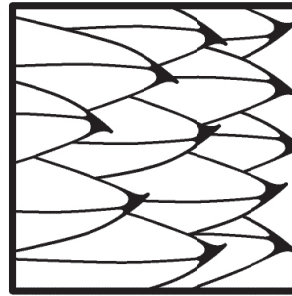


Central Coast Cactus
& Succulent Society
c/o Markus Mumper
780 Merced St.
Pismo Beach, CA 93449



On the Dry Side

January, 2012

CCCSS December Meeting Recap

Our members proved once again how awesome we are at cooking, baking and shopping (and eating!), helping set up and clean up, and how generous and enthusiastic you are in donating and bidding on the high-quality plants, pots, crafts and related items in both the live and silent auctions. The room was filled with people, some of whom we hadn't seen in awhile, and tables overflowed with food, succulents and good cheer. The food was uniformly delicious and there was more than enough for everyone. What else is there to say about our December get-together -- definitely not a "meeting" -- other than a good time was had by all.

Many thanks to everyone who participated, with a special thank-you to Maggie and Markus for the lovely centerpieces. For those of you haven't been around in awhile, come back -- our next meeting is January 8. Appropriately enough, our plant of the month will be Christmas Cactus, or as we like to call them, *Schlumbergera*. We would appreciate seeing some examples from this genus for our plant-of-the-month show-and-tell, particularly if you have one from the holiday party centerpieces.

It's a new year, so let's start thinking about our projects, among them community outreach, for which we need both ideas and volunteers, and our annual show. It's not too early to start planning what you want to enter and how your entries can best be presented. And don't forget that we always need volunteers for all sorts of things, from running for a position on the Board to bringing refreshments to helping set up and clean up for the monthly meetings and the May show and whatever else comes to mind that will contribute to the well-being of our organization. Our party showed what we are capable of accomplishing ... let's keep it up all year long.

Happy New Year!

~ Carol Moss (carol.moss@gmail.com)



Thanksgiving Cactus



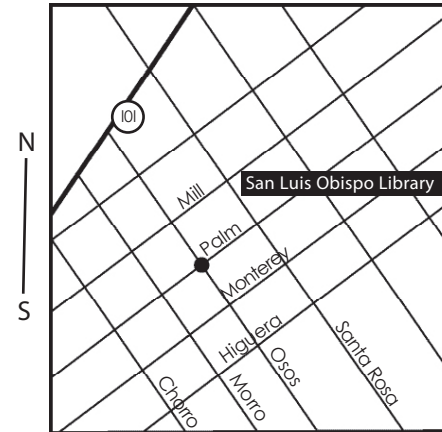
Christmas Cactus

NEXT meeting:

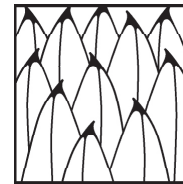
Sun, Jan. 8'th at
2:00 pm

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Easter Cactus



Central Coast Cactus and Succulent Society

e-mail: markusmumper@gmail.com

All submissions to the CCCSS newsletter must be submitted
two weeks prior to the monthly meeting.

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A one time free newsletter will be mailed out to those who sign in at the monthly meetings.
After this dues must be paid in order to start a subscription.

Speaker of the Month

Donna Duerk *Gasteria*

Fellow club member Donna Duerk will give a slide presentation of the genus *Gasteria*. In Donna's words:

"I became fascinated with *Gasterias* about the time I joined the CCCSS. I was attracted by the variety of leaf shapes, patterns and colors and generally how easy they are to grow. I set out to collect at least one of each species and discovered that Ernst van Jaarsveld was the expert on the genus. By chance, he was giving a lecture on my 65'th birthday in a town not too far from where my daughter lives in MA. So, I gave myself a birthday present to attend the MA C&S week-long conference and sale and made friends with Ernst as well as several of the other C&S aficionados there."

Donna's presentation will be a walk through the genus showing her collection with images from Jaarsveld's publications for the species she does not grow.

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Upcoming Events

January 14

Desert Forum

Huntington Botanical Gardens
1151 Oxford Rd., San Marino, CA

March 17 - 18

Midwest Cactus & Succulent Society Spring Show & Sale

Cleveland Botanical Garden
11030 East Blvd., Cleveland, OH

March 30 - April 2

Cactus & Succulent Soc. of Australia and the Ballarat Cactus & Succulent Soc.

Hoppers Crossing, Victoria, Australia
www.cssaustralia.org.au

May 5 - 6

Sacramento Cactus & Succulent Society Show & Sale

Sacramento Garden and Arts Center
3330 McKinley Blvd., Sacramento, CA

May 12 - 13

San Diego Epiphyllum Society Annual Show & Sale

Balboa Park Botanical Gardens
Casa Del Prado, Rm. 101, Balboa Park, CA

November 30 - December 1

Orange County Cactus & Succulent Society Show & Sale

Anaheim United Methodist Church
1000 S. State College Blvd., Anaheim, CA

Hospitality News

Thanks to all for the set up and clean up, and of course all of the great food, at the CCCSS Christmas pot-luck. It looked like everyone had a great time and left with a full belly.

HOLIDAY CACTI

Collectively, Christmas-, Thanksgiving-, and Easter Cacti are often called "Holiday Cacti." The first two are members of the genus *Schlumbergera* while the Easter Cacti comprise two species of the genus *Rhipsalidopsis*. Both genera are native to the tropical jungles of the Americas and, with other jungle natives of the family *Cactaceae*, are also popularly called "Jungle Cacti."

