

The Eastern Spine

Newsletter of the National Capital
Cactus & Succulent Society
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(NCCSS Home Page)

www.washington-dc.cactus-society.org

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THIS MONTH'S PROGRAM - September 21, 2008

What Kinda Kaktus Is It?

When you look at a cactus, is the best you can say is, "That's a cactus, but darn if I know what kind." Identifying the various genera of cacti is usually a daunting task, even for many succulent plant enthusiasts. This month's program utilizes the collective wisdom of all society members to learn more about how to tell a *Mammillaria* from a *Copiapoa*. Each member attending the September meeting is ask to bring in at least one cactus (unless your plant collection is cactus deficient) and tell us what kinda kaktus it is, if you know, and if you don't know the rest of us will try to figure it out. This program can help us all better understand how the cacti are classified into the different genera and how we can improve our cacti identification skills. This program depends on your participation, so don't forget to bring in a cactus plant or two or three.

Our Next Regular Monthly Meeting is scheduled for **Sunday, September 21, 2008**. It will be held at the **St. Anselm's Abbey School at 14th & South Dakota Ave. N.E Washington, DC**. The meeting begins at **10:30 am** and ends at **Noon**. The Board meeting, which is open to all the membership, begins at 9:30 am and ends at 10:15 am.

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Society Dues Are Due

Once again it's dues paying time. Our membership secretary Lee Miller will be ready to accept payment of club dues. Dues are \$20.00 for an individual and \$30.00 for a family. If you have questions about your membership status you can phone Lee at: 202-232-0629 or email him at: leejmiller@verizon.net

NCCSS HAPPENINGS

It's Your Society - Get Involved

2008 NCCSS Show and Sale Report

The 2008 Show and Sale was a success. Treasurer Paul Hanerfeld reports that it was the best ever. There were a large number of club plants and they helped to build-up our treasury. (Paul is happy!)

The plant show also went very well. 17 exhibitors entered plants with 126 succulents and 57 cacti for a total of 183 plants. We also had five first time exhibitors. They were, Emma Fritze (Ingrid's granddaughter), Philip Wexler, Kathy Kevany, Ben Burkhardt and Corinne Parks. Congratulations to all and hope you will be back next year.

Top prizes went to: Bob Stewart - Best Cactus - *Gymnocalycium saglionis*; Hadley Nation - Best Succulent - *Gerarrdanthus microhezus*; and Bob Petza - Best Non-Succulent - *Tephrocactus* Collection. Total ribbons awarded 113 and they were: 36 - first place, 35 - second place, 21 - third place and 21 - honorable mention.

In closing, I would like to thank everyone who helped make the show and sale a success. Working behind the sales table is always a trying job and behind the information table can be even more of a challenge while answering all the questions. I also want to thank everyone who helped clean-up after the show. By the end of the day everyone is ready to collect their plants and head home. However clean-up is required for the club to get its deposit back and be welcomed back next year with open arms.

So THANK YOU ALL for a GREAT show and sale.

Sincerely,
Bob Petza

A Note From Florence Nichols

"My sincere thanks to the NCCSS club for thinking of me when Al passed. I received many cards, notes, phone calls and visits to the funeral home. Thank you so much for the club's very generous donation to Baldwin UMC; I know it will be used wisely. I have donated over 1000 plants Al raised to the club to sell. A special thanks to Nicole and Bob Stewart for moving the plants to their home. It took three trips to move them all! At future meetings I will bring Al's many cactus books so the club may use or sell them. Thank you all from my entire family. Every week Al's two great granddaughters release balloons to heaven for their Great Granddaddy." Florence Nichols

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 21, 2008 NCCSS monthly meeting:

October 19, 2008 NCCSS monthly meeting.

November 16, 2008 NCCSS monthly meeting.

December 21, 2008 Annual NCCSS Holiday Luncheon.

April 10-15, 2009 33rd CSSA Biennial Convention, Tucson, Arizona. More info on the CSSA web site at:
<http://www.cssainc.org/index.php>

2008

National Capital Cactus and Succulent Society Show and Sale Retrospective

The question someone asked me as I arrived at the show and sale late morning on Saturday, August 2nd was, “Are there a couple tour busses outside?” Such was the crowd of visitors in the exhibit room. I had brought several boxes of sale plants for the hardy table but potential buyers were standing three and four deep at nearly all parts of the sales tables. It was a good day to show off and sell cacti and succulent plants. One of the Brookside Gardens workers at the information desk indicated it was one of the largest crowds they had seen at a society plant show this year.



