

# CACTUS CORNER NEWS

Fresno Cactus & Succulent Society

<http://www.fresnocss.com>

*Affiliated with the Cactus & Succulent Society of America*

Vol. 42 No. 12

December 2023

**HOLIDAY PARTY, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7<sup>TH</sup>, 6:00 p.m.**

**REDEEMER LUTHERN CHURCH**

**1084 West Bullard, Fresno (Near NW Corner of Palm and Bullard)**



# Happy Holidays

and

A Happy New Year

From F.C.S.S



Holiday Party December 7<sup>th</sup>, 6pm

**FROM THE PREZ:****Hi Members,****December Holiday Party**

Our Annual Holiday Party is almost here! I'm hoping everyone can join us on **December 7<sup>th</sup> at 6pm**, as we feast and come together to celebrate. This year we are having a Pasta and Salad buffet for our Holiday dinner. The buffet will consist of Shrimp Scampi Pasta, Grilled Chicken Alfredo, Spaghetti with Meatballs, Caesar and House Salad, Garlic Parmesan Breadsticks, and of course apple and pumpkin pie.

We will also have a variety of drinks to choose from. All our members and their family are welcome to attend the Party and if you would like dinner, tickets are \$10.00 per person. I'm extending the **deadline until December 3<sup>rd</sup>**. If you would like to go, please contact Rosanna (559) 999-0017. It's too late to mail payment but you can pay at the door, we just need your RSVP. We work on the honor system so please plan to come once you RSVP. Tickets are also nonrefundable, if for some reason you can't attend after purchasing a ticket. We will have people serving the food and for people wanting to take their dinner home, we will have to-go containers.

**Holiday Silent Auction**

Along with the delicious pasta we are having our Holiday Silent Auction during the party this year. I will have tables lining the room to display the items and there will be many to choose from. It's not too late to donate items, I'm extending the **deadline to December 1<sup>st</sup>**. Email me a photo of the item with a description, the item to the party. All types of items can be donated, like plants, cuttings, seeds, books, top dressings, pots, garden items, home decorations, and holiday items. The sky is the limit. Then on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, I will email out a list of all the items with photos to entice you into bidding. Then attend the Holiday Party and bid on the items you would like to win. Bid high to secure your bid and keep your fingers crossed. We haven't had the Silent Auction in person for a few years, so this will be fun to have everyone running around increasing their bids as the clock ticks down. Payment can be done in check or cash, bring a good amount for those large wins!

**End of Year Wrap Up**

The Holiday Party marks the end of the year, and this is when we thank our Board for the work they have done throughout the year. During the Party, we will give our Board and others who have positions in the club a handmade Tony Sharp pot to thank them for their work. I would personally like to thank our current Board, Karen Willoughby, Rosanna Rojas, Michele Roberts, Christeen Abbott-Hearn, Dominic Ortiz, Craig Roberts, Bill Gale, Cindy Duwe and Sue Haffner for their work on the Board and helping run our Club. A huge thank you to Mary Ann Villegas for making our Newsletter each month, which is a lot of work. Thank you to Vickie Veen for keeping our website updated and running. A special thank you to Nancy Jobin for making sure we have snacks at our meetings. Thank you to Fred Gaumer for always doing a fantastic job with the Brag Table. A big thank you to Jose Soto for working on and fixing our technical issues at each meeting. Thank you to everyone who helped us by volunteering or donating items this year. The Club only functions and survives when we come together and we can't do that without your help, thank you! I hope everyone can attend the Holiday Party as we finish up another year enjoying our Club. **Remember Party starts at 6pm!**

*Thank you, Robert*

## DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS



**Melanie Salwasser (4<sup>th</sup>)**  
**Monte Tackett (6<sup>th</sup>)**  
**Eddie Etheridge (6<sup>th</sup>)**  
**David Madrigal (11<sup>th</sup>)**  
**Bryan Robinett (12<sup>th</sup>)**  
**Sue Bohigian (15<sup>th</sup>)**  
**Veronica Navarro (23<sup>rd</sup>)**  
**Angie Muniz (25<sup>th</sup>)**

\*\*\*

A get-well card was sent to Mary Ann Villegas. For you newer members, Mary Ann is the wizard who formats our newsletter. Those of us who provide content just email it to her and she turns it into a fantastic newsletter. Thank you, Mary Ann!

From Mary Ann: "Thank you for your kind wishes!"

\*\*\*

**SUCCULENT BONSAI:** Join the latest CSSA webinar on Saturday morning, Dec. 9<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 a.m., for a talk on the techniques of bonsai with succulents. The presenter, Al Klein, spent 35 years in the plant business. <https://cactusandsucculentsociety.org/>

In fact, you might consider joining CSSA, our national organization. There are several levels of membership, including a \$20 status which excludes the quarterly journal but provides the quarterly online newsletter, *To The Point*, notifications of the webinars, access to the Seed Depot, etc.

The quarterly journal is considered the premier cactus and succulent journal in the world. CSSA also publishes an annual scientific journal, *Haseltonia*.

