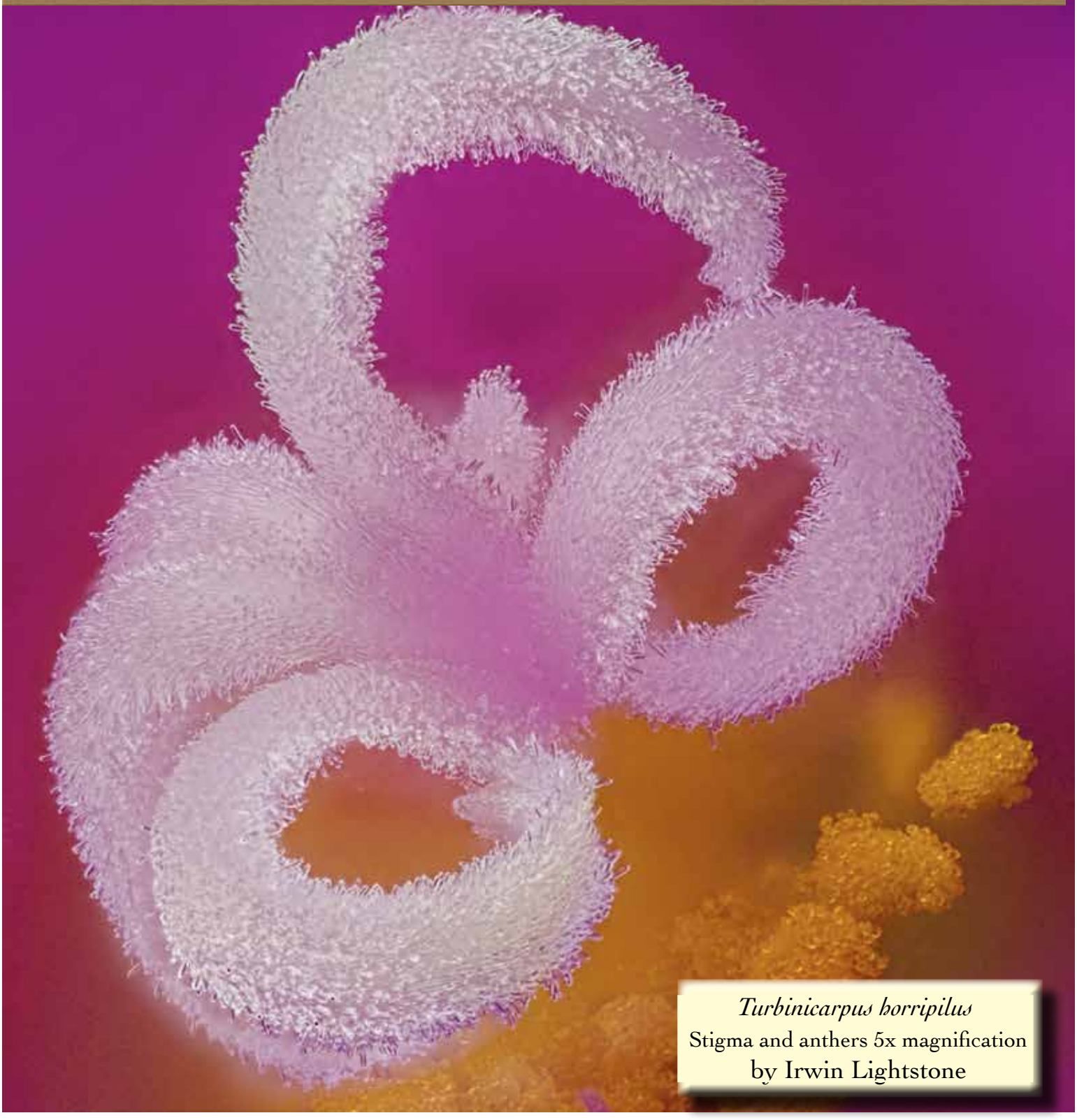
Vol. 62
No. 6

November-December 2025

Kaktos Komments

a bimonthly publication of the Houston Cactus and Succulent Society
to promote the study of cacti and other succulents



Turbinicarpus horripilus
Stigma and anthers 5x magnification
by Irwin Lightstone

Vol. 62, No. 6 November-December 2025

Houston Cactus and Succulent Society
Founded in 1963
Affiliated with the Cactus & Succulent Society of America

From the Editor — Karla Halpaap-Wood

Thank you for all the contributions to this edition of the KK.

