

CACTUS CORNER NEWS

Fresno Cactus & Succulent Society

<http://www.fresnocss.org>

Vol. 32, No. 3

Affiliated with the Cactus & Succulent Society of America

March 2015

**NEXT MEETING: Thursday, March 5, 7:00 P.M. (Doors open 6:30 P.M.)
Deaf & Hard of Hearing Service Center (DHHSC), 5340 North Fresno Street, Fresno**

PROGRAM

ARGYRODERM AND OTHER MESEMBS FROM THE QUARTZ FIELDS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S KNERSVLAKTE

BY: RUSSELL WAGNER

Mesemb specialist and explorer Russell Wagner has visited the quartz fields of South Africa's Knersvlakte on each of his four visits to the world's succulent paradise. But one of his trips, a brief two-week tour in late April and early May of this year, was dedicated to hunting down and photographing every species of *Argyrodema*, one of the famous living stones that calls this region home.

Argyrodema, literally *silver skin*, is a small genus of plants resembling *Lithops*, at least superficially. Unlike lithops, argys are never patterned, windowed, or flat-topped. Instead, the leaves tend to be alabaster smooth, round-topped and keeled (meaning there's an angled protrusion across the back of the leaf), and with a typically gaping mouth. Some are rather suggestively named (*Argyrodema testiculare!*), and at least one has finger-like leaves (*A. fissum*). They can be single-headed or clumping, and some even form small shrubs. In the resting season the plants can become alarming wrinkled and soft, at which time they take on a range of ruddy hues. But when turgid, they are rock hard and may split if overwatered—even in habitat.



Richard Wagner with Conophyllum plum.

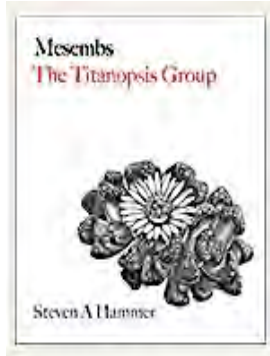


Argyrodema testiculare

Argys are extremely easy to grow from seed, producing their first leaf pair within about six weeks of sowing. They flower usually by year three. And what the plants lack in leaf variation, they make up for in flower color. Russell found populations that flowered in yellow, white, pink, and purple, and visited a few special spots where a range of flower colors co-exist. By traveling at the time of peak flowering, he was able to gather some very special photos for Steven Hammer's next book in the Little Sphaeroid Press *Mesembs* series.

(Continued on following page)

Join us on the 5th of March for a presentation that will reveal not only one of the most coveted of mesemb groups, but also a range of other mesembs (*Dicrocaulon*, *Monilaria*, *Lithops*), succulent daisies (*Othonna*, *Senecio*), rare miniature bulbs (*Gethyllis*, *Morea*) and a host of other strange surprises found only in the Knersvlakte quartz fields.



Russell Wagner has been a member of the San Francisco Succulent and Cactus Society since 1997 and served as editor of the *Cactus and Succulent* journal for seven years. He has an 800 square foot greenhouse in Oakland where he cultivates a wide variety of rare seed-grown succulents that thrive in our winter-rainfall climate. Russell is also the proprietor of Little Sphaeroid Press, a company established to produce fine books about succulent plants. Their first title in Steven Hammer's *Mesembs* series was released in 2013.



Argyroderma delaeii

Russell is also this month's featured grower. He will bring a number of rare mesembs, small winter-rainfall bulbs, and other unusual plants not normally seen for sale. Russell is known for his depth of knowledge on succulent cultivation, so feel free to ask him just how he grows these special plants.

This is Russell's first visit to our club, so let's give him a warm welcome to our club!

Plants: Russell will have many unusual plants for you to purchase.

BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse
715 East Shaw, Fresno
(559) 570.1900
Menu: www.bjsrestaurants.com/menu

~ DINNER ~
Begins at 5:00pm
Reservation under Fresno
Cactus Club
Members are invited to
attend.

Contact Rosanna Rojas by
Wednesday, March 4,
to make reservations.
Phone: (559) 999-0017
Email: rfrojas96@gmail.com



ARGYRODERMA

Argyroderma is a genus of about a dozen species. The name is derived from the Greek *argyros* (silver) and *derma* (skin), in recognition of their characteristic gray-green leaves. They are compact, dwarf succulents, tufted or single-bodied; leaves rounded or finger shaped, opposite in pairs and united at the base, with the upper surface flat or slightly convex and the lower surface rounded. A vernacular name is *bababoudjies* (Baby's Bottom). Flowering period is April to June.

