KAKTOS KOMMENTS

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

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Euphorbia horrida hybrid

by Carson Einkauf

Houston Cactus and Succulent Society
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Calendar

November 12th, 2026	7:00 pm Board Meeting via Zoom
November 18th, 2026	7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Program: Fertilization and Soil for Growing Cactus and Succulents with Lifetime Member Dave Thomas
December 2nd, 2026	6:00 pm Holiday Party at Teotihuacan Mexican Cafe, 1511 Airline Dr, Houston, TX 77009
January 1st, 2026	Deadline to submit articles for the KK

In Memory of Mike Cracraft



Michael James Cracraft passed away on October 2, 2026, with his beloved wife by his side. Mike was a longtime resident of Houston, Texas, where he built a life filled with love, family and cherished memories.

Mike was born on February 11, 1945, in Wichita, Kansas to Lester Cracraft and Velma Maxine Richardson.

Mike earned a BA with Honors in 1967 at UT Austin and a Master of Arts in 1969, achievements that reflected a disciplined mind and a lifelong devotion to learning. Those who knew him best remember not only what he studied, but how readily he shared what he knew—thoughtful, observant, and quietly confident in conversation. He fulfilled his career as a computer programmer for KBR, Inc. (formerly known as Kellogg Brown & Root).



The proudest chapter of Mike's life was his marriage to Liliana Rodriguez and the family life they built together. He was a lifetime member of the Houston Cactus and Succulents Society, and his work with KBR took him around the world—experiences that suited his curiosity and widened the already remarkable breadth of his knowledge.

Mike's interests were many and well-loved: biking, music, food and wine, cooking, reading, and caring for his succulents. He delighted in learning other languages, and he carried into daily life an unmistakable sharpness of mind. He loved classical music, and reading his extensive collection of art



history, classical composers and botanical books. A devoted fan of The Three Stooges, Mike was known for a dry sense of humor, quick wit, and an uncanny ability to offer exactly the right words at exactly the right time.

Mike is survived by his wife, Liliana Rodriguez; stepson, Carlos Ulloa; grandchildren, Sandra, Carlos, and Sofia Ulloa; and great-grandchildren, Charlotte, Olivia, Adeline Yost and Crawford, Cassandra Ulloa; brother, Joel Cracraft.



Mike wished to be remembered as an amazing husband and a world of knowledge—funny, witty, and always knowing the perfect thing to say.

Memories of Mike from Phyllis McEuen: HCSS Life member Mike Cracraft passed away on October 2, 2026. Mike was a quiet, reserved man. He had many diverse interests including music, reading, and cooking. He was quite knowledgeable and always willing to share this knowledge.

His love of succulents brought him to HCSS. Although he liked many succulents such as Adeniums and Boswelia, Mike's passion was Euphorbias. A quick scan of archived KK articles revealed Mike wrote over ten articles on them. He may not have had the same affinity for cacti but he never missed an opportunity to go on HCSS field trips here in Texas and in Mexico.

Mike met Liliana at an HCSS meeting. They soon became a couple and married shortly thereafter. Together, they hosted potting parties at their home, went on field trips, and were vendors at HCSS sales. Mike's contributions as an active HCSS member will be missed.

Rest in peace, Mike.

Membership — Sara Ortiz

On September 23, 2026, twenty-one members attended our monthly membership meeting at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center. Kristi Schmidt presented “A World of Dry Gardens: The Ruth Bancroft Garden,” an engaging and educational program exploring the beauty and sustainability of drought-tolerant landscapes. Members learned about the remarkable plant collections at the Ruth Bancroft Garden and how agaves, aloes, cacti, and other sculptural succulents can be used to create beautiful, water-wise gardens. The presentation offered inspiration for incorporating these fascinating plants into our own landscapes. For September, David Van Langen contributed the Cactus of the Month article featuring *Cylindropuntia bigelovii* (Teddy Bear Cholla), and Sara Ortiz contributed the Succulent of the Month article featuring *Hoya wayetii* Variegated.