After more than 10 years as KK editor I found a successor, Lauren Morris. I am confident we all will be very happy with her version of the KK. Please help her by submitting pictures and articles by the deadline.

Membership — Sara Ortiz

On September 24, 2025, we met at the Metropolitan Multiservice Center. Twenty-seven members attended the meeting. John Weistroffer, Eddie Novak, and Joseph Rodd presented the program titled "Members Showcase." They displayed their unique garden setups and inspired us with their creativity. We also enjoyed a lot of fun with door prizes donated by our members.

On October 22, 2025, we gathered again at the Metropolitan Multiservice Center. Twenty-one members were present, several dressed up for Halloween. Barron Rector from the Texas Department of Agriculture gave a program on the cactus moth, Cactoblastis Cactorum. David Van Langen presented the Cactus of the Month, Echinocereus Dasyacanthus. We also had a great deal of fun with door prizes donated by our members.

Additionally, we held our election for the upcoming term, and the officer positions will be filled as follows:

President: Andrea Varesic
First Vice President: John Weistroffer
Second Vice President: Vicki Treybig
Recording Secretary: Alexander Zabula
Treasurer: Jennifer Peskey

Calendar:

November 12, 2025	7:00 pm Board Meeting via Zoom
November 19, 2025	7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Program: Hands on presentation how to root prune a cactus for repotting.
December 11, 2025	6:00 pm Christmas Party at Juarez Mexican Restaurant, 4145 Gessner RD. Ste F, Houston, TX 77080
January 1, 2026	Deadline for submitting articles for the KK.

November Cactus of the Month

Jennifer Peskey

Uebelmannia pectinifera

Listed as Endangered. The species is threatened mainly by habitat loss and collecting pressure in parts of its region.

Endemic to the state of Minas Gerais, southeastern Brazil. It grows in rock-strewn campo rupestre (dry savanna/rocky outcrops), typically on sandstone/quartzite ledges and in rock pockets at roughly 650–1,350 m elevation. Populations are geographically patchy and tied to specific rocky substrates.

A solitary cactus that is globose when young and becomes more columnar with age (commonly reaching up to ~50–100 cm tall but often much smaller in cultivation). The epidermis is often granular or waxy, green to grayish (sometimes brownish tones). Ribs number broadly from ~15 to 40 (varies by subspecies), with closely spaced, felty areoles. Spines are few (typically 1–4), brown to dark, often arranged in a comb-like (pectinate) pattern — the species name refers to this comb-like spine arrangement. Flowers are diurnal, funnel-shaped, pale yellow to greenish-yellow and small (around 1– 1.5 cm long). Fruits are pear-shaped to cylindrical, reddish-purple when ripe, containing small dark seeds.

Requires very fast-draining mineral substrate (cactus mix with extra grit), bright light — often full sun for many hours — and warm temperatures year-round. In cultivation *Uebelmannia* benefit from regular but careful watering during the growing season and a dry, cooler (but not freezing) rest in winter; they are sensitive to cold and to poorly drained soils (root rot). Propagation is primarily by seed; plants are slow-growing. Humidity tolerance is variable, but many growers recommend good air circulation and avoidance of prolonged high humidity.

Relatively rare in trade due to conservation status and slow growth; available from specialist cactus nurseries and collectors (often as seed or small plants).

References

IUCN Red List. (2024). Uebelmannia pectinifera. Retrieved from https://www.iucnredlist.org CITES Appendices. (2024). Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Llifle Encyclopedia of Cacti. (n.d.). Uebelmannia pectinifera species description. Desert Tropicals. (n.d.). Uebelmannia pectinifera species profile.

Photos by Jennifer Peskey

November Succulent of the Month

Vicki Treybig

Echeveria pulvinata

Common names: Chenilleplant, Plushplant, Rosy hens-and-chicks, Ruby Slippers, Cats and Kittens.

