

November Cactus of the Month

Jeff Boggan

NAME: *Stenocactus obvallatus* subspecies *caespitosus*

(sten-oh-KAK-tus)(ob-val-LAY-tus)(key-as-pi-to-sus)

SYNONYMS: *Echinofossulocactus caespitosus*

COMMON NAME(S): Tepenexcomitl (Te-pen-ex-co-meal)

Brain cactus, accordion cactus

HABITAT/DISTRIBUTION: This plant grows in Central Mexico across numerous states in the Chihuahuan Desert.

1. It is usually found at altitudes between 6,000 up to 7,000 feet above sea level.
2. The soil is low nutrient, rocky, and porous.
3. The environment is very arid and low rainfall.



DESCRIPTION (STEM, FLOWERS, FRUITS):

1. Stem is OBOVOID. This means that it is egg or fruit shaped with the broad end towards the apex.
 - a. The common Mexican name, Tepenexcomitl, triggers the image of it being comet shaped.
 - b. The plant grows to a height of 7 to 8 inches tall. This is dependant on environment and how long the plant survives.
 - c. Caespitosus means that the plant grows in clusters. Some plants grow as a solitary steam but others will produce pups around the body of the plant.

It will also branch off as the plant grows taller and leans on the grown. The pups will be produced along the trunk of the body getting the most sun.

- d. The stem has between 25 to 50 wavy ribs. The number of ribs will vary to the age and variety of the plant.
 - The mature stem of the caespitosus specimens have between 37 and 40 ribs.
- e. The trunk of the main stem varies between 3.25 to 4 inches in diameter.

This is dependant upon growing conditions and if the plant has been recently watered.

2. The plant will start to flower during the growing season in the spring. However, it will flower whenever the conditions are favorable. That is beacuse in habitat it is very arid so if there is significant rain the plant will take advantage of the opportunity to reproduce. Plants will also flower and try to reproduce when they are highly stressed and near the point of death.
3. The areoles produce a flat central spine that varies between 1.25 to 1.375 inches and 2 opposing spines that are .75 inches long. There are 5 small radial spines below the 3 central spines. The spines overlap and interlace with others along the ribs. This produces a dense mesh that is difficult for scavanging animals to penetrate.

CULTIVATION/GROWTH:

Growing conditions and soil requirements will vary depending upon the average humidity in the climate where you live. The more humid your climate the more you need to adjust the soil and growing location for the plant.

- A. The soil should be changed in the pot every 3 to 4 years.

Soil mix should be adjusted to your climate zone.

The higher the humidity the more mineral your soil mixture needs to be.

1. Coconut core - 15%
2. Leaf humus - 20%
3. Compost manure - 20%
4. Pumice or Pearlite - 15%
5. Coarse sand - 15%
6. Sand - 15%

- B. Temperature, humidity, and lighting:

1. These plants are very hardy and can withstand a wide range of temperatures.

The lower the humidity the better the plant can handle extremes.

Temperature can range from 24 to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. (-4° to 49° Celsius)

2. The plant needs good air circulation to keep it healthy and free from pests.

3. Sun - an Easterly morning sun is good for these plants.

They should have protection from the harsh afternoon Southern sun in the summer.

They need a strong sun to produce healthy spines, good color, and keep them pest free.

C. Pots:

1. Clay pots are recommended for better aeration.

You want your soil to dry out within 3-days after watering to prevent rotting.

2. Plastic pots can be used but you will need to increase the mineral portion of your soil mix to 80%.

D. Water - use fresh rain water or ph neutral water.

Try to avoid city treated tap water or highly alkaline well water.

AVAILABILITY:

1. East Austin Succulents - <https://eastaustinsucculents.com/>

2. Miles-2-Go Cactus Nursery - <https://www.miles2go.com/>

3. Mesa Gardens - <https://mesagarden.com/>

4. Lowes Garden Center

5. Home Depot Garden Center

5. The Cactus King (Houston, Texas)- <https://thecactusking.com/>

REMARKS/COMMENTS/MY EXPERIENCE:

I have had the specimens pictured for several years. They have endured the hard freezes when most everything else froze. They have also endured the harsh summer heat without watering. I keep them under the car port facing the East morning sun. They only get watered when it rains and the soil is allowed to fully dry out between waterings. They are protected from the cold North and strong Southern winds. The soil is an 80% Perlite and 20% compost mix. I keep them in cages to protect them from the prowling and destructive critters.



REFERENCES:

1. Daves Garden - <https://davesgarden.com/guides/pf/go/143724>

2. Encyclopedia of living forms - Echinofossulocactus caespitosus - https://www.llifile.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/6295/Echinofossulocactus_caespitosus

3. Encyclopedia of living forms - Stenocactus obvallatus - https://www.llifile.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/6285/Stenocactus_obvallatus

4. National Garding Association - <https://garden.org/plants/view/129807/Tepenexcomitl-Stenocactus-obvallatus/>

INTERNET LINKS:

YouTube:

1. Stenocactus cultivation (Closed Caption Translation)- https://youtu.be/w_VRl0WqCR0

2. How to pronouce caespitosus - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VALbVwMbiyk>

3. Stenocactus crispatus (San Luis Potosi) - https://youtu.be/bdhP3_8IZCE

4. Stenocactus Multicostatus en h-bitat - <https://youtu.be/fBBLqLo90QQ>

5. Stenocactus crispatus identification - <https://cactiguide.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=13756>

6. Stenocactus en habitat(Guanajuato) - <https://youtu.be/Tc67aBrg67Q>

7. 10 Tipos De Stenocactus - <https://youtu.be/hSqDkEbEzz8>

8. Stenocactus aka Echinofossulocactus - <https://youtu.be/DPx1mTNm19E>