

CACTUS CORNER NEWS

Fresno Cactus & Succulent Society

[http: www.fresnocss.org](http://www.fresnocss.org)

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Affiliated with the Cactus & Succulent Society of America

October 2013

**NEXT MEETING: Thursday, October 3, 7:00 P.M. (doors open 6:30 P.M.)
Deaf & Hard of Hearing Service Center (DHHSC), 5340 North Fresno Street, Fresno**

PROGRAM: MADAGASCAR

PRESENTER: ROB SKILLIN

Madagascar has been isolated from the rest of the world long enough to develop an amazing array of endemic plants and animals. This month's program will be a photo exploration of primarily the succulent plants, and also touch on the interesting animals and human culture found there. No place else on earth is like it, and nearly no place is so difficult to reach or travel in. But the rewards for a plant enthusiast are great, and our speaker will show the best of what the island has to offer.



Cyphostemma currori, over 15 feet tall. Photo: Rob Skillin

Rob has been growing cacti and succulents which has been his passion for approximately 35 years. His first, and continuing interest is plants of the Chihuahuan desert, especially Ariocarpus, as well as other cacti such as Aztekium, Strombocactus, Obregonia, etc. He also has a diverse collection of Mesembs, Haworthias, and other succulents, particularly caudiciforms. He is an avid grower of plants from seed, and now has a number of specimens in his collection dating back to 1982.

Along with his interest in cacti and succulents, he enjoys photography and travel. As a result, he has made extensive explorations of the western US and Mexico, and portions of South America, Africa and the Middle East, from which he has put together a number of slide presentations. Several of his photographs have been published on the cover of the Journal of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America, as well as Haseltonia.



Rob currently live in San Luis Obispo County, where he founded the Central Coast Cactus and Succulent Society, was its first President, and has been the Show and Sale Chairman for seven years. He's a past President of the Bakersfield Cactus and Succulent Society, has been Show and Sales Chairman of the Santa Barbara Cactus and Succulent Society, and is a former member of, and got his start with, the San Diego Cactus and Succulent Society. He is a certified CSSA judge, and has judged numerous shows, including the CSSA, Intercity, NORCAL, and the San Diego shows.

This is a meeting you definitely don't want to miss! Let's give Rob a warm welcome back to Fresno.

PLANTS: Rob will bring a nice selection of his plants for you to purchase.

(No Dinner Scheduled This Month)

FROM THE PREZ ...**Hi, all,**

As I write this we are finally enjoying some cool, breezy weather. What a nice relief from what has been a very hot summer.

Our Member's Sale Night appeared to go really well. The club table made a nice profit, and I hope that all the vendors sold lots of plants, as well. Thanks to those who brought refreshments, all who helped set up the tables and—especially—to those who stayed to clean up. With a lot of help it doesn't take long.

The Fresno Fair is our "big deal" this month. We really need as many members as possible to sign up to spend a couple of hours monitoring the cactus and succulent exhibits, sparing the Fair people from having to walk by every little while to see that everything is still okay. See Rudy Rulloda for information and passes. This show is always good advertising for our club.

I am looking forward to this program. Rob Skillin is a master photographer and always delivers an interesting program. I hope to see you all there. *Sue*



From Rudy Rudolla, Chair, Club Fresno Fair Display:



The Fresno Fair is finally here. Members of the FCSS will have their plants on display. Yet, there are still open slots available for club members to volunteer and educate the public for a few hours, especially the week of October 7 through 14th. There will be a schedule at the October club meeting as well as the admission/parking passes. After completion of the hours you put in, the rest of the time is yours to enjoy the Fair. You can also leave a message with your name and date/hours you wish to volunteer with Jennifer Waite at the office and I'll bring the passes at the October club meeting.

Club access: President, Sue Haffner, 292-5624, sueh@csufresno.edu; Programs, Charlene Stebles, 299-1039, ronandcharlene@comcast.net; Treasurer, Charlene Stebles, 299-1039, ronandcharlene@comcast.net; Editor, Sue Haffner, 292-5624, sueh@csufresno.edu; Refreshments, Marian Orvis, 226-0145, mforvet@comcast.net; Librarian, Madeleine Mitchell, 638-2784, madeleine43@comcast.net; Webmaster, Vickie Veen,, vickieveen@gmail.com; Sunshine, Carole Grosch, 323-8602, cgg266@comcast.net.