Argyroderma has restricted distribution in northern Namaqualand in an area known as the Knersvlakte. Here they are abundant on quartz gravel flats and hillsides in the sun. Winter rainfall in the habitat is less than 100 mm per year. These plants are not difficult in culture, but should be kept dry in summer and shaded a bit from the sun in our area. *Sue*

Pictured are (left) *A. delaeii* and (right) *A. fissum*, illus. from "Mesembs of the world" (1998), by Gideon Smith, et al.

FROM THE PREZ ...

Hi, all,

We had a great meeting last month: excellent attendance and a number of visitors. That's what we like to see! If you have friends or neighbors who are interested in gardening and/or succulents, don't be shy about inviting them to a meeting. And remember to greet our visitors, ask them about their plant interests, etc. We have had a healthy growth in membership in recent years, which is an unalloyed good thing.

Some of you still have not renewed your memberships for this year. Check your records; if you're not sure, get in touch with Rob Scott or Polly Dunklin. Polly will be working on the 2015 club roster and we need to have your information for the book. Thanks.

Now that we've reached March, our spring activities are getting into gear. The Home and Garden Show is just around the corner. The information is elsewhere in the newsletter. This event is valuable for the exposure it gives the club, and we always need members to help out. The Clovis Botanical Garden "Spring into Your Garden" event is at the end of the month. We have reserved a table there to hand out club information. In addition, we are planning our spring tour of members' gardens in April; more information will be available next month.

Let's see, what else is ahead of us: May 7th is our annual picnic; then June 6-7 is our annual Show and Sale at Sierra Vista Mall.

I've mentioned this before, but I appreciate how well the members clean up after the meeting: folding the chairs and storing them; picking up the remains of the refreshments. One thing that needs reminding: if you have brought plants and cuttings to share, please check at the end of the meeting and take home any leftovers. Recently, those of us who close up have had to take custody of plants and boxes that others have brought. We'd rather not have to do that. Thanks for sharing—and for your consideration.

Our speaker this month, Russell Wagner, is new to our club, so I hope you will give him a warm welcome. See you there!

Sue

5TH ANNUAL SPRING INTO YOUR GARDEN FESTIVAL

**CLOVIS
BOTANICAL
GARDEN**

**Saturday, March 28, 2015
9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.**

**Clovis Botanical Garden
945 N. Clovis Avenue**

Enjoy a spring day in the Garden!

- Plant Sale; water-wise and California native plants
- Garden presentations on the hour starting at 10:00 a.m. Experts will share information on drought tolerant plants for your home landscape
- Landscape designer consultations; call Georgia at 287-2320 to schedule an appointment
- Exhibits
- Food vendors
- Garden tours

Entrance: \$5.00 for adults; CBG members may attend free

FRESNO CACTUS & SUCCULENT CLUB BOARD MEETING
FEBRUARY 9, 2015

President Sue Haffner called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Attendance: Robert Scott, Treasurer, Cindy Duwe, Secretary, Tom Meyer, Board Member, Polly Dunklin, Board Member, Mary Drumheller, Board Member, Rudy Rulloda, Board Member, Fred Gaumer, CSSA Affiliate Representative. **Absent:** Roasanna Rojas, Vice President, Larry Homan, Board Member.

Visitor: Doris Hooton

Officer Reports:

Sue Haffner announced that the California Garden Club Inc. (CGCI) dues are due. They will be increased \$1.00 per member.

Robert Scott reported there were approximately 15-20 members who have not paid the 2015 dues. He announced we will have to change our club insurance to include the name of the new owners of the Sierra Vista Mall.

Old Business:

Robert Scott reported on the progress of the club participation in the Home and Garden Show to take place March 6,7 and 8, 2015. He passed around sign up sheets for advertising, badges, vendors, signs, club cart, information table, etc. at the February regular meeting.

Cindy Duwe is planning a Bus Trip to UC Davis in September 2015.

Cindy Duwe reported that the Show and Sale will be held June 6 and 7, 2015 at the Sierra Vista Mall. Set up will take place on June 5, 2015.

Sue recommended the club make a donation to the Clovis Botanical Garden in memory of member and past president Don LaMont. Mary Drumheller made the motion, second by Fred Gaumer. Motion passed unanimously to donate \$100.00 to the Clovis Botanical Garden in memory of Don LaMont.

