

# **CACTUS CORNER NEWS**

## **Fresno Cactus & Succulent Society**

*http: www.fresnocss.org*

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*Affiliated with the Cactus & Succulent Society of America*

July 2013



### **FRESNO CACTUS & SUCCULENT SOCIETY MEMBERS**

## **Summer Potluck Picnic**

**Thursday, July 4, 6:00 P.M.**

**3733 North Sierra Vista, Fresno**

**Doris Hooton's and Tom Meyer's home**

Please join us for our annual potluck party. The club will supply tri-tip and table service. We passed a signup sheet at the June meeting. If you can't remember what you offered to bring, or were not able to sign up, call Rosanna Rojas at 999-0017 or you can supply your favorite potluck dish. Make sure to bring your own chairs and an ice chest with your drinks.

#### **SILENT AUCTION**

This year our auction will offer Herb Thorne's large collection of plants and pots. Be prepared to bid on the nice selection. All sales benefit our club!

#### **ADENIUM ORGY**

Bring your blooming adeniums and learn how to pollinate them from the experts.

**FROM THE PREZ ...**

**Hello, everyone,**



Well, here we are at mid-year already. Can you believe it? Our Show and Sale is history and our summer picnic is coming up this month. I want to encourage everyone to attend. This year we will have a special silent auction of some of Herb Thorne's plants. (We will also have some of his plants at the Members' Sale Night in September and at the Christmas Party in December.) Ruth Saludes spearheaded the project to get the plants ready for auction. Her helpers included Mary Ann Villegas, Vickie Veen, Polly Dunklin and Mary Drumheller. Tom Meyer and Joyce Quinn will be holding the plants until they're ready for further auctions. Thanks to all of them.

Paul and Madeleine Mitchell, Sue Haffner and Fred Gaumer left the pleasant weather of the Valley for the heat and humidity of Austin TX for the CSSA

Convention, June 15-20. It was a smallish Convention (211 registrants), but a lot of fun, and the host Austin C&S Society (130 members) worked very hard to show us a good time. These events are always experiences of "total immersion" in plants and plant lore. You not only listen to the programs of famous authors, explorers and horticulturists, but you rub elbows with them on social occasions, sit next to them at dinner, share a van on a field trip, etc.

One of the great things about going to a Convention that is out of the Southern California-Arizona nexus is that you get to see the offerings of vendors unfamiliar to you. For instance, Paul's Garden was one of the Convention vendors, and the plants on his tables were fantastic (obregonias as large as small melons, for instance.) If I had driven to the Convention I'd have had a carload of purchases.

The programs run the gamut of travelogues, studies of individual families or genera, or regional floras. A presentation that aroused controversy was innocuously entitled "Succulent monocots: an update" by Colin Walker of the U.K. What he revealed is that DNA studies of *Aloe* suggest that the genus needs to be broken up; familiar plants being given new names (*Aloe plicatilis* is now to be *Kumara disticha*, for instance.) From the back of the room someone yelled, "Do we boo now or later?" Ernst van Jaarsveld had a talk about *Welwitschia*, on which a lot of recent research has revealed its very interesting biology. "Growing prickly pears on the moon?" presented by Gertrud Konings, sounded like a joke but turned out to be actual science (growing opuntias in conditions that mimic to some degree those on the lunar surface.) Of course, the ineffable Steven Hammer was there for two of his entertaining talks. There was something for every succulentophile.

The next Convention, 2015, will be held at Pitzer College, Claremont CA. I really recommend that you consider attending.

See you at the picnic. **Sue**

**A brief reminder:** the Fresno Fair is around the corner. New members are encouraged to participate. Contact the Big Fresno Fair, 1121 Chance Avenue, Fresno, CA 93702, PH (559) 650-3212 or online at [www.fresnofair.com](http://www.fresnofair.com) for the Exhibits Handbook.



The entry application and the list of plant categories are in the handbook. If in doubt about your plants, check out the books at the club library to properly identify your plants or just bring them to the club meetings and have several of the club members identify your plants. Deadlines for entry form September 7 and online entry form September 9.

**Rudy Rulloda**

**SHOW AND SALE**

We had a successful show and sale last month, and thanks are due to many who helped. First, Show and Sale Chair Cindy Duwe is to be congratulated on a smooth-running event. It was her first show—and she volunteered to chair it. Brave gal! Joyce Quinn was in charge of the cashiers, a most important function. We were really busy on Saturday morning, but it appeared that the cashiers and helpers were keeping up with the surge of customers. Gross sales came to \$13,190.87. (See Joyce’s comments to the vendors elsewhere in the newsletter.)

