

Volume 43 Number 1

January 2008

ESPINAS Y FLORES

The Newsletter of the San Diego Cactus & Succulent Society Inc
Affiliated with the Cactus & Succulent Society of America



Program: Tim Harvey- "Container-free Culture of Succulents; Experiments in Laziness for Everything from Geophytes to Pachycaul Trees"

Plant of the Month: George Plaisted - "Pots, Soils and All You Need to Know"

Saturday January 12, 1:00pm
Casa Del Prado, Room 101
Balboa Park

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings and Happy New Year!

Not to go insane with a hundred New Years resolutions, but have you made one to your favorite cactus club yet? The SDCSS is ramping up for an intense year ahead, and we need your help! Our monthly meetings pack a lot of punch for something that's free and open to the public, and we always need help with setup, tear-down, cleaning, organizing, and all the nuts and bolts of setting up and running a meeting to accommodate 100 people to have a little free time in the midst of our plant drawings, sales, talks, programs, and free exchanges. Anyone on the SDCSS Board will be happy to try and help you find your niche in the club, and there are no shortage of opportunities for everyone to pitch in with the planning of our hosting the 2011 biennial CSSA convention.



Juergen Menzel and his beautiful wife Beate enjoy the Holiday Party.

If you missed our annual Holiday party, you missed a nice afternoon of socializing and sharing plants with family and friends. I want to thank all of you who were so welcoming to my young family and I was really happy to hear such positive feedback about the food and everything. Let's do this again, shall we? Huge thanks and kudos to everyone who pitched in, especially Tom and Laura DeMerrit for their awesome

decorating, plant procurement, and fantastic children; Pam and Lee Badger for their emotional support, organizational skills and plant procurement; Chris Miller for her excellent accounting, award receiving, and general all around help; Mary Whittemore and her daughter for a most excellent round of (YEP!) auctioneering, Herb Stern for his fantastic cork-dorkishness, Ed DeLollis for rotating with me on our auction displays; my Wife, Mary Seton Carr, for keeping our boys in line while I was distracted with other things, Rudy Lime for his incredible plants, and to each and every one of you who showed up and participated with whatever needed to happen to make this one of the best Holiday dinners in my memory!

On the cover: *Astrophytum (Digitostigma) caput-medusae*.
Photo by Mark Fryer.

January is off to a running start for me, things at the nursery have gone from challenging to difficult, yet the plants just keep growing and doing their thing as best they can. Life always finds a way, doesn't it? Around here the past couple weeks we've gone from a maritime fall to a cold winter to a few days of santa-anna (or is it santana??) winds to feel like early summer. As I write this



Adenium obesum
Photo by Mark Fryer



Pachypodium lealii in habitat.
Photo by Tim Harvey.

I am preparing for the rain that the local weather-people keep promising, while dusting off one of my plant talks to take over to the good folks at the Tucson C&S Society tomorrow evening. We're set for Tim Harvey to come give us his talk from back in October that got cancelled at the last minute due to some scheduling conflicts with Balboa Park, and Ric's got our Plant of the Month talks pretty well lined up for the year.

Talk to me! If there's something you're especially eager to hear about or have a talk on (or give to the group), now is the time to really lay it on us as monthly speakers are filling up quick. It's your club, so don't hesitate to tell us, I always look forward to hearing from folks.

Sincerely,

Mark Fryer
January 2nd, 2008

Pots - Why Do You Use The Ones You Use?

by Sue Haffner, Fresno C&S

Have you ever thought about why you use the pots you do for your plants? Here are some factors to consider:

Standard pot - this type is as tall as the diameter of the pot (4 inches across and 4 inches tall);

Azalea or ? pot - this is three quarters the height of the diameter (4 inches across and 3 inches high, for instance);

Bulb pan - this is one half the height of the diameter (4 inches across and only 2 inches high).

Many succulent growers prefer the azalea pot size, chiefly for aesthetic reasons - many specimen plants display better in such pots. The standard pot, especially for smaller plants, may taper too much and prove to be unstable. You run the risk of knocking over and damaging a prized plant. Watering is also affected by the type of pot used. When you pour water onto the surface of your pot, the taller the column of water and gravity will act longer and pull more water out of the pot. This is needed for aeration and for pulling excess salts and fertilizer out of the pot, rather than collecting on the soil surface.

To restate the watering situation: if you have two pots that hold the same volume of soil and one is tall and skinny and the other is short and wide, more water will remain in the soil of the shorter pot. You won't have to water as often, as the short pots don't dry out as fast.