On October 28, 2026, twenty-six members and two guests attended our monthly membership meeting at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center. Jacob Martin presented “Growing Cactus and Succulents from Seed,” an informative program exploring the rewarding process of propagating these unique plants from seed. Members learned about seed-growing techniques and gained a better understanding of the patience and care involved in raising cacti and succulents from their earliest stages. The presentation encouraged members to explore new propagation methods and expand their growing experience. For October, Liliana Cracraft and her husband, Mike Cracraft, had been scheduled to present the Cactus of the Month, *Rebutia fiebrigii*, and the Succulent of the Month, *Euphorbia caducifolia*, respectively. Following the sad news of Mike's passing, these presentations did not take place. Our thoughts are with Liliana and her family during this difficult time. We remember Mike with warmth and appreciation and extend our deepest sympathy to all who knew and loved him.

November Cactus of the Month **John Weistroffer**



Gymnocalycium cardenasianum

Gymnocalycium cardenasianum is one of my favorite *Gymnocalyciums* that I grow. It is remarkable for its exceptionally long, thick, recurved spines, which give the plant an almost bird's-nest appearance. The spines can reach three or four inches in length and are generally pale brown in color. The body has a matte, greenish-gray appearance and is flattened in shape, with plants typically growing as solitary specimens. So far, mine has maintained a rather clean appearance, but is beginning to develop corking near the base.

The species was discovered in 1964 by German cactus explorer Friedrich Ritter and named in honor of Dr. Martín Cárdenas, a Bolivian botanist. The species is native to southern Bolivia, on the eastern side of the Andes, where it occurs in mountainous terrain at elevations of 6,000 to 10,500 feet. It is typically found among low shrubs in open, rocky areas with sandy and gravelly soils composed of various types of sedimentary and metamorphic rocks – but notably not limestone. It has also been documented growing alongside other cacti, including *Parodia carrerana* and *Parodia fulvispina*. Its natural habitat experiences cool winters, and the species is tolerant of cold temperatures when kept dry. Some cultivation references report it tolerant of short periods down to 20°F with some reports saying 10°F, although I would not let it get that cold. The flowers are attractive, pale pink, and typical in appearance for a *Gymnocalycium*. The flowers sometimes have difficulty emerging through the dense nest of long spines surrounding the crown. Flowering generally occurs in midsummer.







I purchased my plant from Dave Thomas at the Houston Cactus & Succulent Society sale a couple of years ago. I grow it in Bonsai Jack's gritty mix, and it seems to be quite happy in that medium. It has shown consistent growth, although it is a relatively slow-growing species, and it has bloomed for me in each of the last couple of years. One point of interest regarding its taxonomy is that there is some disagreement over its classification. It is commonly recognized as *Gymnocalycium cardenasianum*, although some taxonomic authorities consider it a subspecies of *Gymnocalycium spegazzinii*.

References

- http://www.cactusinhabitat.org/index.php?p=specie&id=179&l=en
- http://www.richtstatt.de/gymnos_v3/ginhab.php?a=image&l=en&id=10&img_id=418

November Succulent of the Month **Cameron Brady**

Senecio peregrinus – String of Dolphins



Intro

String of dolphins is one of the few succulents that really puts a smile on my face. Its curved, plump green leaves look like a school of dolphins leaping from the stem. It's also sometimes sold under its old name, *Senecio peregrinus*. String of dolphins is a hybrid in the sunflower family (*Asteraceae*), bred from two familiar plants, the candle plant, or *C. articulatus*, and string of pearls, or *C. rowleyanus*, before 1997. Both of which are African succulents. The exact cultivar is unknown but Paul V Heath is credited with analyzing and renaming it. It gained most of its popularity in 2017 and 2020. However, it is still one of my favorites today.

Care in Zone 9A

Give it gentle morning sun outdoors, or six-plus hours of bright, indirect light in a south or west window. Use a fast-draining, gritty cactus mix. Soak the soil, then let it dry out completely before watering again. Shriveled leaves and closed leaf "windows" mean it's thirsty, and in winter it needs water only about once a month. It's happiest between 60-80°F, grows most in spring and early fall, and goes dormant below 50°F or above 85°F.

Propagation

Stem cuttings work best. Because this is a hybrid, seed-grown plants vary. Root cuttings in water or set them straight into soil. They can flower within the first year, and winter dormancy triggers blooms from late fall to early winter.

