KACTOS KOMMENTS

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

Volume 63 Number 1 **January-February 2026**

Snow-covered *Yucca rostrada*

by Kristi Schmidt

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

From the Editor — Lauren Morris

I would like to extend a huge thanks to Karla Halpaap-Wood for taking the time to pass down her knowledge in creating the KK. As I take on editorial responsibilities, I know that I have big shoes to fill - so please do not hesitate to reach out with any suggestions or feedback for future editions!

IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR ANNUAL HCSS MEMBERSHIP DUES

Your Membership Renewal is due on January 1st. It's $20 for Individual, $25 for Family and $5 for a student. You can bring your check payable to HCSS to the next meeting, send payment through Zelle at hcsstreasurer@gmail.com (include your name and Membership Dues for 2026). Please advise if you have a new email address, address or phone number. New members please complete the membership form (https://files.cdn-files-a.com/uploads/10140608/normal_69179653dc5ec.pdf) and email to membership4hcss@gmail.com if using Zelle. Members who have not paid by January 30th will be dropped from Membership and will not be included in the Yearbook

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Calendar

January 14, 2026	7:00pm Board Meeting via Zoom
January 28, 2026	7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Program: Some Consequences of Adapting to Desert Life by Professor Jim Mauseth from the School of Biological Sciences at UT Austin
January 30, 2026	Last day to pay dues for 2026 Membership
February 25, 2026	7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Program: Introduction to Plant Photography by Irwin Lightstone from the North Texas Cactus & Succulent Society
March 1, 2026	Deadline to submit articles for the KK

2026 President's Message

Happy New Year everyone!

I hope you all had a great holiday season!

It was a pleasure and a joy to be your president in 2025! I look forward to another fun filled cactus and succulent year, as your returning president. Thank you for this continuing honor!

Our year was filled with meetings, field trips, garden tours and friendships. Our social calendar was full! The May sale was a lot of fun. We exceeded our previous sale in the number of vendors, monetarily and in attendance. In October, at Mercer Botanical Gardens, we hosted the TACSS seminar. In lieu of a fall show and sale, we had a one-day sale in conjunction with the meeting. It was well attended by 96 cactus enthusiasts from our club and the other clubs in Texas. I would like to thank everyone who contributed their time and energy to make it a wonderful seminar!

Our membership continued to grow this year. We are now the second largest club in Texas. I appreciate all who joined us for activities and volunteered their time and energy into making this a reality. Without your hard work and involvement, our club would not be what we are today.

Happy new 2026 to everyone! I hope that your year is happy, healthy and filled with your favorite cacti and succulents.

Sincerely, Andrea Varesic

Membership — Sara Ortiz

On October 19, 2025, we met at the Metropolitan Multiservice Center. Twenty-three members attended the meeting. John Weistroffer presented the program titled "Hands-on presentation on how to root prune a cactus for repotting". Jennifer Peskey introduced the Cactus of the Month, *Uebelmannia pectinifera*. While Vicki Treybig presented the Succulent of the Month, *Echeveria pulvinata*. We had a fantastic time, thanks to the door prizes and raffle plants generously donated by our members. A big thank you to everyone who contributed! As always, the door prizes and raffles provided an excellent opportunity to expand our cactus collection.

We had a Christmas party on December 11th at Juarez Mexican Restaurant, and it was such a fun evening! We enjoyed a delicious dinner together and had a great time playing White Elephant. It was full of laughter, good food, and wonderful moments shared with everyone.

January Cactus of the Month — Jennifer Peskey

Melocactus matanzanus

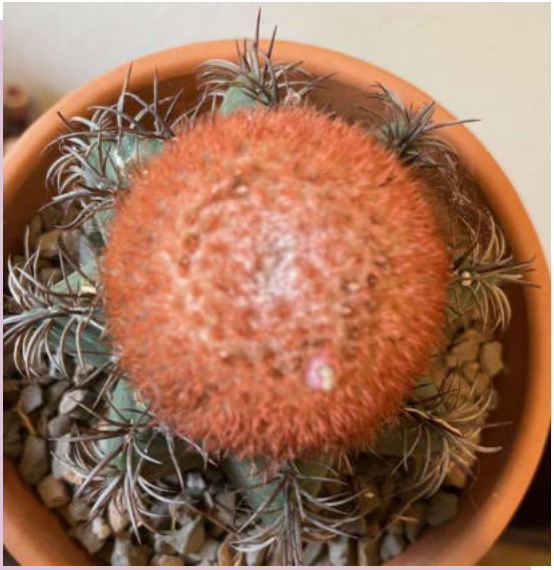
Common name: Dwarf Turk's-Cap Cactus

Description and Habitat:

Melocactus matanzanus is a small, spherical cactus known for its distinctive cephalium — a dense, woolly, reddish structure that forms at maturity on the top of the plant. The main body is bright green, ribbed, and usually grows 3–10 cm tall, though it may become wider with age. Short, stiff spines line the ribs and vary in color from whitish to brown. Once the cephalium forms, the cactus stops growing in height; flowers and fruits emerge only from this cap.