The pot should be large enough to provide a comfortable finger width between the edge of the pot and the plant (spines included), for globular plants. Tall, columnar plants should have a pot whose diameter is about one half their heights. A cluster or clump of plants generally has a shallower root system than a single plant of the same diameter. It is also growing more laterally than vertically, so you should allow more space between the pot and plant.

Clay, plastic, or other materials? Well, clay pots, of course, allow water to evaporate out from all sides. Clay will also allow water in from all sides (such as by overhead spraying or from capillary matting). This exchange works to keep the roots cool, as well. Plastic keeps the soil wetter longer by allowing evaporation to occur only from the soil surface. Also, plastic pots stay free of salt build-up and algae growth longer than clay pots do.

Pots made of Styrofoam, glass, or glazed ceramics tend to act much like the plastic pots.

Pot colors? Dark colors absorb most of the light that hits them, while white or light colors reflect a lot of light. Algae may grow on the insides of white pots if they sit where they are hit by direct sunlight. If your plastic pots are subject to the vagaries of temperature throughout the year, they will deteriorate - grow brittle and crumble at your touch. Green pots seem to last longer than white pots.

Round or square? We have more aesthetic considerations here. If your plant is more-or-less round, put it in a round pot. Still, many succulents defy classification as to shape, which no doubt has led to the many free-form ``artist's" pots you see used for specimen plants.

How about the drainage? We all know that it is possible to grow succulents in containers without drainage holes - because we've seen this in the collection of one of our members! Still, most of us use pots with holes. Most commercial plastic pots have large drainage holes, so large, in fact that your soil mix escapes through them. Some of us use pieces of paper towel, used clothes dryer sheets, squares of hosiery material, squares of window screening, etc., in the bottom of the pot to hold in the soil. The paper will eventually deteriorate, but, by then, the plant's root ball may have grown enough to hold the soil.

Top dressing: most succulent growers use gravel of various sizes and colors to top dress the soil in the pots. This can also keep a ``tippy" plant supported; can keep the base of the plant drier, thus reducing the possibility of rot. Also, the gravel is decorative. Bear in mind that the top dressing also can make it difficult to judge whether the plant needs watering. Figure out a means whereby you can check the soil under the gravel.

Should you water newly repotted plants? The standard advice you read in all the books and articles is that you need to let your plant sit for several days to a week while any root damage that may have occurred will heal. Generally, the authors of these books are writing from climates unlike ours, where plants may be subject to extended periods of dark, cold, damp weather when they are in danger of attack by fungi. Some growers in our area water-in their newly repotted plants - just a bit, to settle the soil - and have never noticed any ill effects. You can decide for yourself which is the better course to take. Also, don't put a newly repotted plant directly out in the sun. Let it rest for awhile in bright shade.

Remember that there is no perfect system that works for everyone. Experiment a bit and develop your own best technique. Good luck!

Reprinted from the CSSA Article Archive

Beneath the Soil

by Michael Louie

Many growers do not concern themselves with plant root health until the tell tale signs of distress become evident: The healthy sheen of the plant dulls from dehydration, turgid leaves or stems become flaccid, and the fine extremities appear wilted. "Did I over-water or under-water?" "Why did the roots die?" Plants have many kinds of roots: deep tap roots that centrally anchors a plant firmly into the ground, lateral moisture seeking surface roots not only offer radial support but also roam great distances looking for moisture to transport back to the main crown of the plant. Feeder roots are specialized roots that fan out as intricate permeating networks that extract nutrients and minerals from the growing media. If any of these roots lose function, the plant will be at risk of starvation, dehydration or losing physical support. Finally the tiniest members of the root family are the root hairs which spread out with great surface area looking for water and nutrients. The hairs injure very easily-even during a bumpy ride in the car to the plant show! The hairs regenerate quickly when a plant is healthy and active to help plants reestablish quickly.

Most succulents benefit from growing in an open, porous medium that offers air, water and essential nutrients. Growers can achieve this by adding large airy particles (pumice, perlite, lava rock...etc) into potting mixes. The amount of time that roots stay in contact with water and air can be controlled by correlating the shape of a pot with its volume capacity. In general, deep, narrow pots give faster drainage than shallow, wide pots. However, watering schedule, climatic conditions and soil mix "openness" are the primary determinants of plant root health.