DESCRIPTION AND HABITAT:

Echeveria pulvinata belongs to the *Crassulaceae* family. It is native to southwest and central Mexico and thrives in rocky areas and on cliffs. The plant features rosette shaped, fleshy green leaves that are covered with fine velvety white hairs. When it receives enough sunlight during the colder months, the leaves develop striking red edges. *Echeveria pulvinata* produces tall stems with small, bell-shaped flowers and can bloom in the spring, early summer and mid to late winter. The flowers are typically orange-red or yellow and attract pollinators such as bees and butterflies. The fuzzy leaves also attract pet hair and dust! I periodically clean the leaves off with a soft paint brush.

CARE AND PROPAGATION:

This succulent is easy to care for and can be grown both indoors and outdoors, provided it receives plenty of sunlight and has well-draining soil. It is well-suited to a semi-arid environment due to its high drought tolerance, needing water only once every three weeks. As an evergreen succulent, it stores moisture in its leaves. When grown indoors, it requires well-draining soil to prevent root rot and ensure proper hydration. They have a shallow root system and are susceptible to overwatering. Let it dry out between waterings.

During spring and summer, fertilize the plant every four weeks using a diluted succulent fertilizer. In the fall, reduce the frequency to every six to eight weeks. Do not fertilize during the winter months. Do not over-fertilize to prevent root burn and buildup of salts in the soil. To maintain a healthy nutrient balance, flush the soil periodically.

Echeveria pulvinata has become popular due to its texture, beautiful colors, and ease of care. It is easy to propagate using cuttings. When it gets leggy, I just break off a section and stick it back in the soil. It makes an excellent addition to any indoor or outdoor plant collection. It has received the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit.

REFERENCES:

Leaf Snap; Wikipedia; GBIF Global Biodiversity

December Cactus of the Month **Liliana Cracraft**

Cylindropuntia leptocaulis (DC.) F.M. Knuth

SYNONYM
Opuntia leptocaulis

OTHER COMMON NAME(S)
Christmas Cactus, Pencil Cactus, Christmas Cholla, Desert Christmas Cactus. In Spanish: Tasajillo, Alfilerillo, Catalinaria.

HABITAT/DISTRIBUTION
USA: AZ , NM , OK , TX
Native Distribution: AZ to OK, TX & several states in northern México
Native Habitat: Mesas, flats, valleys & washes in deserts

DESCRIPTION
This is a 2-5 ft. perennial, upright, shrub-like plant with many branches made up of slender, cylindrical joints. These narrow, spiny branches often twist together with the branches of adjacent plants to form impenetrable thickets. New growth is dark green. Leaves modified into spines or glochids and emerging from areoles. With age the branches and trunk develop a scaly bark and turn pale tan. Spines in groups and of 2 types: one, 1/2 to 1 1/2 inches long; and the other, about 3/16 inches long. Leaves very small, falling early in the growing season. Flowers greenish, yellow, or bronze. Small, attractive, yellowish-green flowers are followed by fruits which cling to the stem into winter. Fruits are fleshy, red or purple, rounded, flattened at the end and tapering toward the base (berry-like), ripening in late summer.

This plant has the most slender stems of all southwestern Chollas. During winter its bright red fruits add attractive color to the brown desert.

CULTIVATION/GROWTH:
This plant requires very little water to grow. It requires full sun. The ideal soil must be gravely, sandy and heavier bottomland soils (fine-textured, clay-rich alluvial soils deposited by rivers in floodplains).

This cactus can become a pest if not controlled. It has narrow, spiny branches that twist together with the branches of adjacent plants to form impenetrable thickets. The sharp spines are difficult to remove from the skin.

Flowers are small, yellowish-green followed by fruit that gives it one of its common names...Christmas Cactus. Blooms time: April, May, July, August.

This cholla cactus is native to the Southwestern United States and northern Mexico, where it is adapted to survive cooler winter temperatures than many other cacti.
It is moderately tolerant of freezes, but it can sustain damage during hard or prolonged freezes.

