

# CACTUS CORNER NEWS

*Fresno Cactus & Succulent Society*

*fresnocss.com*

*Affiliated with the Cactus & Succulent Society of America*

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December 2021

~ NO MEETING FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER ~



# Happy Holiday



## Wishes

**From the  
FCSS Board**



**FROM THE PREZ . .****Hi Members,**

Where has this year gone too? In a blink of an eye, it's already December and the end of the year is only a few weeks away. We spent all of 2021 dealing with a pandemic and all the changes that came with it. We adapted to online meetings and slowly got back to in-person meetings, finally being able to see each other masked face to masked face. None of us wanted to deal with all the restrictions but we made it work. Now we look forward to 2022, and everything a new year full of possibilities can bring. We will have to just go with the flow and adjust to anything that comes our way.

We don't have a meeting in December and know this time of year is busy for everyone. Between too many holidays in a short period of time, hectic work schedules, and it gets dark at 5pm, there isn't much time during the winter. Thinking of that, we do have something special planned for you, a Winter Auction! We will be starting the Winter Auction in January so that everyone can recover from December and have time to get together any items they wish to donate to the auction. The Winter Auction will be just like the online auctions we have done in the past. Photos of items with a description, will be posted and you will be able to bid on whatever items you like. During the week you can check on your items and increase your bids to make sure you win the items. It's easy and a lot of fun! The auction will run January 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>, with item pick up on January 17<sup>th</sup>. So, you have now till January 6<sup>th</sup>, our January meeting date, to get some items together to donate to the auction. We are looking for plants, cuttings, seeds, pots, yard decorations, gardening tools, books, rocks, home decorations, holiday items, ornaments, and anything else you would like to donate. The sky is the limit, and every item is greatly appreciated!

We have a few ways on getting items to the auction. You could send me photos of the items you have to donate and then bring them to the pickup date. We could find a time to meet to get items from you. Or bring them to the January 6<sup>th</sup> meeting. Another option is, if you're donating an item from Amazon you could have it shipped to me to save time. Lots of ways to make it easy for you. We just need all items by January 6<sup>th</sup>. A separate email with more details will be coming your way. Please send me any questions or photos you have by email, [rob\\_scott@yahoo.com](mailto:rob_scott@yahoo.com).

I mentioned before that winter can be a scary time for those who grow cactus and succulents. Do I water or not? Do I need to cover? Remember if you're unsure its best to not water and bring the plant to a protected area that still gets a lot of light. It's always best to err on the side of caution. If you have any questions on how to protect your plants, please email me. This is why we have a club, to share knowledge and ideas to help us all become better at our hobby.

Reminder, that renewal forms are due by the end of the year!

This is the time of year that we reflect on everything we are thankful for and look back on the year we had. Hold on to times of joy, and time spent with loved ones. Grow from the darkness and pain. Be kind to everyone and have patience, as they are going through the same issues as you. Remember that nothing lasts forever, so enjoy what you have and spread as much happiness as you can.

*Happy Holidays!*

**Robert**

**DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS:** Janet Moos (2<sup>nd</sup>)  
 Monte Tackett (6<sup>th</sup>)  
 Eddie Etheridge (6<sup>th</sup>)  
 Doris Hooton (8<sup>th</sup>)  
 B.J. Franz (14<sup>th</sup>)



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A sympathy card was sent to Rob Scott on the death of his grandfather, Ken Scott. He was 97.

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### CSSA NEWS

The Cactus & Succulent Society of America, our national organization, has created a new membership category called Supporting Membership, which only costs \$20.00 (as opposed to the regular \$50.00 membership.) Most of the benefits of belonging to the organization are included with the exception of the CSSA journal. The new membership form can be found on the CSSA website ([www.cactusandsucculentsociety.org](http://www.cactusandsucculentsociety.org))

If you can support CSSA by joining, I urge you to do so. This is an organization well worth our assistance because of all the work they do in the fields of education and conservation. And if you can afford the regular membership level, I think you will enjoy the journal, which is a very interesting and professionally produced publication. *Sue*

**The desert is a carbon sink**, as important as conifer forests for soaking up the carbon we're pumping into the sky. Even a seemingly lifeless expanse of low-desert Mojave hosts immense cryptobiotic networks of living organisms that feed off carbon dioxide. It's the reason you should keep your mountain bikes and hiking boots on trails; human traffic breaks up and kills the macrobiotic crust that holds the desert together, keeps it from becoming loose sand like on a desert road.