Local vendors were the Succulent Shack; Mary Drumheller; Susan Cook; Veone, Dan and Bill Gale; Dennis Anderson; Larry Homan; Jack Fleming; Val McCullough; and Rudy Rulloda. Steve Frieze and Elton Roberts were our out-of-town vendors. Our club sale table had many contributors. I would especially like to thank Don and Dolores Martin for donating some of their potted plants (several in Mark Muradian pots) and thanks to Paul Mitchell for transporting them to the show. I worked this table all weekend, along with Ruth Saludes. Sales from this table go to the club, which made \$1,232.50 for the treasury.

There were some gorgeous plants on the show tables. Some of them did not get show cards, so I am not sure of all the exhibitor’s names. Non-vendors Jo Ann Caufield and Jack Barkley contributed very nice exhibits. In addition, Jo Ann created a very attractive western-themed display in the glass case that is part of the cashier’s station. Thanks, Jo Ann! We also need to thank those who kept watch over the tables: Laverne Cottet, Doris Hooton and Nell Lemke.

We had a lot of help setting up on Friday. I want to especially note Ed Myhro, who came down from Lincoln CA to help out on Friday and Saturday. (And, thanks, also to Sue Loucks, who provided accommodations for him.) Charlie Nelson, as well, was there most of the day.

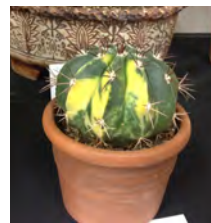
Rosanna Rojas was in charge of food for the vendors and helpers, and we had plenty this year. Thanks to everyone who contributed goodies.

If there was any aspect where we needed more help it was in clean-up. Thanks to Lisa Brew and Viv Shinkawa for sticking around to help, and a big thank you to Jason Kabeary, who brought his shop vac., not to mention Janet Moos, who swept the room.

And, of course, we owe a big debt to the work of Tom Meyer, who transported club properties back and forth and spent all weekend helping customers take their purchases out to their cars.

Phyllis Frieze said to me, “Your members are the best!” I think she was referring to how we help the vendors carry their plants in and out, but I would like to think that it’s an appropriate description for all of you. I know that I’ve probably left out some acknowledgement but just know that you are thanked for your contribution.

*Sue*



A few of the Show Plants





**Nell Lemke (6<sup>th</sup>); Laverne Cottet (12<sup>th</sup>); Beth Teviotdale (17<sup>th</sup>); Burma Gunther (18<sup>th</sup>); Herb Thorne (31<sup>st</sup>).**

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**Say hello to these new members:** Donna Joe, Fresno Karl Church, Dinuba  
Marjorie McQuiston, Fresno (welcome back!)

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**Visitors last month:** Lea Lewis, Lynn Andresen, Heather Bogosian Franks, Donna Joe, Susan Gardiner, Noelle Jeschien, Karl Church, Roz Tampone, Brenda Condar, Terry Passons-Conley, David Ehrlich, Wayne Kaiser, Richard Smith.

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**Passing noted:** former member **Richard Braun** passed away June 11<sup>th</sup>. Our sympathies go out to Sandra and the family.

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### SOME FOLLOWUPS

In the last newsletter I quoted Tim Harvey, editor of the *Cactus and Succulent Journal*, as to the edibility of cyphostemma “grapes”. This led Polly Hargreaves to send me this comment:

“In 1969, while camping in the northwestern side of Botswana, we found some wild grapes. Bruce assured me that they were edible. Well, four of us didn’t react, but two of us had our tongues swell up and our throats close making it difficult to breathe. After thinking “This is it!” we both recovered in about 40 minutes. Turns out, the oxalic acid crystals are very irritating to some people.

“Bruce published this incident in the 1978 American C&S Journal when the plant was still a grape, *Vitis congesta*. Since then it has morphed into *Cyphostemma congestum*. Yes, they taste like cherries; very sour cherries; a grape by any other name is still just as irritating!”

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In September 2010 I wrote an article for the newsletter on the history of the **Deutsch Cactus Garden**—how it was created by Fred Deutsch as his own “desert”, how the plants and rocks came to be transferred to the Discovery Center when his property was sold, etc. I also stated what I had been told, and believed, that his landscaping was bulldozed and the house torn down. Well, I was wrong about part of that. Just recently I received an email from Richard Sorsky, saying that he had read my article and wanted to add a comment. As it turns out, the Deutsch home was not demolished—and he knows this because he is living in it! He suggested the confusion might have come about because another neighbor, at about the same time, had purchased a property two doors down from Deutsch and had bulldozed that house. Mr. Sorsky also said, “Too bad they took all of the cacti. I have come to appreciate them!”

