

# CACTUS CORNER NEWS

## Fresno Cactus & Succulent Society

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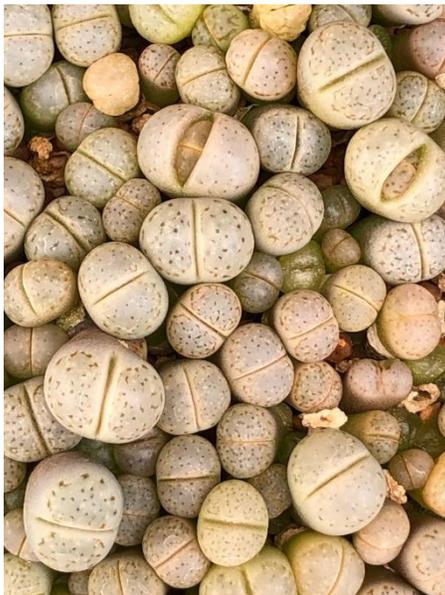
March 2021

**NEXT ZOOM MEETING: Thursday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 6:30 p.m.**  
Meeting ID: 862 0437 2753 Passcode: 529895

## Lithops, The Living Gems

Peter Beiersdorfer

Lithops are among the most varied and colorful succulents, and they thrive in California's sunny climate when grown with a few basic rules. Peter grew his first Lithops from seed around 2007. He still has plants from around that time that he bought from Elton Roberts and Jim Smith (yes, at one point they sold Lithops!). In the meantime, his collection includes all 37+ species of Lithops and most of the 95+ taxa (which include subspecies and varieties). During the past two years he has made a targeted effort to locate and photograph these plants in the wild during his trips to South Africa and Namibia. As he will attest, searching for and finding a given species has been a highly rewarding adventure. In his talk, Peter will show numerous photographs of Lithops, including many brightly colored cultivars, and he will reveal his secrets to finding these "living gems" in the wild. He will also discuss how to keep these wonderful plants alive and thriving, in the hope that those of you who never had or no longer have these little gems in your collection will give them a try.



*Lithops julii*- seedlings

Peter is a retired scientist, who worked for 31 years at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. He maintains his ties to the Laboratory and continues to volunteer on his NASA projects at UC Berkeley, which means he still works but spends fewer days and does not get paid. Peter was in Namibia photographing Lithops when Covid-19 closed down international air travel, briefly stranding him. Recently, Namibia has re-opened with strict testing and quarantine rules in place, and Peter has again been traveling in Namibia and "self-isolating" with his Lithops in remote locations and little human contact. If all goes well, he will have returned from Namibia on Sunday before his presentation.



*Lithops psuedotruncatella volkii*

## From the Prez...

Hi Members,

It was great getting some much-needed rain, and now it looks like the Valley is slowly starting to roll into spring. As we are seeing plants beginning to bloom and green up, we begin asking ourselves that tricky question: "when should I water?" Just like the question itself, the answer is tricky.

The winter growing types love water when temperatures are mild, and nights are cool. The summer growing types are where things start to get tricky. Our days are getting warm but nighttime temperatures are still low, that's the problem. In these conditions' pots will stay wetter longer if you water now, and you really want them to be able to dry out within a few days. If you feel like your plants need a drink, or that they look wrinkled and limp, then give a small amount of water. A quick watering that only wets the surface is best. You defiantly don't want to soak the pot. Wetting just the surface gives the fine roots something to soak up without keeping the pot wet for too long. Always look at the weather forecast to be sure if the warmer weather is sticking around for a few days. We all know that our springs can go from warm to freezing very quickly. This watering tip applies to a lot of the common types of cactus and succulents. There are a lot of specialty types that can only have water above a certain temperature. If you're worried, or in doubt, then don't water just yet and wait until we stay warm consistently. Your plants will be fine waiting a little longer.

Usually, around this time of year the Club is busily getting ready for the Fresno Home and Garden Show held at the Fairgrounds each year. With everything going on this year's event has been moved to the middle of May. The Board came together to discuss the event and the safety measures that the event would be implementing this year. It was decided that the Club would not be participating this year. We took everything into account and our member's safety comes first. Not enough will have changed by May to keep our volunteers completely safe.

This also led to discussions about our Club's Annual Show and Sale, which is held the first weekend in June. Citing all the same issues with other events (e.g. member safety and lower public participation) it was unanimously voted to move our event to June 2022. Our Annual Sale has grown a lot over the last few years and now brings in large crowds of people. While this is absolutely amazing, circumstances being what they are this year, an event like this isn't possible. Our number one concern is the health and safety of all who work and participate in this event. As such, the Club will be waiting till 2022 before resuming any large events. We want to thank everyone for understanding.

This doesn't mean, however, that the Club won't be offering anything exciting for its members. We are in the process of planning a big Spring Silent Auction. We are tentatively looking at holding it sometime in May so that everyone has lots of time to prepare. When the time comes, we will be asking for donations items. This can include books, pots, plants, cuttings, gardening items, yard décor and so much more. Start hunting for items and making cuttings to add to the auction. Our last Silent Auction in December had over 90 items, lets make this one even bigger!