This species is endemic to Cuba, primarily the Matanzas region, where it grows in dry, rocky habitats such as coastal scrublands and limestone or serpentine outcrops. These environments are characterized by intense sunlight, high temperatures, and very fast-draining soils. Due to its restricted range and habitat loss, *M. matanzanus* is considered endangered and is protected from wild collection.

Care:



In cultivation, *Melocactus matanzanus* requires conditions similar to its natural habitat. It thrives in bright, direct sunlight and should receive several hours of full sun daily. A well-draining cactus or succulent soil mix amended with sand, grit, or pumice is essential to prevent root rot.

Watering should be done sparingly. During the growing season (spring through early fall), water only when the soil has completely dried. In winter, watering should be greatly reduced. The plant prefers warm temperatures and low humidity and should be protected from frost, as cold temperatures can cause damage or death. Fertilization is minimal; a diluted, low-nitrogen cactus fertilizer may be applied occasionally during active growth.

Propagation:

Propagation of *Melocactus matanzanus* is almost exclusively done by seed, as the plant does not produce offsets. Seeds should be sown on sterile, well-draining soil and kept warm and lightly moist until germination. Growth is slow, and it may take several years for seedlings to reach maturity and develop a cephalium. Some growers graft young plants onto faster-growing cactus rootstocks to accelerate early growth, though seed propagation is preferred for conservation purposes.

References:

- Anderson, E. F. (2001). *The Cactus Family*. Timber Press.
- Llifle – Encyclopedia of Living Forms. "*Melocactus matanzanus*."

- World of Succulents. "*Melocactus matanzanus* Care and Propagation."
- Wikipedia contributors. "*Melocactus matanzanus*."
- GBIF Secretariat. *Melocactus matanzanus* species profile.

January Succulent of the Month — Carol Gaas

***Fockea edulis* (Hottentot Bread)**

Fockea edulis is a caudiciform plant native to southern Africa, notable for its large, tuberous rootstock (caudex) and vining growth habit. The genus name *Fockea* honors 19th-century German botanist H. G. Focke, while the species epithet edulis ("edible" in Latin) refers to the traditional use of the caudex as a food source by indigenous peoples during times of scarcity.

Synonyms: *Chymocormus edulis, Pergularia edulis, Fockea cylindrica*

Common Names: Hottentot Bread, Bread plant. "Hottentot" historically refers to the Khoikhoi people, and "Bread" reflects the starchy, water-rich caudex that can be processed into a flour-like substance.

Habitat and Distribution:

The species grows in arid and semi-arid regions of South Africa and Namibia, typically on rocky, well-drained slopes and scrublands. The caudex is often partially buried or concealed among stones, and populations tend to be scattered.

Description:

Fockea edulis develops a large, solitary caudex that stores water. Young caudices are mostly subterranean, but with age, they may become exposed and take on a rounded, irregular shape with grayish to brown surfaces. Slender, twining stems emerge from the caudex. Leaves are ovate to elliptic, green, and deciduous during drought or cool periods. Flowers are small, star-shaped, greenish to yellow-green, and borne in clusters. Fruits are paired follicles that release flattened seeds with silky hairs for wind dispersal.

Cultivation and Growth:

This species requires a very well-drained, mineral-rich substrate and bright light, preferably including periods of full sun. It thrives in warm conditions with moderate watering during the growing season, followed by a drier rest period in dormancy. *Fockea edulis* is sensitive to cold and excessive moisture. Growth is slow, particularly for the caudex, and propagation is primarily by seed.

Availability:

It is available from specialty succulent and caudiciform nurseries, though large, mature specimens are rare and often expensive.

Remarks:

As a succulent enthusiast, I have found this plant forgiving of neglect. Watered sparingly and fertilized infrequently, it continues to bring joy with its untamed vining habit. It has yet to bloom, but remains a captivating addition to my collection.

Reference: LLIFLE Encyclopedia of Succulents- https://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/SUCCULENTS/Family/Asclepiadaceae/11329/Fockea_edulis

February Cactus of the Month — David Van Langen

Thelocactus bicolor

Thelocactus bicolor is a small to moderate size cylindrical cactus found in the Chihuahuan Desert. It is very common in the northern parts of Mexico but is fairly rare in Texas, where there are small populations in the Big Bend area and the lower Rio Grande Valley. This globular cactus is usually under a foot tall with 8-13 vertical ribs and covered with bristly spines that can be yellow to white while some varieties or locales may have brightly colored pink to red central spines which can be longer, flat and upturned. The stems are normally single even though some varieties may form clusters. The spectacular flowers give this plant its common name- Glory of Texas!