The Sale Tables

There's no doubt that people like to buy plants, and when you offer a great selection at low prices, you will sell a lot of plants, and we did. The sales tables were full of plants. There were many types and sizes of plants as well as a mountain of small, medium and large boxes into which plants could be carried. The volunteer sales staff collected payment and answered many questions. Does this plant need a lot of sun? How often should I water this plant? When should I repot this? When the question was a little more complicated, such as, “How do you take care of this Lithops?” the buyer of the Lithops was referred to the information table. A big THANK YOU is owed to everyone working at the 2008 NCCSS sales table.

The Show

The plant show was a great success. More club members entered plants this year than in any previous year. All day Saturday and Sunday visitors inched along the tables, heads bent downward, carefully studying plants most had never seen before. Many times visitors would stop by the information table and ask, “Can you really grow these plants in this area?” Or ask, “How long does it take to grow a plant that large?” Once again visitors were wowed by the magic of succulent plants.

The Plants

Once again, thanks to our members, we had a wonderful display of show plants at the 2008 Show and Sale. While the “other succulents” were in the majority by numbers, there were still plenty of cacti and thus a nice mix of different plants for the public to see.

Best Cactus in the Show

Here's a case where sheer size and age gave the Best Cactus Award to Bob Stewart's very old and large *Gymnocalycium saglionis*. Most cactus books will tell you that gymnocalyciums are small, globular plants, suitable for window sill culture. Bob's 23 year old plant, that's the size of a soccer ball, won't fit on many window sills.

Best Succulent in the Show

The best succulent award went to a member of the cucumber family, and a very special cucumber it is. *Gerrardanthus macrorhizus* (the specific epithet *macrorhizus* is Greek for "big foot") is a deciduous, caudiciform vine with climbing and scrambling ivy like foliage. The plant shown on the right was beautifully grown by one of our youngest members, Hadley Nation.



Best Other Category Plant

The winner of this category was Bob Petza for his *Tephrocactus* Collection. The real gem of this collection was the plant *Tephrocactus alexanderi* var. *geometricus* (shown at left). This plant generated more comments than any other plant in the show. Several times the information table was asked to confirm that this was indeed a "real" plant and not some sort of fabrication. It was fitting that Bob Petza won one of the "Best in Show" ribbons because he was our tireless plant show chairperson and it was through his "behind the scenes" that the show was such a success.

Best Beginner Category Plant

It's always great to see plants entered in the beginner's section, especially when the beginner is also the granddaughter of one of our members. The beginners first place award went to Emma Fritze, granddaughter of Ingrid Fritze, for her beautiful presentation of *Astrophytum asterias* 'Super Kabuto,' shown at right. The 'Super Kabuto' astrophytum is the result of careful selective breeding by Japanese growers, and has now become one of the most sought after cacti. Although highly desirable the 'Super Kabuto' is not easy to grow well. It is very sensitive to poor drainage and excessive watering. Make a mistake with this plant and you end up with a pile of mush. The beautiful condition of this plant is a testament to the growing skills of Emma Fritze. Congratulations for such a great plant.



There were a lot of really nice plants in the show. I hope you had a chance to visit the show and see them.

Plant of the Month

Gymnocalycium 'Hibotan' The Moon Cactus

Many people's first experience with a cactus is with the 'Moon Cactus,' also known as the 'Redcap' or 'Ruby Ball.' The Moon Cactus is a strange looking thing – a green cactus stem with a bright red ball at the top. For the novice grower, the Moon Cactus is a wonder to behold; a cactus with a glorious, and strange, red flower that never seems to fade. To the experienced grower of cacti the Moon Cactus is a monstrosity that has allowed unscrupulous growers to fool the public and make a lot of money.

Is The Moon Cactus Really A Cactus?

Actually the Moon Cactus is two cacti. It's a graft. The top part of the graft, called the scion, is a mutated form of *Gymnocalycium friedrichii*. It is red because it contains no chlorophyll, much like the red we see in the fall foliage of trees when their chlorophyll breaks down and disappears. Without chlorophyll the mutant gymnocalycium can not produce sugar and without sugar it will die. The only way to keep it alive is to graft it onto another cactus which has chlorophyll and which will provide sugar to the mutant scion.