Jason Kabeary, Karl Church (2nd);
Paul Mitchell (9th); Rudy Rapisura
(19th); Marian Orvis (20th).

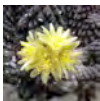
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#### SAY HELLO TO THESE RETURNING MEMBERS:

Mary and Steven Westenrider, Fresno. *WELCOME*

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Our sympathies go out to Vickie Veen
on the loss of her mother.



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Old timers in the club will remember **Inge Hoffman**, who did programs for us years ago. They mainly dealt with her travel adventures in South America, some of them quite hair-raising. She passed away in August in San Lorenzo at 83.

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Jack Loughmiller has been working on the old desert garden at the Discovery Center for the past two years. This is the garden immediately south of the winery building. Our club established that garden back in 1965, I believe. We used to get work parties out there on Saturdays back in the 1970s and 80s. Jack has been fixing up the pathways, brickwork and signs. Tom Meyer has been helping him with plant identifications.

On matters relating to the Deutsch Cactus Garden, the Discovery Center has hired a person to create a website just for the Deutsch Garden. Mary Ellen Wright, Director of the Center, also would like to work with us on projects to promote the Deutsch Garden. If you have any ideas, please let us know.

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**When you have a big pot to plant** but don't want to have to fill it with soil, mainly so it won't be so heavy to move, what do you put in the bottom? A lot of people use Styrofoam peanuts, or other similar lightweight material. The latest issue of *Fine Gardening* has an interesting tip: spray foam insulation. Using a dowel to keep the drainage hole open, spray as much foam as you need into the bottom of the pot. Remove the dowel after the foam has dried. This is a lightweight, long lasting material. Leftover foam can be sprayed into smaller mounds which can then be used in smaller pots.

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A NEW AZTEKIUM: A new aztekium has been described: *A. valdezii*, from Nuevo Leon, Mexico. It was published in the online journal *Xerophilia*, special issue no. 2 (Aug. 2013): www.xerophilia.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/AZTEKIUMVALDEZII.pdf
The description is in Spanish, English and Romanian.

EVENTS THIS MONTH

Bakersfield C&S Society Show & Sale, Oct. 12-13,
Golden State Mall, 3201 F St., Bakersfield; for more
info: www.bakersfieldcactus.org

C&S Society of San Jose Fall Show, Oct. 12-13,
Peterson Middle School, 1380 Rosalia Way,
Sunnyvale;
hours, Sat. 9-5; Sun. 10-4.

Palomar C&S Society Show & Sale, San Diego Botanic
Garden, Encinitas;
hours: Sat. 9-5; Sun. 10-4.

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**BOARD MEETING: Monday, Oct. 7<sup>th</sup>, 6 p.m.,  
Sunnyside Branch Library. This is the annual budget  
meeting. All members are welcome.**

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NEW BOOKS IN THE CLUB LIBRARY: "Prickly Pears"
by Green & Ferguson; "Genus Fouquieria" by
R. Scott; "Color Encyclopedia of Cape Bulbs" by
Manning, Goldblatt & Snijman; "Succulents
Simplified" by Debra Lee Baldwin.

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**CLUB TEE-SHIRTS:** We have an assortment of club  
tee shirts (and a few sweat shirts) for sale. They will  
be available at this meeting. And did you know that  
the tee shirt is 100 years old this year? Yes, the U.S.  
Navy invented the tee shirt in 1913 as a convenient,  
easy-to-laundry, quick-drying garment for sailors.

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INTERESTING CONCEPT:

"string gardens" (in
Japanese: *kokedama*)—
wrapping plant roots
firmly into moss balls
and hanging the plants
in the home. If you Google
the term you can see a
video of two Aussies
wrapping plants (it
works better with two
pairs of hands).



(Image: www.designsponge.com)

Getting to Know You...

Carole Grosch

A fairly new member to FC&SS, Carole enjoys growing a wide variety of plants, albeit, not always successfully. "I have learned a lot from other people, from reading and from research and using the Internet," she says. "But, for me, the exchange of ideas with other gardeners is the most beneficial. They give me hope."