When a plant is "under-watered," or experiences long periods of drought, the fine feeder roots and surface roots dehydrate and die causing a plant to become flaccid, malnourished and unstable in the growing media. This is also the case when a plant is "over-watered," and the fine roots die of drowning. In both cases, moist dead roots provide a rich nutrient source for opportunistic soil dwelling bacteria and fungi to feast on the root remains sometimes leading to infection of the plant. Pests, such as Sciara fly larvae consider dead moist roots an invitation to feast opening "gateways" for soil microbes to wreak havoc.

Please address correspondence to:
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In order to maximize the chance for a plant to thrive in a container, a grower should be acquainted with a plant's root structure; understanding the shape, size and extent of the various roots. Growing conditions should accommodate the size and shape of the roots and the medium should fit the air-water contact requirements of the root system. The watering schedule should be such that fine roots are not killed by drowning or excessive dehydration. When the system beneath the soil is healthy, the plant has a chance to thrive and reward the grower with satisfaction and accomplishment.

Happy Growing!

From the San Francisco Succulent and Cactus Society (March & April 1999 newsletter)
The Growing Tip

By Michael S. Louie

Volume 2 Issue 3 - April 1999

'The Growing Tip' is a forum where members and friends of the SFSCS can share information about succulent horticulture, nomenclature, science, history, ethnobotany, and other interesting topics. We encourage readers to submit interesting short articles that they have written or found (with permission and/or proper credit given to the author).

Reprinted from the CSSA Article Archive



Wolf's Cholla, *Cylindropuntia wolfii*, can be found in southern Anza-Borrego from the Mountain Springs exit to Interstate-8 eastward to Dos Cabezas and County Road S-2 between Ocotillo and the entrance to Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Look for Cholla with stems that grow in large clumps with branches in every direction. You'll notice it is especially wild-looking, quite unlike any other in Anza-Borrego.

Photo and text from the Anza-Borrego Desert Natural History Association website, www.abdnha.org. See related article on page 8.

From March through May, the flower color may vary from a beautiful red to deep maroon to bronze to yellow. A distinguishing characteristic are the red filaments in the center of the flower.

WHAT'S THE STATUS?

By Art Cooley

Global Warming Continues to Make News

The Bali conference is now over and, despite some foot dragging by the United States, an agreement was reached on how to proceed to adopt a treaty that would replace the Kyoto Treaty in 2012. Early in the conference, Australia with a new Prime Minister voted to ratify the Kyoto Treaty leaving the United States as the only industrialized nation not to have signed on.

The Bali Conference and the US Senate

At home, the Senate Committee on Public Works and the Environment passed, 11-8, the Lieberman/Warner bill that would establish caps on greenhouse gases and set up a market in greenhouse credits (one credit is one ton of carbon). This bill which was shepherded out of committee by its Chair, Senator Boxer of California, will be voted on by the full Senate early next year.



Lecture series at the San Diego Natural History Museum

The third in the lecture series continues on January 23 from 6:30-8 PM with Dr. Walter Jetz, PhD from UCSD, giving a talk entitled, "The Future of Biodiversity in a Changing World."

The following lecture will be on February 20, at the same time, and will be given by Dr. Jane Lubchenco, PhD, an outstanding marine biologist and past President of the AAAS from Oregon State University and Board Member of Environmental Defense; it is entitled "Climate Change and the World's Oceans."

FINDING CACTUS IN ANZA-BORREGO

By Bill Sullivan

Here are some favorite places to look:

Cholla (*Cylindropuntia*) – Teddy-Bear (*C. biglovii*) and Gander's Cholla (*C. ganderi*) can be found just about anyplace where cactus grows. Try looking for Diamond Cholla (*C. ramosissima*) and Silver or Golden Cholla (*C. echinocarpa*) along County Road S-22 from Clark Lake east to Mile Marker 35. Valley or Cane Cholla (*C. californica* var. *parkeri*) is best found by County Road S-2 from Mile Marker 11 to Scissors Crossing.

For **Mason Valley Cholla (*C. Xfosbergii*)**, an Anza-Borrego original, look along County Road S-2 from Mason Valley south to Bow Willow, particularly along the road to Mountain Palm Springs. For Wolf's Cholla (*C. wolfii*), try driving the dirt Dos Cabezas Road off S-2, four miles south of the south ABDSP entrance.

Mohave Mound (*Echinocactus*) – Park at Call Box 319 on County Road S-22 and walk northeasterly towards the Santa Rosa Mountains and Palo Verde Wash.