Hardiness range: The tasajillo is hardy to USDA Zone 8a, with some sources claiming tolerance down to 25°F (-3.9°C) and others reporting it can survive temperatures as low as -10°F (-23°C). This variation likely depends on the plant's acclimation, dryness, and the duration of the freeze.

Freeze damage: During hard freezes, the water-filled cells of the cactus can rupture as they freeze, causing the plant to collapse or turn to mush. The extent of the damage depends on the species, the intensity of the freeze, and the moisture level in the plant.

Recovery: A tasajillo that has collapsed or softened after a freeze may still have living tissue at its base. By trimming back the mushy, damaged parts, a plant often can regrow in the spring.

AVAILABILITY
This cholla can be purchased on Etsy. Inexpensive.

REMARKS
This is the first time I have written an article about a plant I don't have, but I like it very much, for many reasons. It is recognized by pollination ecologists as attracting large numbers of native bees, and is on display at the following locations in Texas:

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center - Austin
Brackenridge Field Laboratory - Austin

Texas Master Naturalists - Lost Pines Chapter - Bastrop
Native Plants Society of Texas - Austin Chapter - Austin

The fruits are crushed and mixed with a beverage by the Apache, Chiricahua, and Mescalero to produce narcotic effects.

REFERENCES:
https://www.wildflower.org/plants
https://southwestdesertflora.com
Anderson, E. The Cactus Family, 2001

https://southwestdesertflora.com/WebsiteFolders/All_Species/Cactaceae/Cylindropuntia leptocaulis, Christmas Cactus.html

https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=CYLE8

December Succulent of the Month

Elizabeth Jackson

Euphorbia horrida

Common Name: African Milk Barrel
Scientific Name: *Euphorbia horrida*
Family: *Euphorbiaceae*
Subfamily: *Euphorbioideae*
Genus: *Euphorbia*

Don't let those spines fool ya. It's a Euphorbia!
At first glance it might resemble a cactus but this species name 'horrida' is Latin referring to those rows of spines that might be considered a deterrent to some and if that's not enough it has Latex (milky white sap), which can be a skin irritant. *Euphorbia horrida* is resilient in nature and will make a beautiful addition to your collection.

Origin and Habitat: This species is native to South Africa. The Great Karoo is a semi-desert natural region.

Description: This distinctive *Euphorbia* is a clump-forming succulent. Its unique appearance has wavy ribs with spine-like structures which are rigid and can grow up to 1.6 inches in

length. These structures are a dried remnant of its flower stalks. Offsets will form from the base and with age will become a dense clump. They are bluish green in color and typically cylindrical.

Cultivating/Growth: This *Euphorbia* is very easy to care for. Don't worry so much about the soil pH but, keep it in well-draining soil so you don't get root rot. Water it weekly in the summer if you see that the soil is dry between waterings. It will thrive in bright indirect light, avoid direct sunlight in the hottest hours of summer. Fertilize during its growing season.
In the winter restrict watering for its dormant period. Mature healthy plants are tough and can tolerate lower temperatures if the roots are kept dry. Can easily grow up to 3 feet in height with a 3-to-5-inch diameter.
Can be propagated from seed sown during the spring or summer but it can more easily be reproduced by offsets. Again, watch out for that white milky sap and don't get it in your eyes or mouth. Very important to use protective gloves when handling.

References:
www.llifle.com
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Euphorbia horrida (African Milk Barrel) - World of Succulents

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www.desertmyths.com
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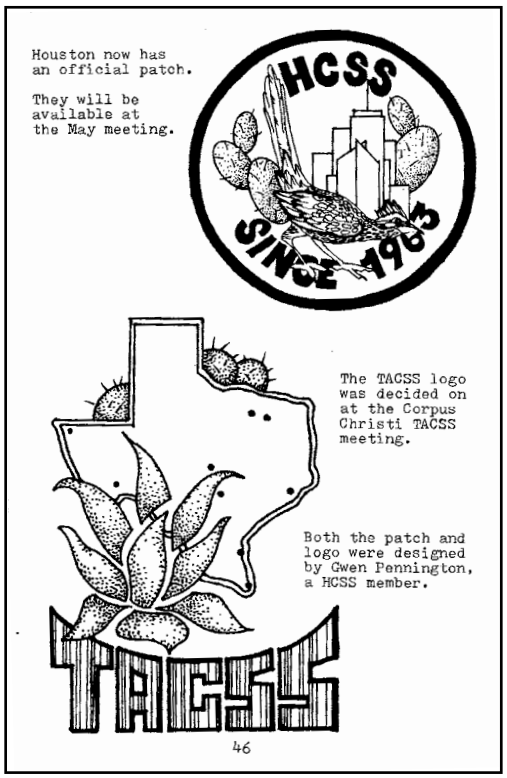
Map Image:
https://www.freeworldmaps.net/africa/southafrica/southafrica-map-physical.jpg