In Texas, *Thelocactus bicolor* var *schottii* can be found in the lower elevation deserts near the Rio Grande. They seem to be found to the west of Big Bend National Park and can be found in the Lajitas / Shafter/ Big Bend State Park areas of the lower Trans Pecos. Long red central spines are common in this variety. It is mainly found on limestone but also grows on gravelly flats, sandstone and volcanic substrate - all with little organic matter. Further north can be found the var *flavidispinus*. This smaller bodied plant mainly grows on Caballos Novaculite substrate north of Big Bend National Park and south of the small town of Marathon, Texas. It also has pretty yellow and red spines with upturned centrals. This cactus is usually under 4-5 inches tall and a single stem. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the type *Thelocactus bicolor* var *bicolor* is found. It is commonly seen growing in sparse mesquite / thorn brush country south of Laredo and down past Rio Grande City, typically in Starr County and near the river. This *T. bicolor* var *bicolor* also carries a lot of bristly spines with nice red coloration.

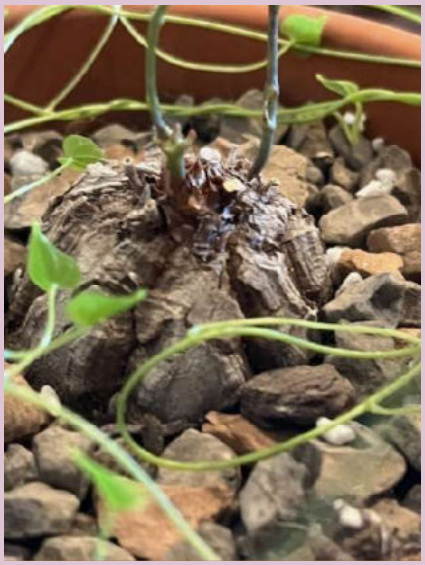
In northern Mexico there are several different varieties that grow over large areas of the Chihuahuan Desert. The var. *bolaensis* is a very nice-looking cactus that can grow over a foot tall. This variety is also known to make nice clusters and can have a dense covering of spines anywhere from deep red to yellow or white. There are several other varieties in Mexico with similar traits.

Now comes the good part!! The flowers!! *Thelocactus bicolor* has some of the finest flowers of any cactus!! They are usually purple to pink, with a deeper red throat. They can be up to 4 inches across and many times the tips will turn downward and cover the entire top of the plant.

Thelocactus bicolor is a fairly common plant in cultivation and is easy to grow given a very gritty soil mix with little organic material. They love full sun and are completely winter hardy here in Houston. They will not do well here if exposed to our 50 inches of annual rainfall but should do alright if located under the eaves of a house as long as it gets some good sun exposure.

February Succulent of the month — Jennifer Peskey

Dioscorea elephantipes



Common name: Elephant's Foot

Description and Habitat:

Native to the Eastern and Western Cape regions of South Africa, *Dioscorea elephantipes* inhabit rocky, semi-arid terrain where rainfall is seasonal and summers are dry. In habitat, the plant's large, woody caudex often grows partially below ground, serving as a storage organ that allows it to endure prolonged drought.

The caudex is the plant's most notable feature, developing thick, polygonal plates over time that resemble elephant skin. From the crown of the caudex emerges a twining vine bearing heart-shaped to triangular green leaves. As plants mature, the caudex becomes increasingly fissured and sculptural, making older specimens particularly desirable.

Growth Cycle

Unlike most succulents commonly grown in cultivation, *Dioscorea elephantipes* is a winter grower. Active growth typically begins in fall or early winter, when vines and foliage appear. During the hot summer

months, the plant enters dormancy and usually sheds its leaves. Understanding and respecting this seasonal rhythm is essential for successful long-term cultivation. During summer, *Dioscorea elephantipes* benefits from shade, reduced heat exposure, and minimal moisture. Overwatering during dormancy is the most common cause of failure in cultivation. Watering can be gradually resumed once new vine growth is observed in fall.

Cultivation and Care:

Bright, indirect light is ideal. Plants may tolerate some direct morning sun but should be protected from strong afternoon sun, especially during summer dormancy. A fast-draining soil mix is critical. A standard cactus or succulent mix amended with pumice, perlite, or coarse sand works well. Good drainage helps prevent rot of both roots and caudex.

Watering should follow the plant's growth cycle.

- Winter (active growth): Water thoroughly when the soil is completely dry.
- Summer (dormancy): Water very sparingly or withhold entirely. Occasional minimal watering may be provided if the caudex shows excessive shriveling.

Propagation:

Propagation is primarily by seed. While slow growing, seed-raised plants develop the most natural and aesthetically pleasing caudex forms. Vegetative propagation is generally unsuccessful for producing a true caudex and is not recommended. Elephant's foot can be found easily on Etsy or other specialty cactus and succulent nurseries.

