. During the summer months, Graptopetalum Purple Delight may produce outward and downward pointing flowers at the ends of thin long stalks, with petals containing fine reddish-brown dots on the lower parts of the petals.

From my experience, this plant does not produce offsets prolifically. With that said, it is possible to propagate the succulent from healthy leaves by allowing a disconnected, fully-intact leaf to sprout roots and propagations.

References:

International Crassulaceae Network

<https://www.crassulaceae.ch/de/artikel?akID=55&aaID=1&aiID=G&aID=81>

<https://www.crassulaceae.ch/de/artikel?akID=55&aaID=3&aiID=S&aID=118>

Wikipedia

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graptopetalum>

GardenTags

<https://www.gardentags.com/plant-encyclopedia/graptopetalum-purple-delight-syn-graptopetalum-snow-white/21871>

Mammillaria schiediana giselae

Family: Cactacea

Species: schiedeana

Subspecies: giselae

This plant was previously *mammillaria giselae*, but has been grouped with *schiedeana*. It is from Tamaulipas, Mexico.

It is a small, clustering plant with up to 35 stems in maturity. The tubercles are ovoidal to cylindrical in shape, and under 6" high. Radial spines number 16-21, and are 2-5 cm long, feathery, and somewhat pectinated. They are white to yellow to almost orange. There are 1 or 2 central spines set between radials, and they are very short.

The blooms are pale pink or white. The bloom time is at the end of winter, although mine are blooming in late December. The fruit is red and the seeds, black. They are propagated via stem cuttings or seeds.

The plants are hardy in zones 10B and 11. They like morning sun or partial shade in full summer, and can become sunburned in full summer sun. They should be watered regularly in summer, kept dry in winter. If kept dry, they can survive 40 degrees. The recommendation is not to overwater at any time because they are prone to rot.

I purchased mine from Woody Minich at the TACSS seminar in 2017, and it has not yet required repotting. The recommendation is to use fast-draining soil and a fairly shallow pot.

I have enjoyed this plant because I tend to love small mammillarias. This one has been trouble-free and is quite beautiful. It lives in my greenhouse, and has bloomed each year.



February Succulent of the Month

Karla Halpaap-Wood

Orbea schweinfurthii

Family: Asclepiadaceae

Synonyms: *Angolluma schweinfurthii*
Caralluma schweinfurthii
Pachycymbium schweinfurthii

It is named after Dr Georg August Schweinfurth (1836-1925), a German botanical collector and taxonomist.

Habitat: Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Description: *Orbea schweinfurthii* is a mat-forming succulent plant. Stems lay flat on ground where they have soil, 8-10 cm long sections 4 to 5 ribbed with small tubercles. Leaves are rudimentary. Stems have pointed tips. They are not solid green but have some brownish markings.

Inflorescence: Flower stalks lateral arising at the apical part of the stems. Flowers 2-5 per head, about 1.5 cm across. They are mostly yellow to brown with burgundy, beige and purple stripes or spots. Blooming season is summer to fall.

In contrast to most other species of the genus *Orbea*, this plant is not pollinated by carrion flies but by small fruit flies (*Drosophila*). The flower of *Orbea schweinfurthii*, don't have a bad smell' more like overripe fruits, deceiving a food source and a suitable place to lay *Drosophila* eggs.

Cultivation: *Orbea schweinfurthii* grow well in light gritty soil with good drainage. Minimum winter temperature 5-10°C, but then needs to be kept very dry.



Propagation: Plants are usually propagated by cuttings, they should be allowed to dry and then they may be put singly into pots.

Pest & diseases: Mealy bugs and fungus. A layer of grit on the surface of the soil prevents moisture from accumulating around the base of the stems and minimize the chance of fungal attack on the roots.

Traditional uses: This species is sporadically collected for food by local people

My experience:

I got this plant as a small unidentified cutting from Wallace Ward. In my experience stapelias, huernia and orbea root best by just laying the stem flat on the soil, and roots develop at the sides. At first I kept the plant in the greenhouse and ignored. It rooted but showed only little growth. Last summer I put it in a shaded but bright area outside and let natural rain water it. It seemed to like that and grew much more. Then suddenly it surprised me with flowers. I grow it in a hanging pot. This plant is easily identified by the flowers.