The chlorophyll containing bottom part of the graft, called the stock, can be any number of different cactus species. In the case of the Moon Cactus it is usually *Hylocereus* sp., a tropical cactus.

Cuttings of *Hylocereus* are produced by the thousands and mutant gymnocalyciums grafted to the tops.



Where Did The Moon Cactus Come From?

The exact origin of the Moon Cactus is the subject of some controversy. E.W. Putnam, author of the 1978 British Handbook, *Gymnocalyciums*, relates the following:

"The original plants were produced by E. Watanabe in Japan. Sowing of some thousands of seeds of *G. friedrichii* yielded two bright red freak seedlings which would have died quickly had they not been grafted at once. From these have been produced literally millions of plants, distributed all over the world, by repeated grafting and cutting."

Like them or not, the Moon Cacti are now part of our horticultural culture. I was asked at the Show and Sale if we had any Moon Cactus for sale. We didn't.

A Potpourri of the Miscellaneous

Plant Adoption Service

Your newsletter editor has received several requests for help in finding new homes for succulent plants that have either outgrown their spaces or their owners have encountered circumstances that no longer allow keeping the plants. I have offered to post two such request for new homes here in the newsletter.



Adoption Request 1

Laurie Foudin of Olney, Maryland writes: "I am looking for a new home for two large specimen plants that may be of interest to your members. I have had these plants for many years, and they have become too large to overwinter in my south facing window. One is *Epiphyllum oxypetalum* (Dutchman's pipe; night blooming Cereus), which is about 4 feet high and three feet wide. It has at least 32 young flower buds on it right now. The other is a *Euphorbia* (we think it is *E. trigonum*, African milk tree) about 6 feet high and 2.5 feet wide. I hate the thought of destroying them for lack of space." You can email Laurie at alfoudin@verizon.net.

Adoption Request 2

Elaine T Lozier of N.W. Washington writes: "I am and have always been interested in cactus, so I picked up a few 30 yrs ago and then I inherited some larger cactus and now we must take down our sun structure and I need to get rid of the cactus. I have not cared for them much, but many of them do bloom and unfortunately several need to be repotted. A couple are heavy enough that I cannot carry them. I would like to give them away to a loving home." If you interested in more info about Elaine's plants you can reach her at 202 686 1229 or E-mail her at danlozier@cs.com.

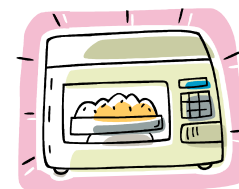
Cholla Cactus 1, Bad Guys 0

Here's a news tidbit found by Mary Hartzler.

"Police in Mesa, Ariz., chased driver Christopher Psomas, 38, in May after his companion, Ashley Strahan, 20, allegedly tried to pass a forged check at a business. The pair's car ran red lights at high speeds to get out of town, then left the road near the Salt River Reservation, and when the car became disabled, kept going on foot. However, they ran smack into a bed of cholla cactus, becoming virtual pin cushions. At Banner Desert Medical Center, as nurses plucked the needles from his body, Psomas, in pain and in tears, said, "I am so stupid. This is what I get for trying to run from the police." [Arizona Republic, 5-7-08]

Cooking Bugs

Want to reuse your potting soil? The reuse process starts with removing debris, such as roots and plant parts, then moistening the soil and adding heat. The heat once came from the kitchen oven, but now there's a new tool available; the microwave oven.



There are numerous recipes for killing insects in used soil with microwave heat. One suggestion is to put about 2 pounds of moist soil in a thick, plastic bag. Leave the top open and place it in the center of the microwave. Treat it for two to three minutes on full power. Close the bag carefully and allow to cool before use.

If your aim is to pasteurize the soil, which means killing soil pathogens such as bacteria and fungi, the soil must be heated to 140 degrees F. and held at that temperature for about 30 minutes. You should only do this if you have a microwave with a soil probe and you can program the microwave to maintain a certain probe temperature.

A couple years ago I (your editor) had a problem with root mealy bugs and solved it by microwaving all my soil prior to reusing it. I filled a one quart microwavable plastic container, with moist soil, and microwaved it on high for two minutes. This killed all mealy bugs in the soil. Happy cooking!