References:

- Dyer, R.A. *The Genera of Southern African Flowering Plants*
- Van Jaarsveld, E. *Growing Succulents*
- International Caudiciform Plant Society (ICPS)
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew – Plants of the World Online
- Field observations and cultivation notes from caudiciform growers

CSSA News — Liliana Cracraft

Happy New Year! The Cactus and Succulent Society of America (CSSA) begins the year with some great news. First, they are offering a Special Affiliate Member Supporting Membership. For only $10/year, Members who join at this special rate will receive:

- The ***To The Point*** quarterly digital e-newsletter
- Notifications of CSSA monthly webinars
- **Access to purchase seeds** from the CSSA Seed Depot
- Supporting Member discounts to the CSSA Biennial Convention
- A meaningful way to support **CSSA's mission in conservation, research, and education**

Below are the details specific to our club:

Direct Discount Link (Recommended):
https://app.joinit.com/o/cactusandsucculentsociety/viDRLZXRuWmiEp7YS/?discount=Houston-Affiliate-Partner-Discount

Your Club's Discount Code:
Houston-Affiliate-Partner-Discount

Also exciting is the 2026 CSSA Photo Contest. **Theme – *From the Garden (Cultivated Plants)*.** Photos must feature cultivated cacti and other succulents grown in gardens, containers, or greenhouses. For the purposes of this contest, **greenhouses are considered gardens**, recognizing that many of our members rely on greenhouse growing due to climate challenges.

Entry Period: January 1 – April 1, 2026

Submission Guidelines

- CSSA is seeking visually striking images of succulents and other cacti in sharp focus
- Original photos only, with copyright owned by the entrant
- Each entrant may submit up to **three high-resolution JPG images** (max 20 MB per image)
- File naming format: Birth Year + City of Residence + image number (e.g., *1965-Altadena-01.jpg*)
- Include the location and year photo taken, and plant name for each image
- All photographic techniques and app editing are allowed—**no AI-generated photos**
- Entries must be submitted through their **website portal available soon!!**

https://cactusandsucculentsociety.org/2025/12/18/2026-photo-contest-from-the-garden-cultivated-plants/

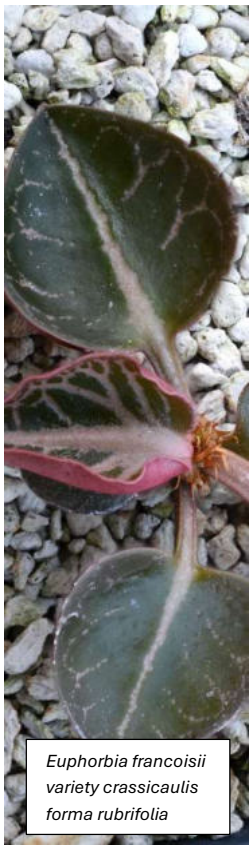
Prizes

- **1st Place**: $250
- **2nd Place**: $150
- **3rd Place & Honorable Mentions**: $50

All winners will be featured in the *Cactus and Succulent Journal*. For any additional information, send Liliana a message to: opuntia77@yahoo

Whatchmacallit thingii: Plant Nomenclature And Why it Matters by Jared Petker

Thank you to Jared Petker for allowing us permission to reprint from the newsletter of the San Diego Cactus and Succulent Society, Espinas y Flores January 2025
https://www.sdcss.net/_files/ugd/70ee7e_c21ce50cce44499e9907f2bf7f6e551f.pdf



Euphorbia francoisii variety crassicaulis forma rubrifolia

"Euphorbia francoisii variety *crassicaulis* forma *rubrifolia*."

That plant has a long name! It has as many syllables as I have fingers and toes. Does it have one of those common names so I can use that instead? And how is it even pronounced? Is it "fran-koh-ss-ee"? "fran-swah-ss-ee-eye"? Something else entirely? What's the difference between a variety and a form... and why do the other words matter? Looks like a tiny little palm tree to me anyways. I'll leave it at that. It's a tiny little palm tree.

These are the same thoughts that have run through my head in the past when I began learning about plants, or when encountering new species, I haven't seen before at nurseries and shows. I've embarrassed myself many times in front of nursery owners by chopping names up into bits and spitting them out for all to be confused by. Well, they were always nice about it, but I still felt embarrassed.

Somewhere between my first *Euphorbia pachypodioides* rotting and my second *E. pachypodioides* becoming curiously hollow inside, I decided I should start discovering more about why the plants I was learning to love had the names they had, and also how to pronounce some of them. Along the way, I learned a bit more about the taxonomic ranks below species and why any of it matters.

I hope to share some of what I have learned with you. Maybe we'll figure out what the tiny little palm tree is along the way.

A Hoodia by any other name (would smell as hideous)

We use names every day to refer to people: our spouses, friends, favorite athletes, or celebrities. LeBron James, an NBA star, is sometimes called "Bron," "King James," or "LBJ." However, "LBJ" also refers to former President Lyndon B. Johnson. To ensure clarity, I'd use LeBron's full name when discussing highlights from last night's game.

Plant names share these same qualities. There exist common names for plants which are used by the general public. Common names, often used in local languages, vary widely. Sometimes, different languages have similar common names for the same plant, or even different common names within a single language.