Hedgehog (*Echinocereus*) – From Highway 78 at Scissors Crossing, walk north on the Pacific Crest Trail and in the first half-mile you should see plenty.

Barrel (*Ferocactus*) – Commonly seen near the base of hills and mountains. For very tall specimens, try the Cactus Gardens along the Old Kane Springs Road south of Highway 78. CAUTION: This road gets very sandy.

Fish-Hook (*Mammillaria*) – These little cacti like to snuggle up to the base of ocotillo. Try looking in Ocotillo Flat, north of Desert Gardens.

Prickly-Pear (*Opuntia*) – Beavertail (*O. basilaris*) is fairly common. Try the Grapevine Canyon jeep trail from Highway 78 to Yaqui Flat. Anywhere in the State Park along S-2 is a good place to look for Mojave Prickly-Pear (*O. phaeacantha*).

For help in finding these locations, call at the Borrego Desert Nature Center, 652 Palm Canyon Drive in Borrego Springs, or call (760) 767-3098.

Reprinted from the newsletter "The Sand Paper" with permission of the Anza-Borrego Desert Natural History Association. For more information visit their website: www.abdnha.org.

Reminder reminder reminder

SDCSS Winter Show & Sale

saturday, FEBRUARY 9, 2008

9:00 am to 4:00 pm

Time to start thinking about our winter show and which of your spectacular plants you would like to display for the public.

As usual, we will be needing volunteers to help with cashiering, security, sales assistants, info table, and cleanup. Mark the date and plan to spend the day enjoying the plants, the company of your fellow plant lovers and the opportunity to share our knowledge with the public.

FYI

(FOR YOUR INFORMATION)

From Collette Parr, Membership Chair: Heads up to all SDC&SS members: we are converting to a yearly membership this year. The gist of this change is that all SDC&SS memberships will expire at the end of December each year. Details will be forthcoming in the March issue.

Do You Know Your Native Plants? Volunteers are needed to help identify plants at the Point Loma Native Plant Reserve. A Plant Inventory is being established which will be used to develop new identification signs for this beautiful garden. If you are interested in helping out, contact the River Park Foundation at 619-297-7380 or volunteer@sandiegoriver.org.

Snacks for the break: Those with last names beginning with N-Z, please bring a snack to share at the break.

UPCOMING EVENTS

2008

Feb 9: SDCSS Winter Show & Sale, 9:00am-4:00pm, Rm 101, Casa del Prado, Balboa Park.

Feb 29—Mar 2: Spring Home/Garden Show at the Del Mar Fairgrounds. Friday 11:00am-6:00pm, Saturday 10:00am-6:00pm and Sunday 10:00am-5:00pm. Info: 858-350-3738 or www.sandiegohomegardenshows.com.

Apr 19-20: Green Scene Plant Sale, Fullerton Arboretum, 1900 Associated Rd, Fullerton, CA 92831.

Apr 26: The 15th Annual Spring Garden Festival at the Water Conservation Garden, 9:00am-3:00pm, 12122 Cuyamaca College Drive West, El Cajon, info: 619-660-0614 or email info@TheGarden.org.

May 3-4: Sunset Cactus and Succulent Society Show & Sale, Veterans Memorial Center, Garden Rm, 4117 Overland Ave, Culver City, info: 310-822-1783.

May 18: Huntington Plant Sale, 10:00am-5:00pm, Huntington Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Rd, San Marino, info: 626-405-2160.

Jun 7-8: SDCSS Summer Show & Sale. Casa Del Prado, Balboa Park.

Jun 14: Gates Cactus & Succulent Society Show & Sale, 9:00am-4:00pm, Jupupa Mountains Cultural center, 7621 Granite Hill Drive, Glen Avon, info: 909-360-8802.

Jun 14-15: Los Angeles Cactus & Succulent Society Show & Sale, Sepulveda Garden Center, 16633 Magnolia Blvd, Encino, info: 818-363-3432.

Jun 27-29: CSSA annual Show & Sale, Huntington Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Rd, Sam Marino, info: 626-405-2160 or 2277. Plant sales are Jun 27-29, show opens to the public Jun 28-29 .

2009

Apr 10-15: The Cactus & Succulent Society of America's convention, Tucson, AZ.

The due date for submission of article (Plants of the Month) and information on the program/speaker will be the meeting preceding the intended issue (approximately one month ahead of time). The due date for letters, regular columns, brag table winners, and the President's Message will be one week later. All submissions are to be made to the Editors.

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