New Business:

Sue announced the Clovis Botanical Garden "Spring into your Garden" festival to be held March 28, 2015.

Sue announced the need for a chairperson for the May 7, 2015 picnic.

The Board decided to purchase a new coffee urn for the meetings, etc.

Meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cindy Duwe, Secretary



BOARD MEETING: Tuesday, Mar. 10th; 6 p.m., at 3733 N. Sierra Vista, Fresno.
Any member may attend; board members should attend.



Club access: President, Sue Haffner, 292-5624, sueh@mail.fresnostate.edu; Programs, Rosanna Rojas, 999-0017, rfrojas96@gmail.com; Treasurer, Robert Scott, 960-3665, Rob_scott85@yahoo.com; Editor, Sue Haffner, 292-5624, sueh@mail.fresnostate.edu; Refreshments, Marian Orvis, 226-0145, mforvet@comcast.net; Librarian, Madeleine Mitchell, 638-2784, madeleine43@comcast.net; Webmaster, vacant; Sunshine, Carole Grosch, 323-8602, cgg266@comcast.net.



Happy Birthday!

Chuck Thew (1st); Paula Singer (6th);
Lisa Fialho (7th); Larry Carlberg (15th);
Veone Gale, Caludia Carlson (22nd);
Cori Aunger (29th); Natalie Nugent (30th).

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**Visitors last month:** Sylke Portner, Leon George,  
Gail Blank, Ardell Andersen, Matthew Johnson,  
Jackie Johnson.

**New Members:** Domenic Ortiz, Fresno;  
Michael Meadows, Fresno.



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SYMPATHIES: Our condolences go out to Karen
Willoughby, whose mother, Maxine
Jayne Collier, passed away Feb. 3rd.



Also to Bruce Hargreaves, whose
brother, Robert Hargreaves, passed away Jan. 6th.
He was a veterinarian and teacher.

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**Joyce Quinn's** latest book has now been published:  
"Earth's landscape: an encyclopedia of the world's  
geographic features." It is a reference and textbook.

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WHITE CRUST ON CLAY POTS: The white crust or film
that appears on clay pots indicates the presence of
soluble salts in either your fertilizer or from minerals
in your water. Because terra cotta is porous, water
seeps through it. When it evaporates from the sides
of the pot it leaves the salty film.

To remove this film, soak pots in a 1:9 solution of
bleach and water. Scrub the pot and rinse; let dry
thoroughly. You can also make a paste of baking
soda and water and scrub the pot with it.

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Running out of plant room? You just came home  
with that box of succulents from Home Depot or  
Evergreen, or some other garden shop and realize  
you have hardly any place to put them. The only  
thing you can see is a narrow shelf or windowsill. A  
strip of Velcro along the shelf will help stabilize the  
pots. You could also use a tacky sort of shelf liner.

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Big Agave americana plants in pots to give away. Get
in touch with Paul Mitchell if interested (559) 977-8697.

CLUB WORKSHOP: the March Workshop will be
Wednesday, March 18th, 6 p.m., at 3733 N. Sierra
Vista. "Tips and Tricks" is the subject. Bring your
good ideas.

We had a lively workshop in February, with a
number of impressive mammillarias brought for
us to look at. Thanks to everyone who participated.
For members with plant questions: this is the
venue for bringing your issues and getting some
good advice.

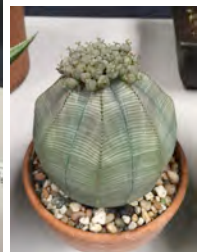
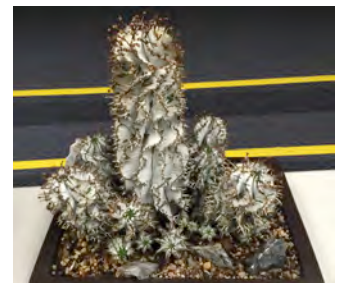
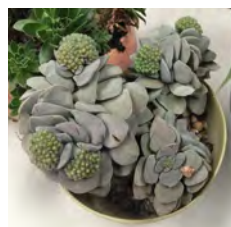
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### SALE THIS MONTH

**March 14-15, Cactus & Succulent Society of San  
Jose Spring Show and Sale,** Peterson Middle  
School, 1380 Rosalia Ave, Sunnyvale;  
Sat. 9-5; Sun. 10-4.