Beyond simply pointing, we need a way to accurately identify plants. Common names like "Crown of Thorns" (*Euphorbia millii*) or "Madagascar Palm" (*Pachypodium lamerei*) are convenient for everyday use and often reflect the plant's appearance or their geographic origin. However, common names lack standardization. For example, "Elephant Foot" can refer to several different plants, including *Beaucarnia recurvata, Dioscorea elephantipes,* and *Pachypodium rosulatum*. This ambiguity can lead to confusion, especially when identifying or researching specific plants. If we want to ensure preciseness when speaking about a particular plant, we'll want to use its scientific name presented as what's called a "Latin binomial"

The Latin binomial

The Latin binomial is a system for naming plants developed by Carl Linnaeus, an 18th-century Swedish botanist. This system uses a two-part name for each organism: the Genus (capitalized) followed by the Species (not capitalized). In *Euphorbia francoisii,* "Euphorbia" is the Genus and "francoisii" is the species, or specific epithet. Although the words themselves might not always be strictly Latin, they generally follow Latin grammatical rules.

Early botanists, including Linnaeus, often adapted Latin terms to describe plant structures. For instance, "filamenta" (threads) was used to refer to the stamen. When Latin lacked suitable terms, Greek words were incorporated. This resulted in a unique botanical Latin vocabulary that diverged from classical Latin.

Several factors contributed to the need for expanded botanical terminology. Increased global exploration led to the discovery of numerous plant species, requiring a more comprehensive naming system. Furthermore, advancements in microscopy revealed intricate details of plant anatomy, necessitating new terms to accurately describe these observations.

Today, in 2025 AD, there are nearly 400,000 known species of flowering plants. Each is uniquely identified by its Latin binomial.

On Pronunciation

There are two primary directions to go on pronunciation of botanical Latin names. Stearn describes the two systems neatly in his book on "Botanical Latin".

> *In English-speaking countries there exist two main systems, the traditional English pronunciation generally used by gardeners and botanists and the 'reformed' or 'restored' academic pronunciation adopted by classical scholars as presenting a 'reasonably close approximation to the actual sounds of language as spoken by educated Romans'*

That said, Latin is a 'dead' language, not spoken natively since the fall of the Roman Empire over a millennium ago. This makes definitive pronunciation uncertain. While understanding pronunciation guidelines is helpful for clear communication about plants, it's not crucial to obsess over. Pronunciation can vary, and we'll explore easier cases and helpful tricks in the upcoming sections when appropriate.

What's (literally) in a name?

With all these species, how will we figure out what all their names mean? Lucky for us, we can group *most* specific epithet name schemes into a few different categories. If we can figure out what category the species name is in for a plant we are engaging with, we can more easily figure out what it means, represents, or what to research. The most common categories in my opinion include:

- Species named for a descriptive characteristic (Latin based)
- Species named for a descriptive characteristic (Greek or other language based)
- Species named after a person
- Species named in honor of a person
- Species named for a place

I'll provide a description for each of these, followed by some examples. Photos of some of the examples are included in the gallery section of this article to aid in understanding what the species name is referencing when applicable.


Euphorbia brevirama

Characteristically Descriptive Names (Latin-based)

Many plant names reflect their characteristics (morphology, growth, etc.). Ideally, the species name alone would distinguish plants within a genus. However, reality doesn't always end up meeting that desire.

Latin-based plant names often use descriptive words to highlight a plant's (hopefully, but not always) unique qualities within its genus. Non-exhaustively, these can include color, shape, size, appearance, specific plant parts, or a mix of several of these.

The terms found in these names generally come from some root word in Latin, and may appear in a form that is not exactly the way the root is formed.

- *Euphorbia aeruginosa* - aeruginosa = verdigris i.e. "copper rust". Referring to the color of the branches
- *Euphorbia albipollinifera* - albi = white + pollinifera, in reference to the white pollen
- *Euphorbia brevirama* - brevi = short + rama = arm. It has short arms.
- *Euphorbia debilispina* - debil = weak + spina = spine. Weakly spined, that's not nice!
- *Euphorbia echinus* - echinus = hedgehog
- *Euphorbia fractiflexa* - fracti = broken + flexa = bend, "zig-zag". The continuous spine-shield zig-zags back and forth
- *Euphorbia micracantha* - micra = tiny + cantha = spine
- *Euphorbia multifolia* - multi = many + folia = leaves. Note, folia, *not* flora
- *Euphorbia multiceps* - multi = many + ceps = head
- *Euphorbia pubiglans* - pubi = from pubescent, meaning finely haired + glans = glands

If you suspect a plant name uses Latin or botanical terms, search for the meaning online or use a botanical glossary. A helpful resource is the 'Glossary of botanical terms with special reference to Succulent Plants' by Urs Eggli.

Characteristically Descriptive Names (Greek or other language based)

Sometimes we encounter species which look like they may be made up of Latin words, but they are instead of Greek origin. At other times, the name used may actually be a word from an entirely different language, but usually a language which is used within the geographic area that the plant is native to. As with the Latin-based descriptive names, the species name provided is usually providing some sort of descriptive quality about the plant itself.