**JUNE BRAG TABLE:** Fred Gaumer brought *Avonia quinaria*, *Gymnocalycium bodenbenderianum*. Bill Gale contributed *Dorstenia gigas*, *Ariocarpus trigonus* and a gymnocalycium. Bruce Hargreaves exhibited *Ledebouria socialis*. Larry Carlberg brought his bombax caudex. Rudy Rulloda brought and a *Pseudolithos*. Linda Lopez brought *Monanthes polyphylla*, a plant that is almost impossible to keep alive in our climate. Thanks to Fred and everyone else who brought plants.



**JULY WORKSHOP:** Wednesday, July 17<sup>th</sup>, at Succulent Shack, 1302 N. Wishon, Fresno. Everyone welcome.

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### BIG EVENT THIS MONTH

**Cactus & Succulent Society of America  
Show & Sale, June 28-30; Huntington Botanic Garden,  
San Marino, CA.**

Sale begins Friday, 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Show opens Saturday and runs through Sunday, same hours. Both the show and sale will be held at the Botanical Center. The show plants will be in the Amundsen Classroom and across the patio in Banta Hall. *The sale will be held on the lawn around the Center. Construction at the Huntington has brought about changes this year.* If you plan to attend, note the following:

- \* Be sure to wear your club membership badge;
  - \* Tell the person at the front gate that you are going you will be given a sticker, “CSSA Show Participant”; be sure to put it on your shirt and keep it in view.
- If you follow these cues you should be able to avoid the \$20.00 gate fee to the facility.

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**NO BOARD MEETING THIS MONTH**

## Getting to Know You.....

### Herb Thorne

“We have great people in this club,” said long time member Herb Thorne. “We are fortunate to have people willing to assume responsibility.”

The club is fortunate to have Herb. After relocating to Fairwinds, an independent living facility in Fresno, Herb has very generously offered his larger, in ground plants to the Clovis Botanical Garden to be planted in their new Desert Garden. His sizeable collection of smaller potted plants he has donated to the Club’s Silent Auction, to be held during the annual picnic at Doris Hooton’s home on July 4<sup>th</sup>.

Thanks to the efforts of Ruth Saludes and her FC&SS helpers, there are a wide variety of pots, cacti, agave, aloes and succulents to choose from. The club members have worked very hard in Herb’s garden, getting his collection ready for their new homes.

“All are attractive plants,” said Ruth. “Many are show quality and 90% are in excellent condition and have top dressing. There was a lot of help from club members who cleaned up the plants. Tom Meyer has been extraordinarily helpful, especially with transporting plants. It was a big effort, yet fun, and the plants look beautiful.

“There will be pots and plants for sale at the August meeting, which will be the second opportunity to own something from Herb’s collection. We will not be competing with a speaker selling anything that month, as we will have a panel of four club members making the presentation. Any remaining plants will be sold during the member sale in September. There will be very good deals on everything and every penny will go to the club’s treasury.”



Herb Thorne was born in Bakersfield, California. His father worked for the railroad as a machinist and at his suggestion, Herb got a summer job working on the railroad. While he was in the Navel Reserve, the odd hours of his job interfered with his reserve meetings. In 1950, he was drafted into the army and was sent to Korea where he did survey work.

“I was lucky to get into that position,” he said. “I didn’t have to shoot anybody. Korea was interesting. I was in the replacement company and can remember riding through Seoul when it was completely deserted. It was usually a typical city teeming with people and it was unusual to see it empty.”

“A good time well spent,” is how he remembers his military service.

Herb moved to Fresno when he attended Fresno State. He majored in Social Science and had a strong interest in American History. He planned to become a history teacher.

But life took a different turn.

Herb liked the railroad and went to work there. He had positions as a fireman, a locomotive engineer, then became involved with the union and acted as mediator. “I enjoyed that,” he remembers. “I was very busy day and night and worked with different kinds of people. The main thing was to be a calming influence on the involved parties...it was well worthwhile.” Later he was the local Chairman Deputy Labor Commissioner for California for six years.

While living in Bakersfield, Herb was one of the founding members of the Kern Cactus Klub. They started with four or five members, and continued to grow. He liked the unusual aspects and different forms of cacti and succulents. "Amazing plants," he says. "They can take a lot." He especially likes agaves and aloes. He has a favorite agave living with him at his current residence.