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March Brag Table: Fred Gaumer showed
Tephrocactus geometricus, *Mammillaria
parkinsonii*, *Mammillaria albilanata* and 3 clones
of *Adromischus marianiae halli*. Bill Gale brought
Euphorbia obesa and *Orbea (Stapelia) variegata*.
Anthony Thomas displayed a nice *Euphorbia horrida*.
Jack Fleming showed *Aloe sladeniana* and
Tylecodon officinale. Many thanks to all of them.
Any members are welcome to bring plants for the
Brag Table; be sure to sign in on the notebook.



FEAR NO MESEMB!

By Fred Gaumer

I can only imagine what it must be like to be standing in the land of the South African mesembs. I think that as I get older the possibility of that happening decreases every year. I could barely stand the flight from Fresno to Austin, Texas for the last CSSA Convention. What would I do stuck on a plane in the air for 20+ hours? Surely the seating arrangement would have to be a bit more spacious and they might even give you 2 bags of peanuts. That would have an additional fee, Sir. And, of course, Sir, our international peanut packets have an ounce and a half more than our domestic packets, which is why we must charge \$25 for them. Yes, more peanut weight equals more fuel consumption, Sir. Would you be paying cash, credit or debit? Oh, no, Sir, I cannot accept a tip.



Seriously, I do have a very large collection of dimes that I call my "Namibian Trip Fund." I'm sure there is nowhere near the money it would take to finance such a trip but I think I would be surprised how much is in that jar.

Realistically, it is not likely I am going to go to southern Africa in my lifetime. But I can go there by attending some of the presentations offered at the local cactus club or by seeing some others with a little driving time and distance involved. And I can go there in my mind by observing the plants in my greenhouse from that area.



Mesembs in general are very easy to grow. I recently heard someone say that they have lithops until the first time they water them. A few years ago I visited someone who is very good at growing cacti and had a large pot with many different kinds of lithops growing in it. He told me he never waters them. You can only imagine how awful they looked. The way to determine how to grow mesembs is find out where they grow in nature and what kind of weather conditions are at these places. All this information can be found in the club library and by talking to experienced growers or on the Internet.

Many mistakes in years past were due to following advice from books authored by people living in Germany or England. There was a belief that plants from the southern hemisphere would not accept a move to the north and they would insist to grow "out of season." Of course they would be winter growing plants responding to shorter day lengths and cooler temperatures. The term "winter growers" is misleading. It means that the plants are cool temperature growers, most likely shutting down and going dormant when it gets really cold or very hot. The term "fall and spring growers" would be more accurate. And there are the "opportunistic growers" being active whenever there is moisture present and temperatures are within their favorable levels. Your mission as a mesemb grower is to find these conditions and apply them. I will add that the majority of these plants will survive an occasional mishap or mistreatment. And there are times when, unprovoked, you can almost see your plant turning to mush in hours. Maybe with patience or time-lapse photography it would only be minutes. All plants in containers need to have a generous watering once in a while to flush out accumulated salts and other chemicals. And most mesembs like a good misting especially in the hot summer. Mist yourself while attending to your plants.

Knowing your plants has great bearing on the type of pot you choose to grow them in. Some mesembs have a very shallow root system and don't need a deep pot. *Conophytum* is an example of this. *Nananthus* with a large taproot would eventually push itself above grade if confined to a short pot. This also shows the need to have an understanding of the wants of your mesemb. The question of plastic or clay is a matter of your personal preference. Both have their advantages.

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The succulent members of the mesemb family are not restricted to southern Africa. There are many species from Australia which will probably be available to collectors in the next few years I am not aware of them existing on other continents but would not be surprised if they did. They range from medium sized shrubs to miniscule sphaeroid gems. The plants favored by people reading this are certainly the smaller ones. The kind you can get your face right in there and stare in wonder. My wife catches me doing this often.

To grow these plants an elaborate growing area is not required. The majority will do best on a table outside or even on a windowsill. They do like the open-air flow and a stuffy, hot greenhouse is usually not to their liking. When your collection is outside there is the hazard of animals disrupting them. Birds and rodents sometimes eat the plant but mostly they will pull them out of the pots, realize they are not food and go on to the next one. The ones they will do this to first will be directly proportional to their monetary value or the ones that are on the top of your favorite list. Even if you have plants outside that are compatible with the weather conditions where you live it is a good idea to have a cover for your plants so you can control rain and the sometimes-scorching sunlight.