I know the news of no in-person events this year is disappointing. I'm disappointed as well. It's just something that needs to be done to keep our members and the public safe. Years fly by quickly and before we know it, we will all be planning for our next in-person Club Sale again. Until then, please stay safe and healthy.

Robert



*Lithop bromfieldii*



## CEROPEGIAS



*Ceropegia* is a genus of around 200 species of milkweeds, most but not all succulent. They are found in many parts of the tropics and subtropics, chiefly southern Africa, Canary Islands, eastern India and Madagascar. Most are vining, some have caudexes or tuberous roots. They tend to favor forested habitats where the stems scramble or twine, using surrounding vegetation for support. The Canary Island species are stem succulents, growing as upright bushes with bare stems, and are called “stick” ceropegias.

*Ceropegia* flowers display unusual shapes and colors. The flowers have corollas elongated into tubes and sometimes expanded at the base. The corolla lobes may be completely open, united at their tip into a sort of cage-like structure, or expanded into an umbrella, complete with handle.

Downward pointing hairs in the tube trap pollinating insects. After pollination the hairs relax and let the insects escape.

Doubtless the best known ceropegia to succulent hobbyists is *C. linearis ssp woodii* (usually found as *C. woodii*), commonly called “String of Hearts” or “Rosary Vine.” Small round or sort-of heart shaped, fleshy leaves grow along very thin, almost thread-like stems. The leaves are green or whitish, variegated along the veins. A form with pink and cream variegation has come onto the market in recent years. The stems are perennial and grow from a tuber.

The small flowers are pinkish with dark striations to the base and the lobes with blackish margins; the tube with a globose base has long purple hairs inside. Seed horns display the shape typical of milkweeds. Native to KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

*Ceropegia haygarthii*, also native to KwaZulu-Natal, has a perennial, non-tuberous stem that produces a cluster of fleshy roots. A number of variant forms have been found. The corolla has a slightly globose base and curves upwards at right angles, cylindrical, expanding at the mouth, hairy at the base and in the throat, lobes triangular at the base united above into a slender tube abruptly dilated at apex into a 5-winged knot. (Whew! Describing ceropegia flowers can take a lot of words.)



*Ceropegia haygarthii* is sometimes available from succulent dealers.

The bottom picture shows *Ceropegia simoneae*, one of the very succulent ceropegias recently described from Madagascar. A number of these have thick, angled stems, green, gray, brown or mottled in color.

When it's time to bloom the stem grows out a long, thin fertile shoot that bears the flowers. After pollination, this shoot dries and falls off. (This happens with other thick-stemmed ceropegias, as well.) The Madagascan species have evolved to accommodate a definite dormant period during the dry season, which makes them a challenge to grow in a pot. They are easy to over-water.

Generally, most ceropegias are not difficult in cultivation, needing adequate water while in active growth, well drained potting mix; less water in winter. Be on the alert for mealybugs, which love these plants.



**Sue**

**FEBRUARY WORKSHOP:** An enthusiastic group participated in the workshop on February 17th. Presenting plants for show-and-tell were Christeen Abbott-Hearn, Viv Shinkawa, Dennis Anderson, Rosanna Rojas, Karen Willoughby and Rob Scott. The plants included such winter-growing mesembs as *Faucaria*, *Titanopsis* and *Aloinopsis*. Other winter-growers shown and discussed were *Pelargonium*, *Othonna*, *Tylecodon* and various bulbs (*Massonia* (pictured), *Ledebouria*, *Boophone* and *Oxalis*.) In addition, Rob showed one of his baby leopard tortoises.



*Aloe variegata*

Viv had a question as to watering indoor succulents at this time of year. It was agreed that too much watering in a low-light situation could bring about etiolation of plant stems. Water lightly.

Karen mentioned that she had a problem with squirrels knocking over pots, plus something had eaten the top off a cactus. Dennis said he had gotten some great squirrel bait from the county.

Rob said that some of his aloes seem to be 2 to 2 1/2 months behind schedule this winter. It's already been an odd year.

The next workshop will be Wednesday, March 17th. Join in with your plants and questions.

Sue

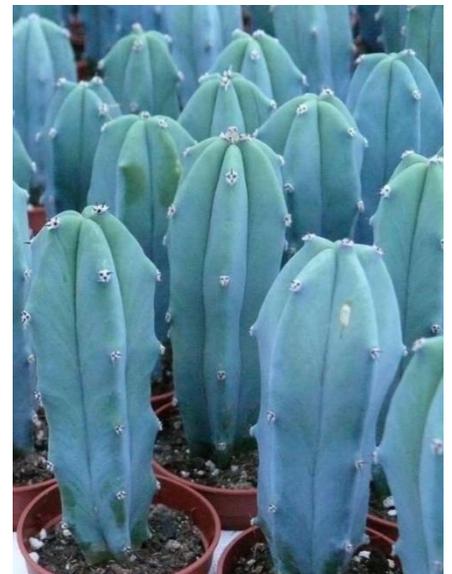
## BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN CEROIDES

