

ADROMISCHUS

By Fred Gaumer

Sue, our editor, who has been doing a great job since at least the last century, is always looking for articles for the newsletter. I try to provide something every once in awhile and often I am fired up and excited about a species of plant or somewhere I've been and it is easy for me to sit at the computer and write a couple of paragraphs. Occasionally I think I did a good job and held the interest of the reader and that it was more than just a series of letters and punctuation marks used for ballast. So I had a couple of ideas that I kicked around and started to write but I got nowhere. If you are thinking that most people would say, "I got nowhere fast", that is not me. I can type a lot quicker than I could when I first started but it still takes me awhile even if I have a real plan. After a session of writing I noticed that I've been at it for hours. When two or three topics end up in the recycle bin I pretty much have lost interest! Luckily for me, Sue corrects my poor grammar and crappy punctuation. I guess I should also thank Bill Gates' crew for their Spell Check technology! They save me all the time.

By this time you are probably wondering why he put 'Adromischus' at the top of the page. When I was trying to come up with something, Adromischus was one of the topics I was attempting to launch. I was totally frustrated with myself. I decided to look on the Internet to see if I could find any information on adros. It was that or fantasize about how many blows it would take using the ax I have in the garage to sever it completely in half and send my monitor to the Promised Land! Oh, I shouldn't even say things like that. My wife would not like it, either. She thinks it is mostly

her computer. And at this time of year I am trying to get in a few good deeds or at least some good behavior to catch the attention of Santa Claus.

Twenty years ago if you said that you were going to "Google" something or someone, anyone present would gasp and press their knees together. In my opinion the Internet really has come a long way or at least searching for plant information there has. The first website that I opened was really informative with lots of pictures. What really grabbed my attention was that this guy was growing adros from seed. In his photos there are tiny plants that are just so amazing. In 2009 I pollinated some of my adromischus plants and put the dried flowers and seed capsules in envelopes and did nothing with them until earlier this year when I ground them between my fingers over some potted plants. I wish I remembered which pots I scattered them into. This is called trickle seed growing*. It is for the lazy but I thought that it would be an attempt at doing something. Again this year I pollinated adros and had the dried flowers in envelopes. So after being inspired by this website and the fact that my writing project had stalled I decided to clean the seeds. I thought that this would give me time to think about what to write.

The first to be cleaned was *Adromischus marianiae* 'Hallii' seeds. These plants have leaves about the size and shape of nickels and they grow along the surface of the soil. One of the seed parents has beautiful rose-colored leaves. I didn't get many seeds of this species and planted them in my usual way of seed growing. The second was the form called 'Herrei', another variation in the diverse species of *A. marianiae*. This form resembles large raisins of many different colors including a large leafed red one. This time I had more clones to work with and more flowers. This means more seeds.

I should mention that the seeds are a little larger than dust. The capsules are five to a flower and are like miniature pea pods and when dried they must be split open to extract the seeds. I don't want to clean what I think would be a reasonable and throw the rest away. And I do not want to give away seeds that I am not sure if they are viable or not. So there I am with a pair of tweezers in each hand and magnifying glass headgear on sitting hunched over the kitchen table with all the lights in that end of the house on. It is like being at an Asian restaurant where there are only chopsticks on the table and the wait staff has completely disappeared. The food looks and smells really good and no one else seems to be having trouble with chopsticks. I'm sure with the magnifier on I look like some kind of mad scientist sitting there mumbling to myself. In my seed cleaning tray there seems to be a potential *Adromischus* for every succulent grower in the world. The seeds seem to be two different colors, suggesting to me that some are good and some not. I am there for hours pinning down these small capsules with one tweezers and splitting the capsule with the other. My wife has the house decorated for Christmas and views my seed cleaning operation as a mess. I look at it and think that what it needs to look really festive is a tall Bloody Mary. Maybe we have a reindeer stir-stick somewhere!

There will be a day when I will be finished. I have my seed raising pots all ready to go and labels made with the date I intended to start the seeds written on the back. I guess that a couple of days won't mean much when I look at my little plants sometime in the future but it is starting to get tiring. Please don't think that I am doing this all day but I have quite some hours wrapped up in this project. I strip two or three capsules, sit up straight, lift the magnifier, take some breaths and repeat. After looking through the magnifier

for an hour my vision seems to be impaired. Someday I will finish and it will have been worth it. I will have enough *Adromischus* seedlings that airline pilots flying over will tell their passengers to look out the starboard side of the aircraft to see them!

*Trickle seed growing is probably the best way to grow cacti like *Ariocarpus*, *Turbinicarpus* and a lot of plants like them, allowing the seed to fall around the parents, germinate and grow until the next repotting. Very small seed will produce very small seedlings that are easily overcome by fungus. Often fungi will get their foothold on the debris that comes along in with the seeds, like capsule fragments. Some fungi can wipe out a batch of seedlings in hours and even if you catch it in time effective chemicals can often damage the small plants. How do these plants survive in the wild without us?