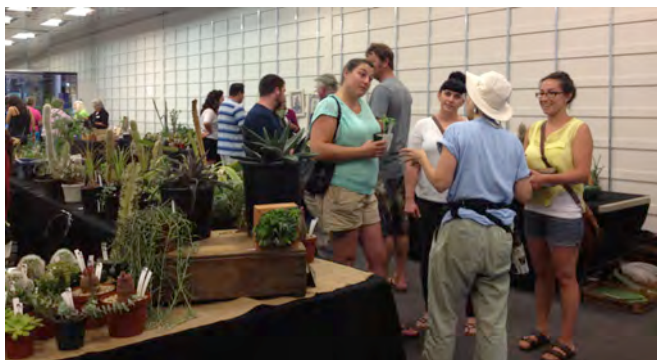
Once in Fresno, he sought out the Fresno Club and has been a member since the 1970s. He was the club Parliamentarian for years, helped to set up the by-laws and ran elections. "A formal chore," he remembers. "The club was not so formally organized then."

He was in charge of the Show and Sale at least once and feels the event holds the club together.

"And Sue Haffner is the heart of the club," he says. "She has always been there, in one capacity or another."

Herb has a broad interest in plants. In 1993, he became a Master Gardener, has been active in their events and now is thinking of "getting something started" at Fairwinds with their plants.

*Carole Grosch*



## Suggestions from the Show & Sale Tag Counter

After the Show & Sale (2013), I sorted and counted over 1,800 plant tags. Yes, I refused help because I preferred to do it at my own pace on my own time. Yet, separating hundreds of tags, to ensure proper payment, is time consuming and sometimes frustrating. I also emphasize that I requested an example tag from each vendor, to make it easier for all of us, especially me. It is not a good idea to frustrate the person who is going to write you a check! The sorting process should go smoothly and quickly. I offer the following suggestions to make future tag counters' lives (it won't be me) more pleasant.

1. Make your tags distinctive at a glance, by color, sticker, symbol, or full name & address (such as commercial tags). Initials or names on plain white tags don't do it. The counter has to pause and read the initials while sorting. [Remember – over 1,800 tags!]
2. Don't use a different tag from your normal and think it's OK just to put your name or ID color on it. Be consistent. Anything out of the ordinary slows the counting process. Eg., yellow tags, white tags, and green sticker were all from one person. Eg., white tags with initials or name.
3. I personally found it OK if the shape of the color was different (semi-circle, square), but the color was the identifier. Don't, however, use a different shade of the "same" color, such as a darker shade of red for red.
4. Standardize the size of your tags. A short tag may be lost or not counted. A skinny tag was OK because they were consistently the same size. Thin tags were sometimes missed on the first sorting but because they were distinctive, easily separated in subsequent countings.
5. Penmanship is still important.
  - a. It is sometimes difficult to tell if a '1' is part of the dollar sign (\$) or indicates another digit. A "125.00" plant is different from a "25.00" plant. Think of how much money you want to be paid and write tags accordingly.
  - b. Write clearly. Sevens sometimes look like ones, twos sometimes resemble fives, etc., some numbers are just not decipherable
  - c. Write the price darkly enough to be seen without difficulty [Most of us are old.]
  - d. Writing over prices, or crossing out prices and rewriting on the same tag is asking for trouble. Dishonest shoppers at my old antique store [RIP] would do this on price tags, and we never knew if it was a legitimate price reduction.

I counted the tags and tallied up the sales. I know that you're making enough money to invest in some new plant tags. They are not expensive – you can afford it! Most of you vendors will recognize to whom these examples are aimed.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Joyce Quinn (ex-Treasurer)**



Anyone who has not yet notified me regarding expenses for the show and sale needs to get in touch with me. I can pick up receipts next time I see them, but need the amounts so we can get every penny profit information to the membership. I know there were expenses for food and various supplies but don't know the amounts.

*Charlene*

## COIR (COCONUT HUSK FIBER)

Mark Dimmit, well known succulent plant authority, has an article in the June issue of *Desert Breeze*, the newsletter of the Tucson Cactus & Succulent Society. Here is part of what he wrote:

What is coir? Coir (pronounced “koyer”) is the fiber from the husk of the coconut, the part between the hard inner shell and the outer coat ... mainly it is a waste product of the coconut industry; mountains of the stuff have accumulated in tropical countries where coconut palms abound.

Coir has been used in the USA as a potting medium for a variety of plants for at least two decades, especially in Florida. Until recently its availability has been undependable and the quality highly variable. These problems have been solved, but few horticulturists are aware of recent developments.