Carole was born in Chicago, one of three children. During summer vacations, the family did a lot of traveling. "My parents enjoyed seeing and doing new things, and took my brother, sister and me along for the ride," she says. "Looking back now, I really appreciate the effort that took. We got to see a lot of historical sites and geographical areas in person, not just read or hear about them in school."



Her grandparents lived on a farm in Kentucky and taught all their grandchildren the basics of tending a garden. She put that knowledge to good use when the family was transferred to the temperate climate of Southern California and she had her own small garden.

Later, the family was transferred to the Washington, D.C. area, where her parents still live. Carole attended university in Geneva, Switzerland, and in Florida, where she graduated from the University of South Florida in Tampa, with a degree in Mass Communications. She worked for two airlines and took an early retirement in 2006. "I enjoyed my job, made a lot of friends and saw places and met some people I probably would not have, otherwise," she says. "For two years, I flew 'baby lifts,' as we called them. Crew members escorted orphaned babies from Calcutta and New Delhi who had adoptive families in the U.S. It was a lesson in appreciating what we have in this country."

After retiring, Carole had time to do some things she long wanted to do; taking Adult Ed courses and Master Gardener classes were two of them. She joined the FC&SS in 2009, after hearing about the club from other Master Gardeners and going to a Show and Sale at Sierra Vista Mall. "Walking into the display room, I felt as though I entered another world," she remembers. "I never saw plants like this before – what were they? How do you grow them? I talked to several members of the club who were very patient with my questions and helpful with information. I bought several succulents that day, and so far, they have survived my care."

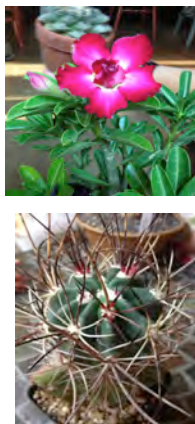
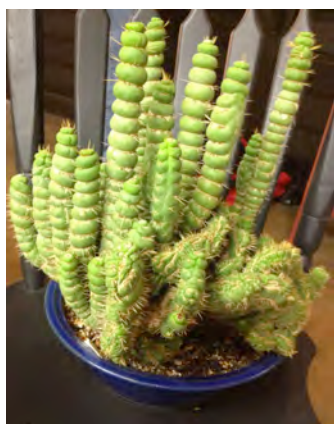
"Being a klutz, I tend to prefer plants that won't hurt me, so the wide range of succulents, especially variegated ones, really intrigues me."

Carole presently serves on the Board and holds the position of "Sunshine" for the club. She enjoys writing the Getting to Know You column and does freelance work for the Fresno Bee and the Clovis Unified school paper, CUSD Today.

She lives on five acres east of Clovis with her husband, a wild mishmash of plants, four dogs, several coveys of quail, and an unknown number of goldfish.



CLUB WORKSHOP: Wednesday, Oct. 16th, 6 p.m., Succulent Shack, 1302 North Wishon. Subject this month is *Ariocarpus*. All members are welcome to bring their ariocarpus plants and questions. We had a good workshop last month. Members brought specimen plants to show off. Some people had questions about their plants ("Should I cut off the top? And, if so, where?") Mary Ann Villegas brought a couple of plants that needed to be identified. Dan Gale brought his mind-boggling *Eulychnia castanea* monstrose that he got from Elton Roberts. Mary Drumheller noted that it was time to taper off watering. Others noted that their winter-growers (*Othonna*, *Pelargonium*, *Tylecodon*, for example) were pushing out new growth. If you have South African bulbs, you will notice that those dormant over the summer are now waking up.



The Michael Technology Charitable Organization donated several dozen opuntia seedlings to the club which are free to the members. Some of these were dispersed at the Member's Sale Night in September. The remaining plants will be at this meeting. If you were one of those who went on our field trip to the USDA research station in Parlier a few years ago, you will remember the acres of opuntias they had planted out there as part of the National Arid Land Plant Genetic Resources project, overseen by Dr. Gabriela Romano. We learn from Dr. Michael that that project has been terminated, any remaining aspects of it transferred up to UC Davis. Dr. Romano has returned to her native Argentina. Imagine having to plow up all those opuntias.