\*\*\*

**Calling all cactus fans:** <https://cactiguide.com/> is a website that is very useful for cactus hobbyists. Created by Daiv Freeman, proprietor of Exotic Plant Books, it has articles on plant culture as well as an encyclopedia of cactus genera. You can find answers to a lot of questions and find links to other sources.

## Questing for cacti?

Google <https://www.youtube.com/c/CactusQuest> for a series of video visits to succulent collectors and collections in California and the Southwest with Hunter and his pals. Quirky.

\*\*\*

**THE CURIOUS CURIO:** This may be the holiday season, but it seems like the plant taxonomists never take a holiday from renaming plants.



This time it's the genus *Senecio* that has been taken apart. Twenty former *senecios* are now in the genus *Curio* (Latin for "curious"). Actually, this arrangement was published in 1997 and has only in recent years begun to be used by nurseries and authors. These species differ from the other *senecios* by having ever-green, striated leaves and discoid flower heads that lack ray florets.

*Curio* includes different forms from low-growing ground covers to trailing cascades of string succulents. All are native to South Africa. It contains such well-known plants as "String of Pearls" (*C. rowleyanus*, pictured); "Chalk Sticks" (*C. repens*); "String of Bananas" (*C. radicans*); "Candle Plant" (*C. articulatus*); and "String of Tears" (*C. citriformis*).

(Illus from <https://www.planetnatural.com/> )

\*\*\*

**DORMANCY:** Dormancy is a period in plants when their growth slows down, usually brought about by such environmental issues as temperature, drought or length of daylight. For most cacti, they can be kept dry until spring. They need a dormant rest to set buds buds for spring bloom. Other succulents are growing now. Examine your plants; water those that show they need it. As a longtime plant grower (and killer) I can attest that there are exceptions to every "rule" in horticulture. All I can say is get to know your plants; find what works for them and you. **Sue**

**NOVEMBER BRAG TABLE:** We had a beautiful array of plants on (and beside) the Brag Table last month. Exhibitors included Mark Muradian, Bill Gale, Dan Gale, Ann Bierbower, Bruce Hargreaves, Jess Hull, Fred Gaumer, Carolyn Unruh and Nancy Jobin. Many thanks to all of them. The next opportunity to show off your plants will be in January. *Sue*



Additional plant photos on page 6.  
~ ~ ~  
Photos by Robert Scott

## HOLIDAY CACTI

### *Schlumbergera*



The holiday cacti are grown mostly for their beautiful winter flowers. The original “Christmas Cactus” is a hybrid between *Schlumbergera russelliana* and what used to be known as *Zygocactus truncatus*. (You still see names “*Zygocactus*” plants in the garden shops.) This later species has since been transferred to *Schlumbergera*, and is now *S. truncate*. The “Zygocacti” are characterized by having teeth on the edges of the stem segments”, giving rise to the common name “Crab Cactus” “Crab Cactus” (also called “Thanksgiving Cactus” — by U.S. Growers— for its late November/early December bloom period.) The “Christmas Cactus” has smoother, more scalloped stem segments. The areoles, which all cacti have, are situated in the scallops along the edges of the stems.

This hybrid is technically known as *Schlumbergera xbuckleyi*. A number of hybrids have been developed, exhibiting many shades of white, pink, lilac, red, orange, and yellow. The flowers range from zygomorphic (irregular) in the “Zygocacti”, to regular in the hybrids more related to *S. russelliana*.

The 6 species of *Schlumbergera* are native to the coastal ranges of Brazil, where they grow as epiphytes— on trees or as saxicolus—on rocks.

The holiday cacti tend to have their heaviest bloom around the holiday for which they are named—though healthy plants may bloom two or three times a year. There are some general “rules” usually cited for getting these plants to bloom:

- The optimum temperature for setting buds is 50-60 degrees. Any higher or lower minimum temps tend to retard bud development.
- Fertilize with low nitrogen, high potassium formulation when the buds form, in order to bring about larger and more long-lasting flowers.
- Giving them the ‘short day’ treatment can make them bloom earlier.

Once buds do form, they can abort if the plant is moved, so leave it where it is.

### *Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*



Another holiday cactus is the “Easter Cactus”. These plants have smooth stem edges like the Christmas cactus, but have a number of hair-like spines at the tips of each segment and have radially symmetrical flowers. These for a long time were called *Rhipsalidopsis*, with two species. The pink-flowered *R. rosea* is smaller in both growth habit and flower size than the *R. gaertneri*. Strikingly beautiful hybrids between these two species have been developed. Later taxonomists have lumped the two species together as *Hatiora gaertneri*. The hybrids are called *Hatiora xgaertneri*.

These are all pendant, epiphytic cacti which grow in semishade. They will do well in any standard cactus mix, but the addition of extra organic material (either humus or leaf mold) is appreciated as long as the soil remains well-drained. They will tolerate severe underpotting. They are jungle cacti and so appreciate higher humidity than their desert cousins. They should not be allowed to go completely dry between waterings, and can be liberally watered when actively growing or in bud. They will tolerate winter minimum temps below 50 degrees, but prefer more warmth. Some growers have a problem with their Christmas cacti, when they seem to dry up. Dick Kohlschreiber writing in the newsletter of the South Bay Epiphyllum Society, addresses this problem: “What do you do if your plant starts withering? If this occurs right after they bloom, I wouldn’t worry about it too much. It’s probably due to the stress of blooming.