■ Ken Layne, [www.desertoracle.com](http://www.desertoracle.com)

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### CACTUS MUSIC

Have you ever thought of a cactus as a musical instrument? That wouldn't occur to most people, but it did to American avant-garde composer John Cage (1912-1992). He was famous for his improvisational compositions. To hear his work "Child of Tree" played on a ferocactus, Google the title or 'amplified cactus' for Youtube views.

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### What does it mean?

- Brachy : a prefix meaning 'short'
- Brachyclada : having short branches

### OBSERVATIONS ON REBUTIA, ETC

A few years back, Miles Anderson (Miles' To Go, [www.miles2go.com](http://www.miles2go.com)) contributed these thoughts online:

"I have noticed the tendency of gymnos, sulcos and especially rebutias to become malformed with age in greenhouse culture. I have also noticed that many gymnos and fraileas will crest with age. From observing quite a few collections, [I think] this phenomenon seems linked to culture and not disease.

"If you compare the mature size of many of the South American species vs. the cultivated size, you often find a ten-fold increase in cultivation. We are providing the plants with an opportunity to achieve growth unknown in the wild. For example, the mature size of the normally solitary *Gymnocalycium ragonessii* is perhaps 4-6 cm. in diameter, but I ended up with a clustering specimen 16 cm. in diameter.

"We are simply overfeeding many of the plants we grow. The best grown plants I have seen (and not in my collection) were given as much sun as they could handle, adequate water, but very little fertilizer. There was a perfectly grown *Notocactus haselbergii* about 8 cm. in diameter and 10 cm. tall. It was over 10 years old, not a mark on it, and densely spined. Commercially these can be grown to this size in 3 years. But these commercial plants, pushed that hard, often split or distort. But, then, you cannot make a living selling 10 year old *N. haselbergii*.

"My advice to growing rebutia well: keep them underpotted and on a diet."

## SCHLUMBERGERA SEASON

I was delighted to see my “Thanksgiving Cactus” is all decked out in buds, which will develop and open over the next few weeks. It’s an unnamed cultivar propagated by the millions and sold all over the country under various generic “Holiday Cactus” monikers. They’re sometimes marketed under the name *Zygocactus*, which is no longer a valid term.

These plants can sometimes be a challenge to grow. They prefer a well-draining mix—one part potting soil to one part perlite will work. Mixes with peat may tend to stay wet too long. If your plant is in an inorganic mix it may need a bit of fertilizer for good growth. However, over-fertilizing may promote vegetative growth at the expense of blooming.



Photo: Wikipedia

They’re sold for their flowers, of course, and you probably bought your plant when it was in bloom. These are short-day plants. Buds are initiated when days feature about 16 hours of dark and 8 hours of light. My plant lives on the patio, so is exposed to natural cycles of light and dark. If your plant is indoors, you might keep it in a back room, if possible. (Although, when I was still working, one of my office mates bought a small holiday cactus and kept it on the windowsill by his desk. As the office was never completely dark, due to emergency lighting at night, I felt confident to say that it wouldn’t bloom there. Then we came in one day to find the plant – blooming. So, I guess the plant didn’t read the books.)

Supposedly, these plants shouldn’t be exposed to temperatures below 50° but, as I’ve mentioned, my plant stays outside, through heat and cold. It is protected, though, by the patio roof and many surrounding plants. An untoward issue with low temperatures when the buds are forming is that pastel colors—white, yellow, other light colors—may bloom pink, instead. Look for the “Holiday Cacti” in the garden shops soon. *Sue*



## BACK TO BASICS: SOIL MIX

By Jim Daniel

(The late Jim Daniel operated Cactus Gem Nursery in Cupertino for years. He wrote a lot on basic plant culture—some of which I have used in the newsletter in the past. In light of all the newer members we have, I thought this would be of interest. Certainly, fewer topics related to plant culture receive more attention than what potting mix to use. Ask a dozen cactus growers what mix they use, and you’ll get a dozen different “recipes”. *Sue*)

The purpose of soil is to hold plants in an upright position, store and release water and nutrients, to allow the circulation of oxygen around the root system. Soils consist of mineral and organic material mixed in variable amounts. Mineral materials are rock, gravel, sand, and clay; these are the basic building blocks of any natural soil. Everyone knows that watered rocks do not hold moisture for very long and are very low in nutrients. Clay, the fine ground rock material, holds water too long, is too tightly packed to allow good water penetration or air circulation. Clay is difficult to wet after becoming dry, but it does hold and release nutrients very well.

