

ADROMISCHUS AGAIN? THERE'S MORE?

BY FRED G.



If you remember our last encounter back in January with Adromischus, you may recall that not much was said about the plants. It was mostly my complaining about not getting anywhere writing something for the newsletter. Or me foolishly boasting that I was known throughout the land as “The King of All Things Adromischus marianae ‘Herrei’” forevermore. It truly became that thing about the counting of chickens while they were still in their original containers. There still may be some action when my garage plastic bag garden warms up in a few weeks.

Quite often someone will comment on the things I write and most of the time it is positive or at least constructive criticism. That January piece generated an offer punch in the nose or a kick to the seat of the pants. I forget which it was but would decline either if given a choice. This person said that, after reading what I had written, they knew even

less about Adromischus than before! And thanked me for wasting their time.

One woman said that growing Adromischus or my comments about them helped her maintain her figure. I would think that it is more genetics, diet and exercise. I will be discreetly monitoring this situation. Adromischus are found in Southern Africa and live in many different kinds of environments but none are desert plants. They mostly grow in places that provide some kind of protection from the afternoon sun and harsh drying winds, such as under shrubs, between rocks and in grassy habitats. In a container in the Central Valley during the summer in the afternoon sun they will turn yellow and die. This is not to say that they are not tough plants. They can take all kinds of abuse. But as all of you know the plants we grow look great with a little care.

They are in the large, widespread family of the Crassulaceae, being closely related to Cotyledon, Tylecodon and Kalanchoe. Quite a few of the species are extremely variable in their leaf shape, size and color. To the average collector with no experience seeing the plants in their natural setting it is hard to imagine that some are even related although they are individuals displaying the other end of the physical characteristics, which makes up their species. There is a very good book about adros by three British gents that really helps in identifying a plant you may have without a name—but sometimes I examine closely and compare with the picture and am still not really sure. Fortunately for us, most adros encountered have a name attached to them. Unfortunately for us, sometimes they are all grown from a single plant that is widespread in cultivation. It could look a little different from the one we already have because of the seller’s unlike growing conditions.

If you are aware that adros are not the kind of plants that you can push along with lots of water and fertilizer, they are very easy to grow. This is especially true during the summer when most of them are semi--dormant. The general succulent collection is having its growing season in the hotter months and adros are just lounging. Do not mistake this slightly withered look for a request for more water. I don't segregate my adros from my other plants but I don't leave the hose on them too long when it's hot. They need a little moisture but are going to look better and do most of their growing during the spring and fall.

Adromischus are perfect for someone who doesn't have lots of room or likes small plants. The majority of them branch from low down on the stem. The new stem develops roots and anchors itself while the older stem, even though it doesn't die, has lost its vigor and slowly fades away. Another reason why there are few large adros is because most are very fragile, shedding leaves at the slightest bump. The leaves send out roots quickly and it isn't long before plantlets form. As with most things in the garden, the most desirable are not the ones that are sprouting up everywhere! They can be very easily propagated by stem cuttings as well. I'll let you know on the raising from seed end of it. So far it doesn't look promising!

Since I have been using the "New! Modern! Safe to use!" systemic insecticide* I don't have any problems with bugs of any kind. Before then I do recall aphids sucking the juices from the flower stalks and new growth and the seemingly ever--present mealy bug. They both can be dealt with by employing persistence. When using a chemical to kill insects always read the label and follow directions. If it will kill insects it really can't be completely safe for other organisms.

I have a story about Adromischus but it is true about other plants and all living things. "Cactus Show Season" is coming up very soon so this is a timely warning. Years ago I was at a cactus show and they made me buy plants. Well, they really didn't make me. I tried to get out without purchasing any plants. To me, water boarding doesn't sound that bad but after watching it done to someone else who "didn't need any new plants", it didn't look like all that much fun. So I picked out some plants including a bunch of Adromischus, whipped out my checkbook, dropped some dollars and put the box of plants in the back of my car. I really had what I thought were some really nice adros! I stopped for lunch and parked the car in the sun. When I got back after about an hour all the adros were yellow and dead, as was most of the stuff in my box. As I recall it wasn't that hot out that day. It was awhile ago and I still remember it but I have burnt other plants in vehicles since then. I've parked in the shade and the sun shifted. I was only going to be there for a couple of minutes. Something happened on several occasions where I disfigured or killed some plants. Carry an old sheet with you on plant buying excursions. Adromischus always reminds me of this.

- Merit (sold as Bayer Tree & Shrub Insect Control)

Photos by cactus-art.biz