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**Question:** Do you have any information regarding the prickly pear cactus and claims that its consumption could provide anti-inflammatory and other health benefits:

**Answer:** The prickly pear cactus, sometimes referred to as the cactus pear (*Opuntia spp.*), has been touted for a variety of health-related benefits from treating diabetes to alleviating alcohol-induced hangover symptoms ... In general, the stems supply high amounts of pectin and mucilage (both are soluble fibers) and minerals, while the fruits are abundant in vitamins, amino acids and betalains. There are about 20 calories in 100 grams of cactus stems, while the same amount of cactus pear fruit pulp provides about 65 calories. Both the stems and the fruit are mostly composed of water (84%-95%), and a majority of calories come from carbohydrates.

Several research studies have identified anti-inflammatory properties of both the stem and fruit extracts; however, data elucidating how this may affect humans is lacking. There is some evidence to suggest that consumption of the stems may have a hypoglycemic effect, and could thus help control high blood sugar associated with diabetes. Cactus pear has also been shown in some studies to lower cholesterol, possibly due to its naturally occurring sterol content. Strong and conclusive evidence regarding the effects of pear cactus consumption is certainly limited; however, it can be assumed that its antioxidant, high fiber and vitamin/mineral content may lend some health benefits. As food industry specialists develop ways to improve the appeal and shelf life of the cactus pear (e.g., by using it to create specialty juices), its popularity among consumers and researchers alike may increase.

(*Health & Nutrition Letter* (Tufts University), September 2013)

## BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO SPINY SHRUB EUPHORBIAS IN MADAGASCAR

By Tom Glavich

There are many spiny shrub euphorbias in Madagascar, with new ones discovered on a near yearly schedule. There is still a fair amount of disagreement on how to separate the large *Euphorbia* family of plants into comprehensible groups of species. The ones in this article are all in the *Euphorbia milli* complex, which in itself is far too large to really understand. It is also one of the euphorbia groups that is still growing as botanists take a harder look at the spiny undergrowth in Madagascan thorn forests. We will take a narrower look at these plants, straying from the ones that are too much like the popular *E. milli*, and concentrating on the curious plants with long sharp thorns and small leaves.

Almost all of the plants in this group are endangered, not through collection since they are easily propagated from cuttings and burning for agriculture and general population pressure. These are the shrubs at the edge of forest clearings that are sharp, have toxic sap, and generally are regarded as nuisances by those trying to clear enough land to feed their families.

Although they are becoming rare in habitat, most of them are available through many of the larger succulent plant houses as seedlings and cuttings. Rooted cuttings from these often appear on the sales tables at many cactus and succulent shows. These plants are easy to cultivate. They need fast draining soil, with lots of gravel or pumice to allow air to reach the roots. Some excellent growers use nothing but pure pumice. The growing season is determined by nighttime temperatures. When nighttime temperatures are consistently about 50 degrees, most of the shrubby euphorbias will start to leaf out and grow. From this time on they need lots of water, lots of sun, and lots of fertilizer. When the nighttime temperatures are above 50 degrees, a porous potting mix will get to about the same temperature, which is still below the soil temperatures in Madagascar. Soil temperatures in the root zone of southern Madagascar are likely closer to 65 F. or 70 F. Daytime temperatures aren't nearly as important. Daytime temps can vary widely, but the soil temperature a few inches below the surface hardly moves at all.

Almost all shrubby euphorbias have at least partially green stems and there is some photosynthesis occurring even in the absence of leaves. The leaves are providing the euphorbias the carbon they need for cell growth. Most of the other chemicals are coming through water and fertilizer and enter through the roots. When the growing season ends, most species will drop their leaves, although a few stay nearly evergreen. In warm areas they can be left outdoors all year, taking winter rains without difficulty as long as they are in a loose potting mix. In colder areas where hard freezes are likely, they need winter protection. If cold causes tip damage to occur, the damaged tip should be left on the plant and pruned off at the start of the growing season.