Troubleshooting

Overwatering causes root rot and mushy, translucent leaves. Legginess means it wants more light, while too much sun scorches and shrivels the leaves. For mealybugs and spider mites, use diluted neem oil and keep the plant out of direct sun afterward. Terra cotta pots, bottom watering, and some spacing help prevent fungal problems. It does fine slightly rootbound.

Where to find it

Etsy has plenty of sellers, including Acehorticulturalinks, Amerikaktus, Franny's Garden, SucculentDepotUSA, and Gardener Studio. It's also sold at big box stores like Home Depot and Lowe's and plant conventions like PlantCon.

December Cactus of the Month — Vicki Treybig



NAME: *Espostoa nana*

FAMILY: Cactaceae

GENUS: *Esposto*. The genus is named after Nicholas E. Esposto, a renowned botanist from Lima.

SPECIES: *Espostoa melanostele* subs. *nana, Psuedoespostoa nana*

COMMON NAME(S): Wolly candle catus; Peruvian Old Lady Cactus

SYNONYMS: *Espostoa melanostele, Bringhamia melanostele, Ephalocereus melanostele, Ceres melanostele*, 9 more.

HABITAT/DISTRIBUTION:

Espostoa is a genus of columnar cacti comprising 16 species native to the mountains of Ecuador and Peru. It usually lives at an altitude of approximately 2600 to 8200 feet.

DESCRIPTION (STEM, FLOWERS, FRUITS):

Mature *Espostoa* (over 10 years old) bloom at night in the summer. Flowers are pink-white and bloom on the ribs of the cactus. The plants are appreciated for their beautiful white fleece which covers their spines. They look deceptively soft, but do not touch them! The fruit is edible, sweet and juicy. The woolly hairs of the cephalia have been used for pillow filling in Peru.

CULTIVATION/GROWTH:

Espostoa is a summer-growing cactus and requires a sunny location and well-draining soil. It is an easy cactus to grow and makes beautiful potted specimens. In summer it will need fertilizer and more frequent watering, however, do not mist the plant, it hates wet foliage. Once established it can produce 7-8 inches of growth per year. Most plants offset and clumps will be produced in a few years. It will fill a large pot and should be repotted every 2-3 years. It rests during the

winter and needs protection when temperatures drop below 54 degrees Fahrenheit. They can be propagated by cutting or from seed.



AVAILABILITY: Widely available at nurseries and from on-line sellers. I got mine at one of our club sales.

REMARKS/COMMENTS/MY EXPERIENCE:

I keep my plant on the patio where it gets plenty of sun and natural light, but out of the rain. Because of the fleece, water does not evaporate easily and could cause the plant to rot. It is a couple of years old and is doing great. I love the soft fleece that hides the spines.

REFERENCES:

- The Cactus King
- Wikipedia
- CactiGuide.com
- Monstera-app.com
- Llifle.com
- Plantiary.com

December Succulent of the Month — Jennifer Peskey



Adenium obesum f. *cristata*

Scientific Name: *Adenium obesum* f. *cristata*
Common Names: Crested Desert Rose, Crested Adenium, Desert Rose
Family: *Apocynaceae* (Dogbane Family)

A Desert Rose with a Twist

The desert rose is well known among succulent collectors for its swollen caudex, thick branches, and beautiful trumpet-shaped flowers. The crested growth form, known as cristata, takes this familiar plant and transforms it into something extraordinary. Instead of developing typical rounded branches, it produces flattened, twisted, fan-shaped, or rippled growth that can resemble coral or even a brain.

This unusual growth is called fasciation, a developmental abnormality in which the growing point (apical meristem) becomes elongated or fan-shaped. Rather than producing a normally rounded stem, the growing tissue expands sideways, creating unusual

folds and crests. Cresting is not a separate species but an uncommon growth form. Each plant develops its own distinctive shape, making these specimens especially desirable among collectors.



Natural Habitat and Distribution

Adenium obesum f. *cristata* (Crested Desert Rose) originates from the Desert Rose species native to eastern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Most crested adeniums sold in cultivation are propagated.

How to Grow a Crested Adenium

Crested adeniums generally require the same care as conventional desert roses. Their most important requirements are warmth, sunlight, and excellent drainage.