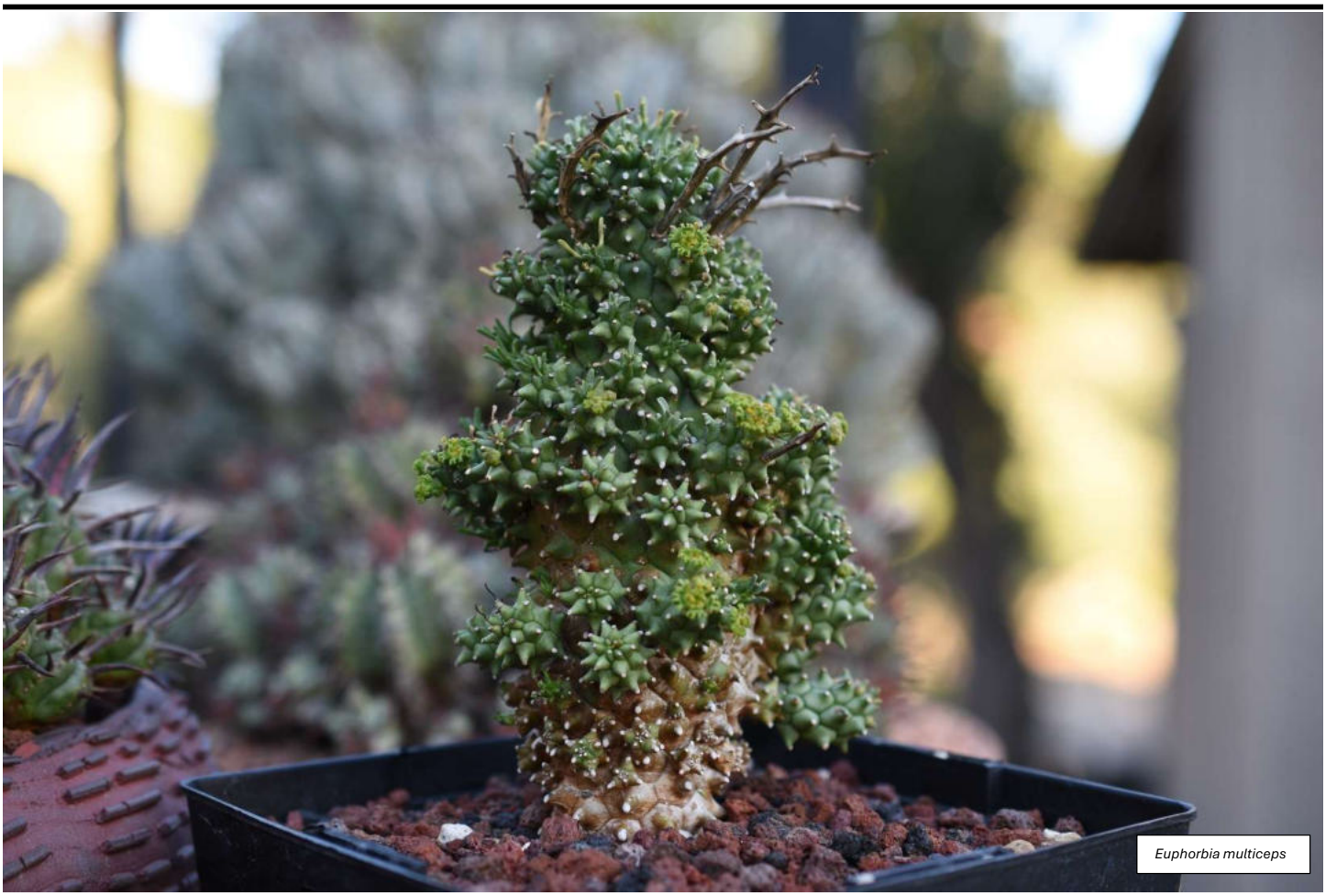
- *Euphorbia enopla* - Greek, referring to nemertine worms. Indeed, the branches do resemble worms.
- *Euphorbia kalisana* - Swahili, 'very sharp'. In reference to the very long and sharp spines.

Species named after a person (Suffix: -ii, -i, -ae, -e)

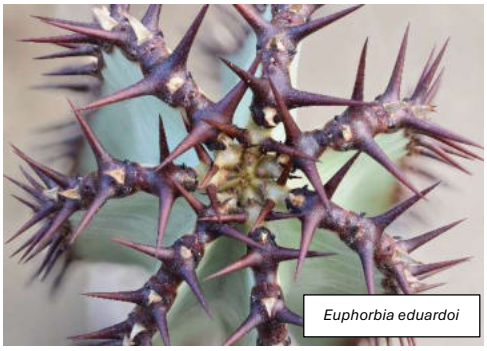
Plants named after people often end in -ii, -i, -ae, or -e. For example, *Euphorbia francoisii* (Francois' Euphorbia) and *Euphorbia susannae* (Susanna's Euphorbia). The -ii suffix is pronounced as *"ee-ee"* or *"ee-eye"* with the rest pronounced as "ee".

It's often tempting to pronounce these names without considering the individual they are named after. Though in general, these types of specific epithets are quite easy to pronounce correctly compared to their Latin counterparts (since of course, we don't actually know how all of Latin was really spoken). Since these names represent actual people, you can often find their correct pronunciation online.