Photos Euphorbia horrida belong to Elizabeth Jackson

HCSS has a new logo. Lot's of work and modifications went in it. All members had a chance to vote for it and approve. The old logo was from 1983. TACSS is still using their logo.



From KK Volume 21
May/June 1983

President's Message

Dear members,
The annual meeting of TACSS was a great success! This was our year to host this fun cactus gathering of all the clubs in Texas. Mercer Botanical Gardens was an excellent venue to host the 93 attendees. We had eight vendors that sold plants, pottery, and cactus leather goods to the attendees and the general public. The outdoor space, below the treehouse, was busy all day.
In the clubhouse, we had the formal meeting. There were five speakers, a cactus and succulent judging to crown the Texas grand champions, a silent auction and a live auction of donated plants.
I would like to thank all who donated their time, their cactus, expertise and spent their cactus money with us. We had a tech run through, a Friday set up and all day Saturday staffed with our club volunteers. A big thank you to everyone that came out!
Our chairmen were Kristi Schmidt and Eddie Novak and this event would not have happened without them. Our club is growing and thriving all because of you! I look forward to another year, filled with cactus and fun!
Sincerely, Andrea Varesic
2025 HCSS President

TACSS Seminar 2025
Mercer Botanic Garden
October 18-19

TACSS board meeting under the treehouse

2025 TACSS Fall Seminar Schedule

Day 1: Saturday, October 18th, 2025
Mercer Botanic Gardens (22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, TX 77338)

Time	Mercer Botanic Visitor Center
8:30-9:00am	Check-In Opens
9:00-9:15am	Welcome remarks
9:15-10:15am	**Irwin Lightstone**: "Intimacy, Exploration, and Wonder...Celebrating 30+ Years of Plant Photography"
10:15-10:45am	Break (Visit vendors!)
10:45-11:45am	**Gierayl Clepper - Madame Cacti**: Small Genus, Big in Cultivation, Astrophytum
11:45-12:45pm	Lunch (Visit Vendors!)
12:45-1:45pm	**Philip Richards**: Succulent Asclepiadaceae: Flies Love Them and So Will You
1:45-2:15pm	Break (Visit vendors!)
2:15-2:30pm	**Barbara Schulze**: The SACXS Legacy Project
2:30-3:00pm	**Steven Lovecky**: Plant Rescue
3:00pm	Silent Auction Ends
3:00-4:00pm	Rare and Unusual Plant Auction and Announce Cactus & Succulent Best of Show Winners
4:30pm	Closing Remarks

Time	Mercer Treehouse Building (Outside)
9:00-4:30pm	Vendor sales

Time	Willie's Grill & Icehouse (6815 Grand Parkway W, Spring, TX, 77389)
6:00pm	TACSS Banquet

Day 2: Sunday, October 19th, 2025
Mercer Greenhouse (21922 Finch Landing Ln Humble, TX 77338)

Time	Mercer Greenhouses
10:00-12:00pm	Tour of Mercer Greenhouses

Registration

Auction

Grand Champion

Dinner

The Speakers

Madame Cacti - Gierayl Clepper

Small Genus, Big in Cultivation – Astrophytum

The genus *Astrophytum* really fascinates me. Their unique star-like appearances are very attractive. My love and fascination for *Astrophytum* gets deeper as the years pass by. For me the act of planting is satisfying in itself. Watching it grow brings daily pleasure and knowing that others will benefit brings deep meaning.
Astrophytum comes from hot and dry regions of Mexico and in the small southern part of United States. It grows on rocky limestone and sandy soils. Currently, genus *Astrophytum* includes six recognized species of cacti.