References:

http://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/SUCCULENTS/Family/Asclepiadaceae/30319/Orbea_schweinfurthii

https://www.zambiaflora.com/speciesdata/species.php?species_id=146740

<https://worldofsucculents.com/orbea-schweinfurthii/>

Illustrated Handbook of Succulent Plants: Asclepiadaceae, Flocke Albers, Ulrich Meve, 2012, p 283



AGAVES AND THE SPIRITS OBTAINED FROM THESE PLANTS

By Liliana Cracraft



Agave plants were first described by the Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus in 1753, taking the name from a Greek word that means “admirable.” These plants have belong to the family Asparagaceae since 2009.

Agaves are native of arid or semi-arid regions of the American Continent. There are 211 species in the genus *Agave*. México has 159 or 75% of these plants, with the State of Oaxaca having the highest variety with 38 species. Four of these were first discovered in 2018. In the United States they are commonly known as Century Plant, because people believed that it will take 100 years for them to bloom.

Agaves are characterized by a rosette of succulent leathery leaves that range in size from a few inches to 8 feet long in some species. This type of growth allows the plant to collect water efficiently, and direct it towards the roots. The color of the leaves varies from pale green to blue-gray. They are thick and succulent with a waxy coat and all have a terminal spine. Most species may take 8 to 12 years to bloom. Their yellow, pale green or red flowers are born from a tall stalk that grows from the center of the plant and can reach 10 feet or higher in some species. The flowers are pollinated by bees, moths, or long-nose bats (*Agave tequilana*). Agaves are generally monocarpic, meaning that the plant dies after flowering and producing fruit.

Agaves have a long history of ethnobotanical importance, especially to the peoples in México. Agaves appear in many pre-Hispanic graphic records because the plant offered multiple benefits. The leaves have strong fibrous tissue and were used to make ropes, brushes, sandals, nets and sleeping mats. The heart or the stalk of the plant are rich in carbohydrates and are edible. The Aztecs also obtained soap from the roots, and a naturally fermented drink from the sap called “iztac octli.” This was a sacred drink and its consumption was carefully coordinated. The punishment for drunkenness could include a death penalty.

When the Spaniards arrived in México, they started observing the Aztecs customs and traditions and paid attention to the fermented drink, which they called pulque. Many agaves can be used for its production. They are usually very large plants and include *Agave atrovirens*, *A. lurida*, *A. ferox* and others. The Spaniards had brought copper stills with them to the New World, and in the 1700’s, began fermenting, and then distilling the sap of many agave plants. They called this drink “mescal.”



Mezcal can be obtained from *A. augustifolia*, *A. rhodacantha*, *A. shreveri*, *A. palmeri* and others. It is interesting that the Spaniards never noticed the abundance of corn; otherwise, the history of bourbon would have been different.

Until the beginning of the XVIII Century, agaves were still wild. Gradually one species, *A. tequilana* begins to be cultivated, especially around the towns that had distilleries, called taberns at the time. The most important towns were Tequila, Amatitlán, and Arenal in the State of Jalisco. In 1753, Don Jose Cuervo obtains the first land grant from Spain to cultivate this agave. In 1902 this agave is re-named *Agave tequilana* Webber.

The mezcal made in the town of Tequila begins to be known outside of México. It had several names: mezcal de tequila, vino mezcal, or mezcal brandy. In 1873, tax records show 3 barrels of mescal wine being sent to New México via El Paso using burros. It is not known exactly when the drink began to be called simply "Tequila," but it may have happened after the drink had won several international awards in Chicago (1893), San Antonio (1910) and Rome, Italy (1923).

In addition to their ethnobotanical importance, agaves are beautiful additions to the landscape. They are amazing plants that require low maintenance and low irrigation. They can grow in full sun to partial shade, and do not require fertilizers. Some species can tolerate light freezes.

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