Euphorbia multifolia


Euphorbia multiceps

A commonly mispronounced *Euphorbia* is *Euphorbia poissonii*. Since *E. poissonii* does indeed have a caustic latex, it exudes when damaged (as do all Euphorbia), and is used as a poison by some tribes in western Africa, many are tempted to pronounce the species as "poison-ee-eye". Your newfound knowledge, however, has made you the wiser! If you are familiar with French, which I'm not, (or had taken a statistics class at some point in life) you may recognize this name to be pronounced more closely to "pwah-sawn" than to "poison" and fully as Euphorbia "pwah-sawn-ee-eye".


Euphorbia eduardoi

- *Euphorbia poissonii* - pronounced "pwa-sawn-ee-eye"
- *Euphorbia groenewaldii* - "grun-eh-wald-ee-eye"
- *Euphorbia guentheri* - "gun-ter-eye"
- *Euphorbia susannae* - "soo-san-a-ee"
- *Euphorbia eduardoi* - "ed-ward-o-ee"

Species named in honor of a person (Suffix: -iana, -ana)

Plants named in honor or in commemorating a person follow the same pronunciation rules as when named for a person.

- *Euphorbia kimberleyana*
- *Euphorbia guillaminiana* - "ghee-yah-min-ee-ah-na"
- *Euphorbia pauliana*

Species named for a place (Suffix: -ensis, amongst others)

While not the only way a geographic area is called out within a species name, the **-ensis** suffix is an easy one to spot. This suffix generally indicates that the plant occurs within the geographic area or place which precedes the suffix. Examples of these types of areas would include a specific country, city, or mountain.

- *Euphorbia jansenvillensis* - Occurs near Jansenville, South Africa
- *Euphorbia baioensis* - Found on the Baio mountain of Marsabit, Kenya
- *Euphorbia godana* - Found within the Goda Mountains of Djibouti

Euphorbia fractiflexa

Species named after another plant (Suffix: -oides)

Once in a while, species are named in a way to indicate that they look like another plant genus. In these cases, the suffix of *-oides* is used. *-oides* is actually of Greek origin, and is pronounced “oh-ee-deez” or “oh-eye-deez” depending on who you listen to.

- *Euphorbia gymnocalycioides* - Like a Gymnocacalycium
- *Euphorbia pachypodioides* - Like a Pachypodium (lamerei)
- *Echeveria agavoides* - Like an Agave

On the Comprehensiveness of the Above

The categories presented are not comprehensive of all the various ways specific epithets are derived, nor are all of the suffixes provided complete for each category. I'll leave learning the full breadth of botanical Latin to the reader, and William T. Stearn's 550-page book on the topic.

Infraspecific Ranks and Friends

If only we could call it quits! The taxonomic rank of species aims to bucket plants by their morphological characteristics, and more recently, their biological similarities as well. At times we see variance within a species, and when that occurs, we need to employ a few *infraspecific* taxonomic ranks to aid in recognizing this variance. *Subspecies*, *variety*, and *forma* are some of the more "official" infraspecific ranks. At times other terms such as *cultivar* and *affinis* are also used. Let's touch on them here.

subspecies - Abbreviated as "ssp", subspecies is generally used to describe a geographically isolated population of plants within a species. A subspecies only makes sense as defined relative to another species. *Euphorbia obesa* and *Euphorbia obesa* ssp. *symmetrica* are nearly identical looking plants but their populations are geographically separated from each other. *E. obesa* occurs, whereas E. obesa ssp. *symmetrica* occurs...

variety - Abbreviated as "var", variety of a species or subspecies usually differs by more than one quality. At times subspecies and variety are used interchangeably with one another even if they aren't necessarily interchangeable.

forma - Abbreviated as "f", forma is similar to variety, but used when there is a single difference between the species or subspecies being referenced.

cultivar - Abbreviated as "cv", cultivars are used for indicating artificially bred plants or plants bred for specific characteristics.

affinis - Abbreviated as "aff", affinis designates when a plant is closely related to another species.

- *Euphorbia polygona* var. *striata* (polygon-shaped with horizontal striations)
- *Euphorbia gareipina* ssp. *balsamea*
- *Euphorbia obesa* ssp. *symmetrica*
- *Euphorbia ritchiei* ssp. *nyambensis*
- *Euphorbia francoisii* var. *crassicaulis* f. *rubrifolia* - A thicker stemmed and red-leafed variety of *E. francoisii*, we did it! Take that, tiny little palm tree!
- *Euphorbia aff. kalisana*
- *Euphorbia aff. actinoclada*