*(Continued on following page.)*

Organic material is animal and/or vegetable remains that are mixed with mineral ingredients to make our native soils. Some desert and mountain areas are very low in organic material and some of the level lands are very high in organic debris. The high organic soils are the very best farmlands; low organic soils are used mainly for grazing animals. Sandy desert soils are useful if watered and fertilized heavily. As fresh humus begins to decay, it robs the soil of nitrogen. As the humus continues to rot, the nutrients are returned to the soil for the use of living plants

The ideal soil mix for succulent plants should be a mixture of mineral and organic ingredients that allow air and water to penetrate easily but that doesn't stay wet for long periods of time. The mix should hold nutrients for a reasonable period of time. Heavy clay soils discourage root growth by being difficult for the roots to penetrate. Since clay holds nutrients so well, the plant roots can gain all the food that's needed without searching through the mix. Consequently, plants grown in clay have very small root systems. Sandy soils are easy for plant roots to penetrate and are low in nutrients so plants grown in sandy soils have heavy root systems.

By all means standardize your soil mix so all your plants may be watered and fertilized at the same time. Most dealers use an artificial soil mix that varies from plaster of Paris mixed with perlite to solid pumice, to pure humus and everything in between. In choosing a personal planter mix, use enough sand and rock so water soaks in easily and enough humus for good aeration, water retention and nutrients. A good test is to wet some of your mix, squeeze a handful and if it remains in a ball you have too much clay. Add coarse sand or pumice until the ball of mix falls apart when you open your hand.

Cactus Gem Nursery's mix is the result of 30 years of searching for the ideal growing medium. This is our best effort so far, but we are still searching for El Dorado (the perfect mix). This mix develops healthy plants with a strong root system but does need regular fertilizing.

5 parts redwood compost (sawdust with added nitrogen)

3 parts #2 Olympic sand

2 parts red lava fines or pumice

To each 3 cubic feet we add one 3-inch pot of pelletized garden fertilizer for a quick start. Some growers substitute 1 part crushed oyster shells for one part sand to this mix for limestone loving plants such as Ariocarpus, Escobarias and Astrophytums.

For a small collection of plants, add 1 part #2 Olympic sand to 3 parts of Supersoil.

[Ah, Supersoil: this ubiquitous product seems to be either loved or reviled by growers everywhere, both amateur and professional. Dave Grigsby, the legendary founder of Grigsby's Nursery in Vista, grew everything in 50% Supersoil and 50% perlite. Several growers have said that they've found what looked like ground up pencils in the mix. By all means screen the mix before you use it. In fact, do this with any bagged mix. *Make up your own mind. Sue*]

2022

# Fresno Cactus & Succulent Society

**Membership Application: New |\_\_| or Renewal |\_\_|**  
**Annual Membership Renewals Due by January 1<sup>st</sup>**

Single Membership with email newsletter \_\_\_\_ X \$20.00 = \_\_\_\_  
Single Membership with paper newsletter \_\_\_\_ X \$30.00 = \_\_\_\_  
Family Membership with email newsletter \_\_\_\_ X \$30.00 = \_\_\_\_  
Family Membership with paper newsletter \_\_\_\_ X \$40.00 = \_\_\_\_

New / Replacement Name Badges \$5.00 EA. # of Badges \_\_\_\_ x \$5 = \_\_\_\_  
(Make sure name/s are printed legibly below)

Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Checks payable to: Fresno Cactus & Succulent Society (FCSS)**  
**Mail to: FCSS – 12307 Gleason Dr Madera, CA 93636**

**INFORMATION FOR CLUB USE ONLY:** [ ] Check here if you don't want your information available on the internet

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Check if Change |\_\_|

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Birthday(s) Optional – Month & Day \_\_\_\_\_

The club publishes an annual Roster containing all current members' information as shown above and distributes it to club members. If you do not want some of your information published in the Roster let us know.

I am interested in helping out in the following areas. Please contact me.

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- Refreshments     Hospitality     Sunshine     Special Events

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