Dispelling coir’s bad rap: Coir is soggy muck that drowns plants. Until a few years ago the main coir product sold in the USA was “cocopeat”, a fine dust that looks much like horticultural peat moss. This product holds even more water than peat, and because of its fine texture, it remains saturated for days after irrigation. I have tried it and even when mixed 1:3 cocopeat:pumice or perlite, it killed nearly every plant that requires good drainage. This stuff is indeed deadly. The product discussed in this article consists of fiber and small chips, with almost no dust. Even when it’s saturated, it contains abundant air pockets and therefore roots will not suffocate.

Coir is dangerously salty. Coir used to be washed in seawater, and was therefore quite toxic to most plants. It had to be thoroughly leached before use, especially the larger chunks used for growing orchids. Modern coir processed for horticultural use has been fresh water washed, and is very low in salt. Tucson tap-water is five times more salty than today’s coir.

Coir comes in hard bales that must be laboriously broken up by hand. Cocopeat was usually sold in compressed bales. The bales were very difficult to moisten and even after soaking for several days they had to be physically broken up. This was difficult and time-consuming. The newer fiber and chip products often come in compressed blocks of one-half cubic foot. When a block is submerged in water, it saturates and falls apart in a few minutes, expanding to two cubic feet. It’s very easy to use.

My experience with coir: Potting medium is a common topic of discussion whenever and wherever horticulturists gather. A huge variety of ingredients have been used, with varying degrees of success. I’ve been growing plants since the 1960s, and have spent most of that time experimenting in the hope of finding the ideal medium for my growing conditions and the plants I like. For the past 15 to 20 years most of my media have used peat moss as the primary organic component, amended with different proportions of pumice or perlite for aeration and drainage. (The product is Sunshine Mix, which is about 90% peat with some perlite

and pH buffers.) I had good success with these ingredients, but I was never completely satisfied.

One of my two main complaints is that the peat retained moisture too long during cool weather, encouraging root rot of sensitive plants. The other complaint is that peat breaks down in a couple of years in our hot climate, so plants needed to be repotted regularly even if they had not filled the pot.

Now I have found a product that thrills me. I discovered good coir in 2008, when I visited Tropica Nursery near Mumbai, India ... The owner, Dr. Ashish Hansoti, has been a pioneer in developing coir as a growing medium. One of his contributions is his research to determine the nutritional needs of plants grown in coir.

I began experimenting with coir when I returned home the same year. After one growing season I was so pleased with the results that I began repotting almost my entire plant collection into coir-based mixes. After four years’ experience with it, I have concluded that coir is by far the best all-around organic potting medium that I have ever encountered. Succulents that have performed superbly in media consisting of from 30% to 100% coir include: Adenium, Pachypodium, Plumeria, Aloe, Agave, Sansevieria, Trichocereus, mammillaria, Stapeliads, Caralluma, Bursera, Boswellia, Fouquieria, Haworthia, terrestrial and epiphytic bromeliads, terrestrial orchids, and some Euphorbia (I have only a few.) Non-succulents have done excellently too, such as citrus, figs, peaches, blackberries, melons, tomatoes, corn, Hibiscus, and many bulbs including Gladiolus, Lachanalia, Scadoxus, Hippeastrum, and Boophone.

I have been using 2/3 to pure coir for tropicals, including tropical succulents such as adeniums. For more xerophytic species I use 35-30% coir, with the rest being perlite and/or pumice. The only plants that have not done well are some extreme xerophytes such as Mojave Desert cacti, Ariocarpus, many mesembs, and *Caralluma socotrana*. But I have never had much success with these plants in any medium.

I have found coir to have numerous advantages over all other organic components of potting media that I have ever used, and few drawbacks. The number one best trait is that it has both high water-holding capacity and simultaneously retains plenty of air. This means that it’s nearly impossible to overwater most plants during their growing season—you simply cannot suffocate the roots. It is highly resistant to oxidation and microbic breakdown; it lasts at least four years with tropical plants when it’s kept continuously moist and longer for more xerophytic ones. Unlike peat, it does not shrink when dry and is easy to re-wet when it’s time to awaken a plant from dormancy. Since I eliminated peat-based media, I had almost no problem with fungus gnats ...

There is much more, as well as illustrations at:

[www.tucsoncactus.org](http://www.tucsoncactus.org) ; click on “newsletter” and select June 2013.

The product Mark uses is Riococo coir; it seems to be a wholesaler. Does anyone know of a local source of this newer form of coir?