Irwin Lightstone

"Intimacy, Exploration, and Wonder…Celebrating 30+ Years of Plant Photography"

On the evening of my return from a photography workshop, I affixed the base plate of a greenhouse wall to the slab foundation. Drilling into the concrete to attach the anchor bolts, I knew I was building a home for my two hobbies: raising succulents and plant photography. After 30 or so years, that marriage has grown, flourished, and enriched my life. See how photography can deepen your growing experience.


Aloe polyphilla


Crassula cv. Buddha's Temple


Echeveria _Cubic Frost_ flower 2.5x

Biography:
Pursuing his passion over his profession, Irwin closed his law practice of 29 years to become a full-time photographer. From 2010 through 2013, he was a staff photographer, then head of the photography department of the Wilson History and Research Center in Little Rock Arkansas. Since that time, he has pursued his artistic vision. Specializing in highly detailed, artistic images of cacti and succulents, Irwin's images are widely published and collected. Publications that featured his work include the Cactus and Succulent Journal, Hasseltonia, Sansevieria, To The Point, CactusWorld, several National Geographic publications and the

new Dudleya book. In addition to private workshops and numerous programs for plant societies and photography clubs throughout the country, he's led workshops and programs sponsored by the Dallas Museum of Art, the International Photography Hall of Fame, The Huntington, the North America Association of Nature Photography, and the CSSA. Irwin is formerly the President of the North Texas Cactus and Succulent Society. He is Vice President, a member of the Board of Directors, and Co-Chairs the Conservation Committee of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America.


Ferocactus latispinus


Mammillaria mystax spirals


Stapelia erectiflora flowering


Mammillaria perezdelarosae


Flowering lithops

Philip Richards

Succulent Asclepiadaceae: Flies love them (and so will you!)

In this presentation, several topics were covered including what they are, their natural distribution, life cycle, pollination and cultivation advice.

The succulent *Asclepiadaceae* that were in focus were the *Stapelias* and simlar genera, and the *Ceropegias*. They are related to milkweeds and have some of the most unique and complex flowers of all succulents. They are primarily found in the arid regions of the old world, stretching from South East Asia across Europe and all the way down Africa. Most species are found growing under shrubs where the microclimate offers some protection from the harsh sun and temperatures of these regions.