In the end your desire to have these plants in your collection must equal your perceived difficulty of cultivation. If you want it you can make it happen. For the most part they are inexpensive, often being sold at the large box stores. For that to happen someone at a large plant wholesale nursery is growing them by the millions. They really have nothing that you don't. Everyone who grows plants has experienced failure. Don't deprive yourself of the joy of seeing a lithops and other genera of mesembs shedding its last year's body and exposing the pristine one of this year, or the pastel beauty of lapidaria, argyroderma and others like them, or the wonder of how life can exist on so little.

GETTING TO THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

When your plants start drying out too fast it can be because the root ball entirely fills the pot; or when roots start growing out through the drainage holes in your pots; or when the pots bulge to contain the roots, you know it's time to repot.

Slide the plant out of the pot. (Okay, you might have to cut away a plastic pot if the plant won't budge. You might even have to grit your teeth and crack a terra cotta pot. Decision: which is more valuable—the plant or the pot?) Do you see a thick mass of roots pressing right up to the edge of the pot? Do you see roots circling around the outside of the root ball? If so, it might be time for not only repotting but for some root surgery.

Surgery? The notion of cutting roots can be alarming. Won't this hurt the plant? Actually, no; it's long been known that root pruning encourages plant growth and renewal. High Country Gardens in New Mexico uses this technique with their cacti and other drought tolerant plants and have found that it promotes root growth, including the development of the fine feeder roots which are so important to improved plant nutrition and growth. It also results in the production of sturdy tap roots with such cacti as *Pediocactus papyracanthus*, *Mammillaria wrightii*, *Echinocereus pulchellus* and others.

With a sharp knife slice a ½" to 2" layer of soil from around and underneath the root ball. The larger the root ball, the more soil and roots can be removed. Then go over the root ball again with a pronged hand cultivator or a stick (a chopstick is good for this) loosening soil and roots on the outside. Prune back any damaged or rotted roots.

Generally, it's recommended that a root-pruned plant be left dry to rest and recover before repotting; in our arid climate that could mean just a few days. High Country Gardens, though, repots right away and drenches the pots. For most of us, caution would be more appropriate: repot the plants and leave them dry for a while before beginning to water.

As with any technique you haven't tried before, apply it to just a few plants and see what happens.

Sue

SPRING HOME AND GARDEN SHOW

The Spring Home and Garden Show is coming up March 6-8 at the Fresno Fairgrounds. It's a huge event, with thousands of attendees. It provides great exposure for any organization or business. The garden club will again be located in the Junior Exhibits Building, at the sound end of the grounds, just to your right as you center the Butler Avenue gate.

Robert Scott (960-3665) is in charge and can answer any of your questions.

Setup is Wednesday and Thursday, March 5-6; again, get in touch with Robert to see when he'll be needing help with this.

The show opens on Friday, March 7th, at 11 a.m. Hours are: Friday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

We need to have a nice show to advertise our hobby and our organization, and also to publicize our June Show and Sale. Some of the other clubs in the building are holding judged shows and/or putting on demonstrations or workshops. Most of them will be selling plants, as well. All show plants must remain on display until 6 p.m. on Sunday.

We still need members to help out on Saturday and Sunday (help pull tags and box plants). We can also use some helpers to spell off the regular cashiers so that they don't have to work all day every day; any members who have experience with registers are welcome to help. The registers are easy to learn, and Robert will be there as a backup. We also need people for setup and cleanup.

We have gate passes to give away, but if you will be working for any length of time, be sure to get a Home and Garden Show badge. (If you got one last year, we hope you didn't throw it away; they're good year after year.) The badge will get you onto the grounds at any time. See Robert about getting one.

Parking: during setup (Wed. and Thurs.) Gate 7, off Butler Avenue, should be open. You can drive in there and park behind the building if you can find a space. Once the show opens on Friday, you will have to either park in the street or use the lot at the SE corner of Maple and Butler (you'll need your badge.) From there you can catch the trolley to the front gate. If you have to drop off something in the Junior Exhibit Bldg. during the run of the show, use the Chance Avenue entrance. You can drive onto the grounds before the show opens to the public, but you have to finish your business quickly and leave. On Sunday, Gate 7 should be open and you can drive in and park behind the building. This year, the show management issued a directive that the vendors should not park in the paid lots; again, your badge lets you park in the Maple/Butler lot.

We had signup sheets at last month's meeting, but I'm sure Robert could use more members to volunteer for duty.

