

December Cactus of the Month

Echo Pang

Mammillaria plumosa

Common name: Feather Cactus

Family: Cactaceae

Habitat and climate: Nuevo León, Mexico, from the border of Coahuila to Monterrey, grows at elevations of 730 to 1350 meters (2395 to 4429 ft.) above sea level on limestone cliffs in sparse xerophytic shrubland.

Nuevo León has many biomes. In the northern part of the state the climate is arid as a result of the proximity to the Chihuahuan desert. Extreme high temperatures of 47 °C (117°F) or more occur on the desert areas while winters are short and mild. Some areas in the mountains are very cold in winter and temperate

in summer. In Monterrey the climate is hot semi-arid with extreme hot summers and mild winters. There is very little rainfall throughout the year, usually about 500 mm (19.7 inches) or less. February 2021 American ice storm sent temperatures in Monterrey below zero Celsius (freezing).

Conservation status: Near threatened due to illegally collection. The local community also collects plants from the wild and sells them at Christmas time for decorate nativity scenes.



M. plumosa in habitat: Ad Konings observed in Nuevo León, MX. <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/50719416>



Snowy mount form of *M. plumosa* with white flowers in Echo Pang's collection

Description: *Mammillaria plumosa* is a clumping cactus that grows into snowy looking mounds. There are two different forms of growth. One forms mounds of even level-topped heads; the other one shows distinct separate heads, also known as the 'golf ball' form. A clump can easily get to over 40 cm wide and the entire plant is covered by the mass of white feathery spines. It has light green stems but appearing white because of the dense spines. The feathery nature of the spines tends to hold water over the plant, which can be troublesome in cold and humid conditions. But the feathery spines can provide epidermal protection against the blasting sun of the desert. **Flowers:** Whitish yellow, up to 3-15 mm long. Some plants have flowers with pink midstrips. The flowers have with a pleasant sweet scent. **Fruits:** About 15 mm long, club-shaped with a deep purplish-rose color, hidden by the spines. **Seeds:** Black.



Houston Cactus and Succulent Society Fall 2023 Best of Show- *M. plumosa* submitted by John Weistroffer.

Cultivation: Needs regular water in summer, but don't over water during the hottest time as the cactus can slow down growth under extreme heat. Keep water off of the spines when watering. It is not suggested to stop watering in winter as the plant is usually in flowers. A mineral based soil is advised to use for its tuberous roots, which can prone to rot if they stay wet for any length of time. In Houston, it needs full sun from fall to spring, light shade in summer.

Propagation: From seeds, offset separation, and detached tubercles. It is reported that both offsets and detached tubercles will form roots rapidly and become a plant easily given the right condition.

Reference:

1. John Pilbeam: "Mammillaria- A Collector's Guide" Universe Books 1981.
2. http://www.llifile.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/9350/Mammillaria_plumosa
3. Wikipedia: Nuevo Leon- Climate https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuevo_Le%C3%B3n#:~:text=Nuevo%20Le%C3%B3n%20has%20an%20extreme,arid%20region%20in%20the%20south.



'Golf ball' form of *M. plumosa* white flowers with pink stripes in Echo Pang's collection