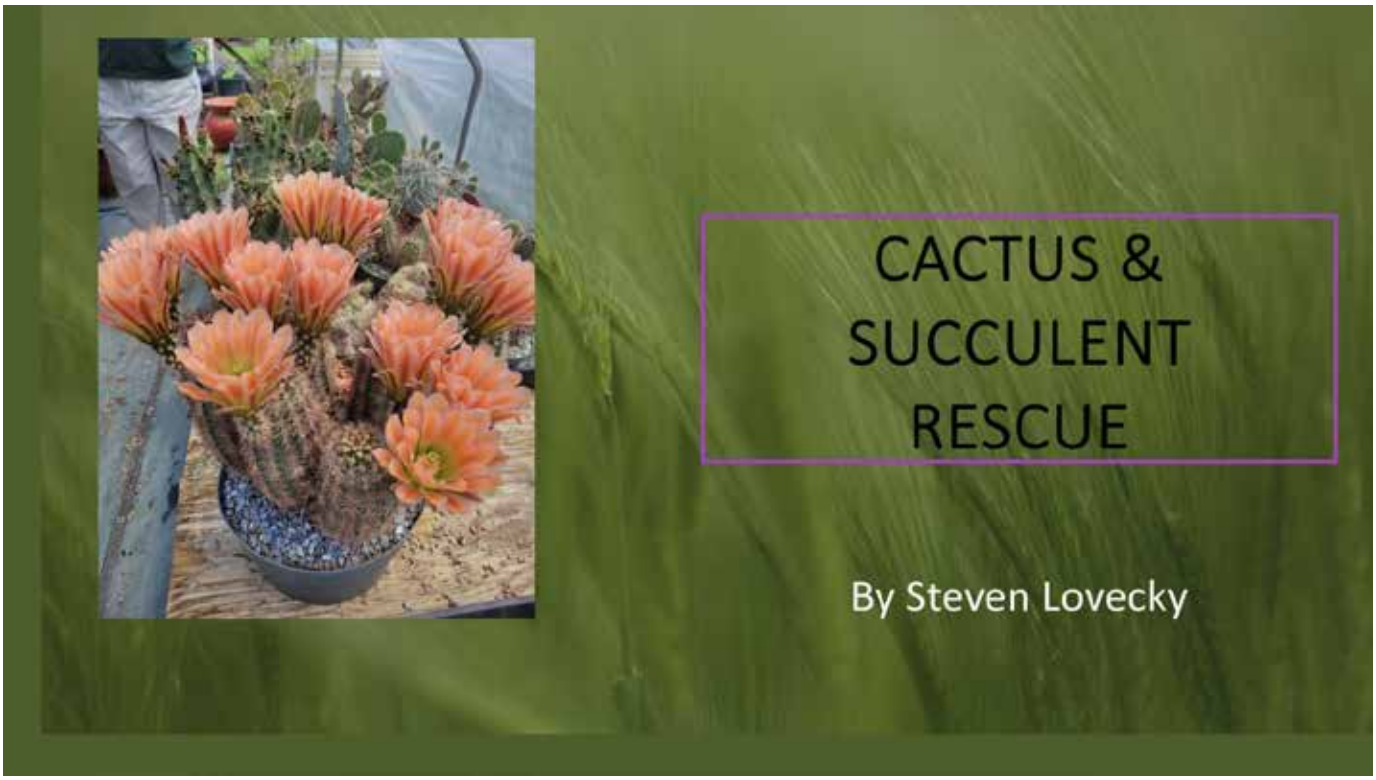
These plants have specialized pollination mechanisms, with the flowers attracting pollinators through some incredible flower colors and textures, as well as a range of odors from carrion, cow dung, dying bees, ripe fruit and even honey. What is also unique is that the pollen is packaged in parcels called a pollinarium, which attaches to an insects probiscus or leg and is then pulled off by wedging into a specific slot in another flower to complete pollination. The flowers develop into horn-like seedpods, that look like those of milkweed and contain similar wind-borne seeds.

The *Asclepiadaceae* that have succulent stems and star-shaped flowers are know as stapeliads and the most well known genera of this group of plants are *Stapelia, Orbea, Duvalia, Piaranthus, Edithcolea* but there are many smaller genera. *Ceropegia* are typically succulent climbing or trailing vines, with String of hearts (*Ceropegia woodii*) being most well-known. *Ceropegia* means 'wax fountain' which is a good descriptor of the remarkable structure of the flowers.

Cultivation of these plants is sometimes considered difficult, but this is not the case provided some general principles are followed. They like a well-drained soil, and it is best to have a mainly inorganic medium as organic matter like compost can encourage root rot. Water only when the plant shows signs that it needs water (slightly soft stems for example) and fertilize regularly in summer. They like hot weather and will usually only actively grow above 70F. Water minimally during winter when temperatures are cooler and the plants are dormant. Filtered sunlight is best, though some species do better with early morning sun but they are susceptible to sunburn from too much sun.

The most common issues are pests such as mealy bugs and spider mites. A systemic insecticide such as imidacloprid works well for mealys. Cycling between two different miticides can control spider mites. Fungal issues are the main disease that is encountered, and fungal rot should be cut away until heathy tissue is seen. This can be treated with sulfur and rerooted after the wound has calloused. A fungicide can be used as a preventative.

Hopefully this advice has been useful and you will give growing them a try. Feel free to reach out to me on the 'Thirst for Succulents' Instagram or Facebook page if you have any questions on these remarkable plants.