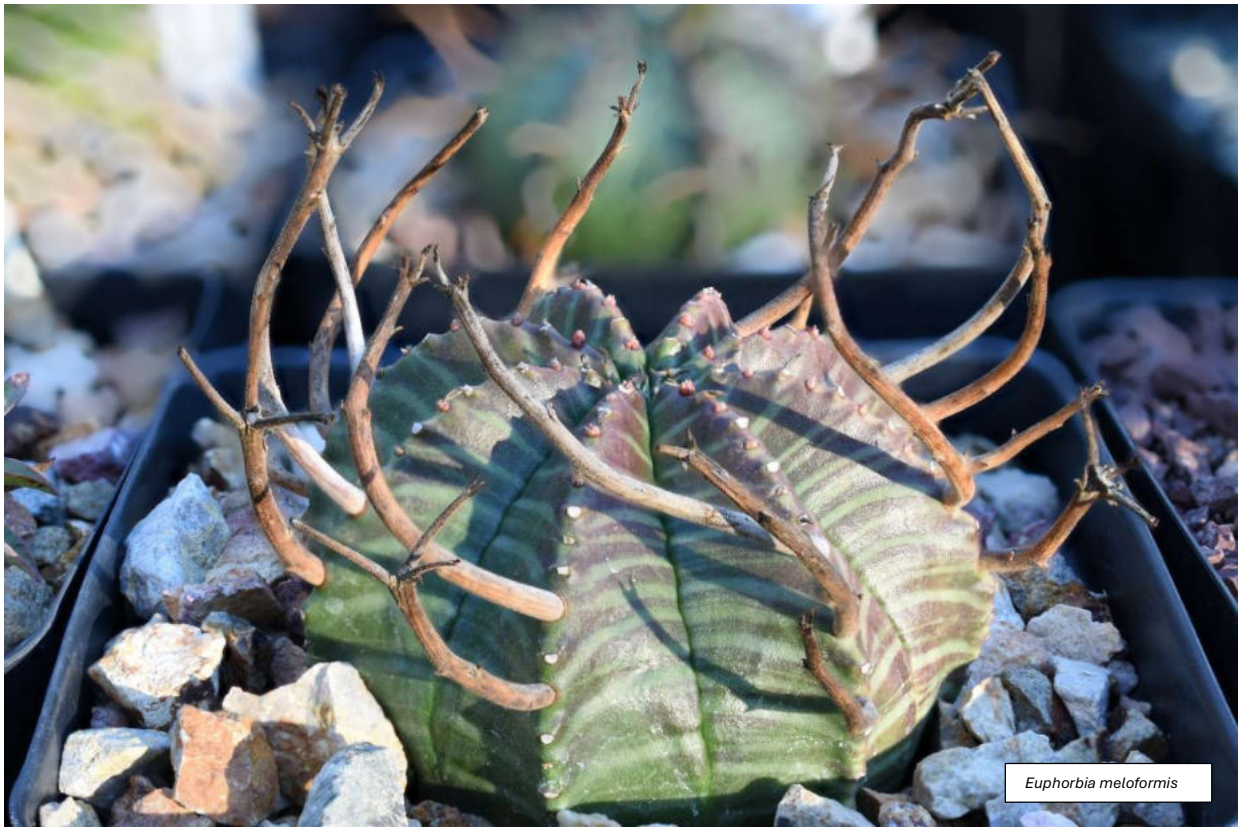
All in the name of Conservation

The IUCN Red List of Endangered Species recognizes taxonomic ranks down to the levels of species, subspecies and variety. Assessments are conducted in habitat over time to understand how threatened or endangered a particular taxon is, whether due to climate change, human expansion, or other factors.

While not a professional in conservation, it seems important to me that similar subspecies and varieties in habitat not be "lumped" with one another at the species level to ensure that appropriate assessments are conducted and cataloged for the preservation and conservation of the plants in question. For example, if

E. obesa ssp. *symmetrica* were to be grouped *E. obesa*, and the *E. obesa* ssp. *symmetrica* sub-population was to wane, we may not catch it in time to take action!

I hope this overview of plant nomenclature and why it matters was insightful and fun, regardless of what your level of expertise in plant cultivation lies. The next time you're at a plant show, nursery, or even in your own garden, try challenging yourself in learning more about the plants you see solely from their plant name tag!



References

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[3] Detlef H. Schnabel. (2022). A Monograph of Euphorbia Polygona, Revised Edition. Self-Published.

[4] Urs Eggli (1993). Glossary of botanical terms with special reference to Succulent Plants. BCSS.

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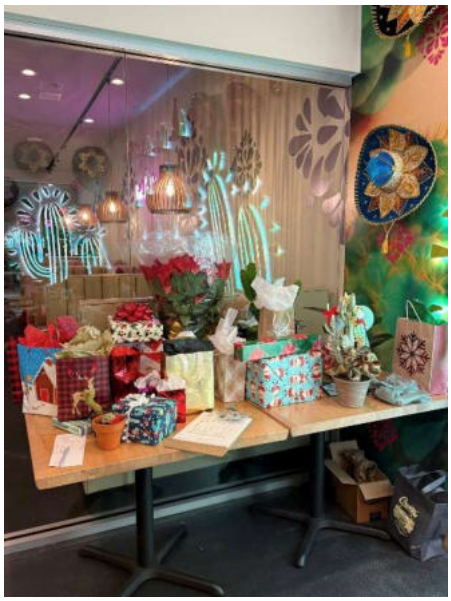
Holiday Party at Juarez Mexican Restaurant



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