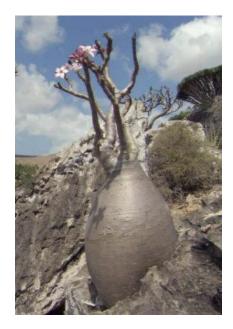ADENIUM SOCOTRANUM

By Sue Haffner

Adenium socotranum is endemic to the island of Socotra in the Indian Ocean, south of the Arabian Peninsula and east of the horn of Somalia. It is the giant of the genus, with a conical trunk several yards tall and up to 8 feet in diameter. The stems are strongly vertical and show distinctive horizontal striations. The leaves are dark green with a reddish or white midrib and light major veins.

In habitat the species is characterized by a long dormant period; the plants don't usually leaf out until mid-summer. October to December is the normal rainy season on Socotra, but plants in cultivation, some watered all year around, show different growth patterns. Mark Dimmitt reports in "Adenium: sculptural elegance, floral extravagance" (2009), that his plants do not leaf out in winter, despite being watered. He recommends responding to the cues of the individual plants.

Photo from www.bihrmann.com

The plants flower in late spring, with blossoms pale to medium pink with pink or yellow throats. Some specimens in the wild have deep pink to nearly red flowers.

Dimmitt also reports that A. socotranum does not like the summer heat in Tucson AZ. The plants are much happier in a humid greenhouse with daytime temperatures in the mid 90s. Their cold tolerance isn't known with certainty, but C and J Nursery (Vista CA) found that plants grew poorly and failed to flower when moved to an unheated greenhouse (temps 41-50° F), and co-author Gene Joseph (also in Tucson) lost his plants in an unheated winter greenhouse.

Gordon Rowley, in "Pachypodium and Adenium" (1999), considered A. socotranum as a subspecies of A. obesum, but Dimmitt describes these two species as incompatible with each other. His attempts at hybridizing the two have been unsuccessful. C and J Nursery have crossed socotranum and arabicum successfully.

The experts don't recommend this species for beginners. Dimmitt writes: "Even a young collector will not live long enough to grow a specimen resembling these wild plants."