Steven Lovecky

Many of you have a bucket list as I do. But mine may be too full for the time I have left, but I want to share one with you. Over the years plant rescue has been a subject of interest to me and cacti are the primary targets. As I consider the demise of these wonderful plants and challenges we face to protect them, I am overwhelmed as I consider a rescue plan for such a large state as Texas and the huge area where cacti occur. But, as they say, "you got to start somewhere". The great state of Texas is basically divided between private property, city, state and federal lands. My focus at this stage is on state and federal lands, specifically highway right-of-way. I can even narrow that down to Interstate 10 which runs east and west across the state. The highway right-of-way which includes intersections and service roads is a great place to observe many species of cacti and other succulents. Expansion and maintenance unfortunately have led to the destruction of many of these plants. I in no way desire to interfere with any of the important functions of our highway system. It is certainly gratifying to be able to drive to the "cactus country" in a matter of hours. My goal is to establish procedures to rescue and appropriately relocate these plants before they are destroyed. I hope others will join me in this endeavor.

Looking forward, I hope to be able to communicate with those interested throughout the state through TACSS regarding any possible rescue projects. Until that time, feel free to contact me at StevenLovecky@gmail.com.

Barbara Schulze

SACXS Legacy Project: How did it begin?

Two events lead to a shift in the operation of SACXS to embrace the original mission of the Club set forth in 1977; the year the club was founded. One event was the growing uneasiness of the Board of Directors concerning the promoting of trips to collect wild plants in Texas and the second event was the discovery of 3500 poached Ariocarpus fissuratus, that had been seized by the US Fish and Wildlife Dept. in 2015. Jimmy Black was the recipient of 300 of those plants with the goal of reintroducing them into habitat.

Since that time SACXS has reinforced its mission statement to once again include "conservation and protection" as guiding principles. The Legacy Project was created in 2022. The club now bans inclusion of any field collected plant into any aspect of the Society's operation or programs unless the field collected plants are being used for educational purposes. The decision was made to discontinue the promotion and support for any event that targeted field collection of wild plants. Further, the Board required that no field collected plants be allowed into the annual Sale or offered as auction plants during regular monthly meetings.

The Purpose of the SACXS Legacy Project is to reenforce the updated goals of the original mission through education and promotion of native and nonnative xerophyte species. The term "Legacy" signifies our inheritance of the original intent of the founding members, the responsibility of conveying this intent to current and future members, and to promote the conservation and preservation of threatened and endangered species.

The Legacy Project includes 5 goals:

- Goal #1 Conduct data-gathering through literature review concerning the current status of the native Texas xerophytes and Chihuahuan Desert plants.
- Goal #2 Encourage the ethical propagation of all xerophyte species.
- Goal #3 Educate SACXS members and the general public regarding the conservation status of xerophytic plants, desert habitat, and other dry-land environments.
- Goal #4 Participate in club-sanctioned conservation activities.
- Goal #5 Designate individuals, businesses, organizations, and club activities as having met the core goals of the Legacy Project.

Other current and on-going conservation-minded activities that fall under the Legacy Project umbrella:

Promoting ethical sustainable practices among members and non-members.

Organizing a list of ethical and reliable cactus and succulent merchants to be distributed to SACXS members.

Providing tips on how to purchase on-line cactus and succulents and seeds safely and ethically.

Coordinating with the San Antonio Botanical Garden to create accurate ID signs for the cactus and succulents in the Desert Pavillion Conservatory.

Coordinating with the San Antonio Botanical Garden to create signage for the Desert Pavillion that provide information for visitors including Cactus Anatomy, Global Distribution of Cacti, Texas Cacti, General Conservation, Grafting, Mutations, "What is a Cactus?", Desert Plant Adaptations, and Ethnobotany of Desert Plants.

Researching local events that might be a good fit for a Legacy Project Display to further our education of the public.

Open Backyard at Eddie's

HCSS Leadership and Contact Info

President: Andrea Varesic
First Vice President: John Weistroffer
Second Vice President: Vicki Treybig
Recording Secretary: Alexander Zabula
Treasurer: Karina Boese
KK editor: Karla Halpaap-Wood
Webmaster: Sarai Ramirez
Membership: Sara Ortiz
Education: Sabrina Kamioka
Ways and Means: Eddie Novak
CSSA and TACSS affiliate: Liliana Cracraft
Social and Special Events: Lauren Morris
New Member Coordinator: Teresa Lynn Podlipny-Kirk
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