(Continued on following page.)

If the plant has not bloomed and it's withering, it does not necessarily indicate that the plant is too dry. So don't water it unless you check for sure that it needs water. Withering often indicates some type of root problem. On the withered plants I've had, 9 out of 10 of them are too wet. If you want to try to save a withered plant, cut back on watering and put the plant in a cool shaded place. Make cuttings in case the plant doesn't survive. Other signs to watch for are roots forming at each joint. Sometimes if the foliage turns red, it's a sign that the plant is stressed. If your buds drop off or segments fall off the plant, it may be due to low humidity or sudden changes in temperatures."

**SHORT DAY TREATMENT:** all of the above species and hybrids are short-day plants. They require a certain length of darkness in order to initiate buds. Plants should be kept away from artificial light at night. If you need to keep your plants in the house, put them in a back room and keep the lights off.

Years ago, a fellow in my office had a "Thanksgiving Cactus" on the windowsill. I felt confident telling him that the plant would not bloom in that location, as it was never fully dark it was illuminated all night with security lights. Of course, the plant paid no attention to me. It went ahead and bloomed and continued to do so several times a year. So much for that "rule". *Sue*

Photos: Wikipedia



**Additional Brag Table photos.**



### BOOPHONE DISTICHA



This is one of those extraordinary plants that, once seen—even if just as a picture in a book—remains with you forever.

*Boophone* (pronounced boo-AH-fu-nee) is a genus of very large, often above-ground scaly bulbs in the Amaryllis family native to South Africa and neighboring countries. There are two species, *disticha* and *haemanthoides*, similar in appearance and sometimes mistaken, one for the other. The more common in cultivation is *disticha*, which occurs in two distinct areas, the summer rainfall region (spring flowering and summer growing) and a winter rainfall region (autumn flowering and winter growing.) The two growth patterns are genetically fixed and cannot be changed. They are commonly found in grasslands and rocky areas.

The bulb is protected by dry scales and projects above ground. In either spring or fall—depending on its origin—the bulb sends up a sturdy stalk of deep pink fragrant flowers. As the flower head dries, it is dislodged by wind and tumbles across the landscape, throwing its seeds everywhere. After flowering, the bulb sends up a fan of gray-green distichous leaves usually with crimped edges.

The odd generic name is from Greek, *bous* = “ox” and *phonos* = “slaughter.” This means that all parts of the plant are very toxic. Numerous alkaloids have been isolated from *B. disticha* and it has long been used by indigenous people as a treatment for skin conditions, arrow and fish poison and, in very small amounts, as a sleep aid. Even the pollen has toxic qualities. The well-known botanical artist, Dr Auriol Batten, recounts how when painting the plant from a fresh flower, she developed headache, drowsiness and sore eyes. (“Sore Eye Plant” is one of the common names for *Boophone*. Another is “Century Plant,” as the bulb can live for many years, even reaching the size of a bowling ball.)

Another remarkable quality of the plant was revealed in 1998 when archaeologists discovered the mummified body of a native San hunter in a cave in the Kouga Mountains. The body had been carefully wrapped in the scales of *B. disticha*. So toxic were the bulb scales that the wrapping—along with the dry climate—had kept the ancient body in a well-preserved state, protecting it from insects and flesh-eating organisms.

The Pacific Bulb Society (source of the above illustration) recommends growing these bulbs in a well-draining mix in a deep pot with bone meal added to the growing mix. It doesn’t need to be watered during dormancy, but a bit of water now and then won’t hurt. **Sue**

References: Binneman, J. (1999) “Mummified Human Remains from the Kouga Mountains, Eastern Cape”, *The Digging Stick*, 16(2), p.1-3 (<https://www.archaeology.org.za> > vol\_16\_no\_2)  
<https://www.pacificbulbsociety.org>

Xaba, P. and Duncan, G. (2008) “Boophone disticha: The Century Plant”, *Veld & Flora*, 94(1), p.38-39.

**Club Access: President**, Robert Scott, (559) 960-3665, [rob\\_scott85@yahoo.com](mailto:rob_scott85@yahoo.com); **Vice-President**, Rosanna Rojas, [rfrojas96@gmail.com](mailto:rfrojas96@gmail.com); **Treasurer**, Michele Roberts, (559) 645-5257, [robertshowse@comcast.net](mailto:robertshowse@comcast.net); **Secretary**, Karen Willoughby, [pkatwillobee@gmail.com](mailto:pkatwillobee@gmail.com); **Editor/Sunshine**, Sue Haffner, (559) 292-5624, [sueh@mail.fresnostate.edu](mailto:sueh@mail.fresnostate.edu); **Publisher**, Mary Ann Villegas, [maryann@maracast.com](mailto:maryann@maracast.com); **Webmaster**, Vickie Veen, [vickieveen@gmail.com](mailto:vickieveen@gmail.com); **Refreshments**, Nancy Jobin