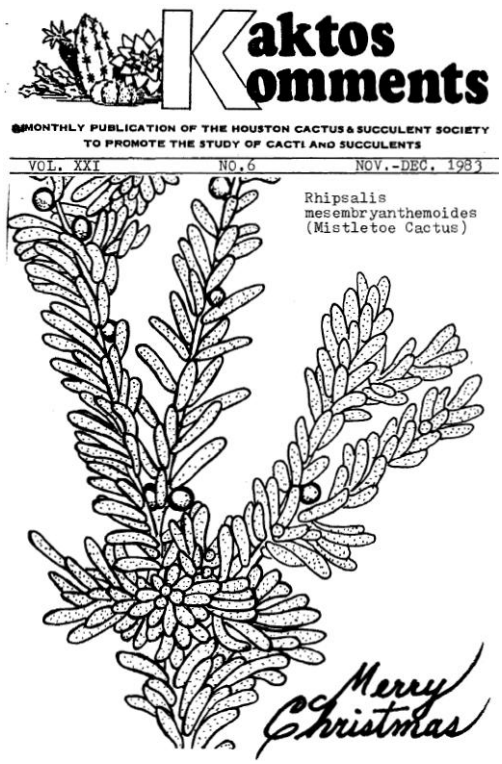


- **Light:** Provide several hours of direct sunlight daily. Acclimate plants gradually when moving them into stronger sunlight. In Houston, morning sun is the best because afternoon sun can be too harsh. They need a lot of sun to grow leaves and can take multiple months to be fully leaved.
- **Water:** Water thoroughly during active growth, allowing the soil to dry substantially before watering again. When leaves start to drop in the fall, reduce watering and stop during winter.
- **Soil:** Use a fast-draining substrate. A cactus mix amended with pumice or expanded shale works well. Avoid heavy, moisture-retaining soil.
- **Temperature:** Adeniums prefer warm conditions, approximately 75–95°F. They are not frost tolerant. Protect plants when temperatures approach 50–55°F and bring them indoors before freezing weather.
- **Fertilizer:** Feed during spring and summer with a balanced fertilizer formulated for flowering plants or succulents. Reduce or discontinue feeding during dormancy.

References

1. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. *Adenium obesum*. Plants of the World Online. https://powo.science.kew.org/taxon/urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:76369-1
2. North Carolina State University Extension. *Adenium obesum – Desert Rose*. https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/adenium-obesum/
3. University of Florida, IFAS Extension. *Adenium obesum*. Publication EP474. https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ep474
4. University of California Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program. *Fasciation*. https://ipm.ucanr.edu/home-and-landscape/fasciation/

Flame Leaf vs Poinsettia and The Christmas Gift Poinsettia



We are going back in the archives to the November/December 1983 issue of Kaktos Komments. This article was reprinted from the 1982 Oct., Nov., Dec. Issue of "The LoneStar Gardener". Reminder: All Kaktos Komments, dating back to 1963, have been digitized and are available for viewing!

Flame Leaf vs Poinsettia

If you live south of the border of Texas you will call the Christmas plant “Flame Leaf” or “Fire Plant”, but everywhere else in the world it is known as “Poinsettia”.

At Christmas time the poinsettia outranks all other plants in popularity. This traditional Christmas plant got its name from a South Carolinian, Dr. Joel Roberts Poinsett.

Joel Poinsett was born in South Carolina in 1779 of wealthy parents, and was educated in England. His parents wanted him to study law or medicine, but he wanted to be a soldier. Because of his parents’ opposition to his chosen field of endeavor, he decided to travel. He traveled extensively in Europe and was presented to both Napoleon in France, and Czar Alexander in Russia.

In 1809 he returned to the United States and was chosen to represent the United States as an agent in South America. After a brief stay, he returned to the states and was elected to the South Carolina legislature. In 1825 he was appointed to the position of ambassador to Mexico where he served until 1829. It is a known fact that Joel Poinsett did not win Mexican friends or influence any Mexican people while Ambassador to Mexico.

When he returned to South Carolina, he brought sixteen poinsettia plants. The plant was new to the United States and was commonly called “Mexican Flame Leaf” or “Fire Plant”. From his greenhouse in Greenville, South Carolina, he distributed plants to botanists and nurserymen. Until 1923 cuttings from these original plants were the only ones in cultivation. It was in 1923 that the poinsettia was first grown in pots. From that time growers have developed new colors and plants with blooms of lasting quality as well as shorter growth.