By Tom Glavich

(The term ceroids describe any of the species of cacti with very elongated bodies, including columnar growth cacti)

For the most part, beginning growers (except of course those from Arizona) tend to stay away from North American ceroids. Many ceroids are robust plants that will grow quickly for most of the year and outgrow their welcome by toppling onto and damaging other plants, getting (and giving) scars and broken spines. There are some that are very slow, and a few that are a real challenge to keep alive outside of their native environment. Many ceroids are available in good garden centers, at plant sales, and even in general nurseries. When sold this way, most of the ceroids are only a few inches tall, just sticking above their globular neighbors. They are almost always in pots that either are or will quickly become too small. Growing these ceroids is discouragingly easy. Anyone can do it, and it is often harder to stop than it is to start. However, there are growing techniques that will keep ceroids under control and make them an important part of your collection.

Most ceroids are gross feeders, willingly accepting far more fertilizer and water than the typical globular cactus. Continued...



*Myrtillocactus geometrizans*

The typical ceroid body shape is a cylinder with vertical ribs that contract during dry periods and allow for quick body expansion whenever there is rain. This type of body form can respond quickly to times of plenty without splitting the skin. This body shape works like an accordion. A typical globular cactus, if suddenly given lots of water and fertilizer would split its skin.

Pot grown ceroids should be grown in deep pots. It's a good idea to put some rock or pot shards at the bottom of the pot, not for drainage, but for ballast. The heavier bottom will keep the plants from falling over longer. Ceroids grow quickly, and for some species a six-inch-tall bargain plant can easily make it to two feet in a year. When the plants get large enough that they begin to fall over in the wind or become so top-heavy that they are dangerous to work around, they should be repotted. This could easily occur more than once in a growing season. For the same reason, heavy ceramic or clay pots are often better for ceroids because they're more stable.

For those in the southwest and California, the option of growing ceroids in the ground is much more tempting. They grow faster, they look better, require virtually no care, and don't fall over except in the most extreme wind conditions. When planting ceroids in the ground, all you need to verify is good drainage, so the soil doesn't remain soggy, and that enough space is left between plants to allow for weeding and yard maintenance.

Whether in pots or in the ground many ceroids outgrow the grower's ability to care for them. They just get too big, too top heavy, or shade too many other plants. Fortunately, they are extremely easy to propagate. The top six to ten inches of almost every species is nearly guaranteed to root if simple precautions are taken. The top to be propagated should be cut off. It can be held by wrapping newspaper around the spines or supported by laying the plant over carefully on its side with newspaper or paper towels underneath. For species without very long, fragile spines, canning tongs work very well. It is generally best to make a quick cut with garden branch cutters an inch or so below where the final cut will be. When this is done, the piece to be propagated is smaller, lighter, and easier to handle safely. A final smooth cut should be made across the stem with a sharp, clean knife. To prevent the spread of disease, the knife should be wiped with alcohol or 10% bleach, or even paint thinner or other quick drying chemical cleaner.

The cut end should be left to dry, out of the sun. A warm garage is ideal. Depending on the size of the limb and where you live, this can take anywhere from a few days or several weeks. When the bottom calluses over, and is no longer damp to the touch, put the new cutting into a deep pot, and fill the pot with either pumice or gravel. Do not add any potting mix. Put the plant on the ground, where the ground moisture can get into the pot. This light moisture will promote rooting. Rooting hormones and powders will not help rooting much, but many contain fungicides, and these will prevent rot.

After a few weeks watering of the cutting can start. The alter will drain immediately but the dampness will help rooting. After a few months, there should be small white roots growing from the cut end. The cutting is ready for repotting. If there are no roots, then put it back and wait. There is no rush.

By this time, the original plant has probably produced a crop of offsets at the cut end. These offsets can be removed as well. They have very small attachment areas at the main stem. A cut should be made right at the stem, getting the minimum possible surface area. These only need a day or so to dry and can be immediately potted into potting soil. They root very quickly and will often outgrow the top cutting done months earlier.

There are many North American ceroids to grow including some of the following: *Carnegiea gigantea* (Saguaro) is the defining plant of the southern Arizona desert. It is easy to come by; plants and seeds are readily available. The small globular plants that are often available will turn into fat columnar plants in a few years, however compared to other ceroid species, these are very slow. *Myrtillocactus geometrizans* is an easy to grow ceroid from northern and central Mexico, produces arms either in a pot or in the ground, is fast growing and robust. It is a good starter plant for beginning ceroid growers. *Pachycereus marginatus* (often seen as *Lemaireocereus marginatus*) comes from central Mexico. It has 4 to 7 ribs which have dense, short spines along the edges; the rest of the body is glossy green. Usually unbranched, it is easy to grow. *Pachycereus pringlei* is the Cardon of Baja California, where it is the distinguishing feature of the desert, much as the Saguaro is for Arizona. It shares many of the same traits, slow growth, and gigantic stature.

(From: *To the point*, July/August 2006)



*Pachycereus pringlei*