Propagation is relatively easy. Cuttings can be taken at any time when they are in active growth, left to dry off for a few days and then potted up in pure pumice. They root quickly, and are generally in visible growth about a month after being potted up. Success will be much higher if the cuttings are taken at the beginning of the growing season, when temperatures are warm. Cuttings taken in late summer will sometimes root, but may sit out the winter, waiting for more agreeable temperatures. Most euphorbia sap is toxic, and these species are no exception. It is best to wear eye protection when taking cuttings and to keep hands and tools clean. Seed is rarely available, but when it is, it should be planted shortly after collection, with luck in the early part of the summer. Late summer seed is best left until late in the following spring.

There are dozens of wonderful species in this group. These are just a few.

*Euphorbia croizatii* will grow to about 2 feet as a loose spiny shrub. When well grown and given full sun, the species forms a graceful clump of stems, each bending to maximize the light that reaches the thin green leaves.

*Euphorbia delphinensis* is a slower growing species with leaves that are rounder and sparser than most of the species in this article. The flower bracts are yellow, fading to peach color at the tips. This species can be developed into impressive bonsai-like specimens.



Figure S11 *Euphorbia croizatii*, red-striped cyathop

(Continued on next page)

*Euphorbia genoudiana* can become densely leaved to the point that the stems can hardly be seen. It needs full sun, lots of water, and lots of fertilizer to grow this way, but the most spectacular specimens can be easily grown. It is the most tolerant of abuse and the most rapidly growing of all the species described here. This is an easy plant to grow. *Euphorbia rossii* is similar in structure to *E. genoudiana*, but the leaves are thinner, sparser, and less green. The plant as a whole will eventually grow larger than *genoudiana*, and will have tuberous roots that can be displayed as well. It is fairly slow, but not a difficult plant in cultivation. It needs nearly full sun to stay compact. Poor light will result in fast growing, leggy stems.

(From *To the point*, the CSSA newsletter, Nov.-Dec. 2010; illus. from "Succulent and xerophytic plants of Madagascar", v.2, by Werner Rauh)



### THE CHIMERA CACTUS

You have no doubt seen the "Red Cap" cacti, the red, yellow, orange or pink gymnocalyciums grafted onto *Hylocereus* stock. They came onto the market in the 1960s, I believe, sold as novelty items. All these chlorophyll-lacking gymnos were developed in Japan at the Watanabe nursery from a single seedling of *Gymnocalycium mihanovichii* v. *friedrichii*. They are now produced by the millions and sold all over the world. The tender *Hylocereus* stocks frequently give out at the first hint of cold weather, spelling doom for the grafted scions, as they cannot manufacture food and grow on their own. Really ambitious growers might try to re-graft the plants.

In the 1980s, an amazing plant appeared on the scene: a monstrose item which appeared to be part *Hylocereus* and part *Gymnocalycium*. Growing on a graft, the stems were triangular basically, green but with reds and purples showing through. What apparently happened was a one-in-a-million accident: a bud developed on the stock exactly at the point of union of stock and scion and grew out, carrying the skin of the scion over a core of the stock. The layered nature of cells at a stem tip allows this to continue, rather like a glove covering a finger. Each cell layer retains its genetic identity—there is no fusion as in a hybrid—and a battle goes on for expression, so the resulting plant shows features of both parents.



This means the plant described is a chimera. In mythology a chimera is an animal made up of bits and pieces of various other animals. Chimeras are not unusual in the plant world but they are generally very short-lived. As far as is known, all have been accidents, not produced by design. Author Gordon Rowley named the plant described above (and pictured opposite) as + *Hylocalycium singulare* (the plus sign indicates that the plant is a chimera.) As might be

expected, + *Hylocalycium* is rather delicate, needing warmth in winter and water at all season.

Another chimera is now on the market, + *Myrtillocalycium* 'Polyp', the result of a 'Red Cap' graft on a myrtillocactus. At the Inter-City Show in August, a very large one was on display. Miles Anderson has sold this plant on occasion, but I don't know its history. Given its myrtillocactus heritage, it is probably hardier than + *Hylocalycium*.

You can read about this and other strange plants in "Teratopia" by Gordon Rowley, which is in the club library.

Sue