Botanists changed the name to Euphorbia poinsettia in honor of Poinsett. Today it is classified as Euphorbia pulcherrima and commonly called poinsettia.

The red "blooms" are actually leaves, called bracts. The blooms are the small greenish-yellow buttons in the center of the bracts.

After Poinsett returned from Mexico, he became Secretary of War in President Martin Van Buren's cabinet. At last, his dream of being a soldier came true because he was in charge of all U. S. military forces.

He died in 1851, but left the world a beautiful plant enjoyed by millions each year at Christmas.

The Christmas Gift Poinsettia

The charm of Christmas is in the excitement of special effects we provide in our homes and churches as the holidays approach. The poinsettia is a show of tropical beauty to contrast the drab of winter. When placed side by side with glitter and artificiality of holiday decor, this colorful plant out classes all contrived art.

Should a gardener consider the possibility of growing the gift flower after the holidays? The answer is the willingness to follow simple procedures to keep it growing and producing.

New varieties are long lasting, some bracts color as long as six months. To produce bloom for another year, care should be given to temperature, light and moisture. Rapid changes in temperature and extreme heat from heaters will deplete the life of the plant. However, even after the leaves have fallen, the plant can be brought into full cycle to bloom for another Christmas.

Change containers - a large terracotta container is ideal when selecting a new growing condition. It can be placed on casters for ease in moving the plant outside and back inside. Texas summers are not too hot for them to grow outside with three hours of sun, but winters are much too cold in most of the state. It is necessary to bring plants into a protected area before the first frost.

Soil should be sterilized if garden soil is used. Sterilize by baking (225°) or pouring scalding water over it. Soil and the addition of Rootone or fungicide will cut back on diseases. The plant should be removed from container where it was rooted by a commercial nursery. Carefully wash old soil away with a soft stream of water. Do not damage roots.

Treat plant as a cutting, dusting with fungicide and gently sift new soil mixture over the fragile roots, being careful not to break plant surfaces or roots. Do not prune at this time. Wait until it becomes established in the new pot to prune.

Keep plant soil slightly damp- not too wet or too dry. It will grow in good light and can be placed outside in a semi-protected spot. It acclimates well after its initial introduction to the new environment.

Fertilize every other month with a rose food containing a systemic insecticide starting about May. Never fertilize with a nitrogen fertilizer after the first of September, it will cause bracts to turn green.

Branching may take place automatically but can be aided by a top pinch about July 4th. (Holidays make it easier to remember.) By Labor Day you may want to pinch the tips again to produce a bushy plant and increase the number of blooms.

The poinsettia tree, similar to the rose tree is an interesting innovation. This depends on the restraints of pruning the top and keeping the main line stem free of offshoots. When stem has reached desired height pinching is done at the top as frequently as needed to keep the ball shape, resulting in multi-bloom-heads. This may take more than one growing season, but you can turn a ten-dollar plant into a one hundred dollar show piece.

Poinsettias are one of the most sensitive photo-periodic plants grown. Your plants blooming date is determined by the daily schedule of exposure to light and darkness. Start the short-day cycle by October 12, Columbus Day. Give plant a fourteen-hour night - total darkness- for three weeks. Dark areas should not be warm. A cool temperature is necessary to set bud. By Thanksgiving bracts will begin to give each bloom tip a frame of color.

Tested information for cut poinsettias comes from the American Poinsettia Society. Placing cut flowers in rubbing alcohol for five minutes immediately after cut is made is a reliable method of conditioning or curing the stem. If stem is shortened, a new five-minute cure is necessary. Also, a leafless stem is a must for the arranger- remove all green leaves on stems 2 or 3 days prior to cutting. Following the cut and cure method, a helpful aid to long lasting arrangements is an overnight float in deep water. A small amount of chlorine bleach will cut down on bacteria. Poinsettias properly cut and cured will last from three days to three weeks.

If flowers are cut from a container plant, keep plant in good growing condition and use the same methods for transplanting previously mentioned.

You can grow poinsettias for your garden and home. A plant which gives so much pleasure for bold color of brilliant reds, shocking pink, delicate pink and creamy white, deserves attention as one more successful experience in growing plant material.

-Mrs. T. L. Duncan, Jr.
American Poinsettia Society
President

Photos from https://www.flickr.com/