Schlumbergeras are epiphytes in nature (grow on other plants or non-soil surfaces), from the high elevation jungles of Brazil. Their natural environment is a relatively cool even temperature, high humidity, bright light with little direct sunlight, and frequent rain. Considering their tropical source and epiphytic nature, however, they do amazingly well as potted plants in normal cactus soil and in a warm temperate climate, or indoors. The genus is named after a Frenchman by the name of Frédéric Schlumberger. Members of the genus are easily recognized by the leaflike pads joined one to another like a chain (cladodes). Flowers appear at the tips of branches and are beautiful during the day but close at night.

Schlumbergera truncata is the scientific name of the Thanksgiving Cactus. Even though *S. truncata* is the Thanksgiving Cactus, it is the one that is usually sold as Christmas Cactus. Sellers call it Christmas Cactus because it sells best by that name. They bloom about a full month or more before the true Christmas Cactus, given the same treatment, and so are more easily made to bloom at the best time for Christmas sales but flowers might not last until Christmas. The true Christmas Cactus, *Schlumbergera x buckleyi* is a hybrid between *S. russelliana* and *S. truncata*. Some call this plant a *Zygocactus* species, but that is not a currently accepted one for this species. *S. x buckleyi*, blooms a month or so later than the Thanksgiving cactus and is usually in bloom after the holidays are past.

Thanksgiving Cactus is easy to distinguish from the Christmas Cactus. On Thanksgiving Cactus, flowers are asymmetrical and are held out from the ovary so that they are almost horizontal from the tips of segments. In contrast, flowers of the Christmas Cactus are radially symmetrical and hang down straight from the ovary. Leaf blades and growth characteristics are different, too. Leaf blade edges on Thanksgiving Cactus are toothed (dentate) while those on the true Christmas Cactus are crenate (scalloped) and do not have the teeth or points along the sides. Typically, the Thanksgiving Cactus branches are more upright than those of the arching but pendent branches of Christmas Cactus.

Christmas and Thanksgiving Cacti Care

These are relatively easy plants to take care of, safe (no spines or toxins) and can live a long time. Christmas Cacti require different care than do most cacti. Though from the tropics, they live in a relatively cool environment and therefore do NOT like high heat like most cacti do. Basically all cacti are summer growers and spend winter very inactive in terms of growing or flowering. This is true of Christmas Cacti, despite their blooming in winter. They do very little growing in winter, but it is the best time of year to enjoy Christmas Cacti, when the days are shortening and the temps cooling down. They don't like temps much over 80F, but they cannot tolerate freezes either, and prefer temps above 55F. For those in cold climates, these cacti do best if kept outdoors under a shady tree or porch when it's warm and moved back indoors near a bright window as it gets colder. In warmer climates they can be kept outdoors year round, but they do not do well as garden plants.

Unlike most cacti, *Schlumbergeras* do not like full sun, particularly when it's hot. But they do like bright light and grow and flower best if the light is very bright. Fortunately they do tolerate low light situations for short periods of time, and that is why they do so well as indoor plants. A few days in the middle of the table far from windows will not do them much harm... but they do need to be returned to an area of bright light soon after, or blooming might cease early.

Like all cacti, they need to be planted in well draining soil. In the wild they basically live in soilless situations, so water needs to drain past the roots easily, or they could rot.

Underwatering will kill a Christmas Cactus, too, but a lot more slowly. There is plenty of time to intervene should the cladodes appear flattened and wrinkled. *Schlumbergeras* are from high rainfall and high humidity environments and do appreciate being watered regularly.

Once the days shorten (usually in October), back off on watering. Some recommend NO water the entire month of October, and then resume again in November. Then it is recommended to withhold water again once blooming is over for a bit longer than a month this time. If signs of new growth appear, it's time to start watering again. This is also a good time to repot the plant and put it in some new, clean, well draining soil. Repotting is recommended every few years.

Fertilization should be with half strength water soluble formulas and only in warmer weather (not during or after flowering, until new growth is seen and time for repotting). If using a granular fertilizer, it is best to be stingy- these plants do tolerate fertilizers better than do most cacti, but still, be careful. 10-10-10 is the best ratio to use.

To induce flowering, put these plants in a totally dark room for a minimum of 13 hours a night. They plants may need longer light to simulate early fall, rather than late fall, to keep them from blooming too early. Then do the total darkness thing about 4-6 weeks before the time blooming is desired, every night until buds form and the plants can be returned to their location near the window or table. Be sure the daytime temps are in the 60s (hot houses will prevent these from blooming) and night temps are not much below 50F. Sometimes a little liquid fertilizer with extra potassium can help stimulate blooming. Once flowering starts, it is recommended not to move these plants too much, in terms of overall heat and light, or they may abruptly stop blooming and drop all their buds.

Problem insects include fungus gnats, mealy bug and scale. The first one can often be controlled by simple insecticidal soap and trying not to keep the soils too wet. The other two usually need systemic insecticides, particularly scale, and can really damage a Christmas Cactus in a hurry. Plants kept in areas where there is good air circulation (such as hanging outdoors under a tree) usually have less problems with insects.

These are pretty easy plants to propagate, by just taking cuttings of 1-4 cladodes long and letting them sit in a cool dry place for 2-3 days, then planting them in a pumice or well draining mix until new growth is seen. Water only sparingly at first, but once roots form or new growth is seen, water regularly. It is best to do this when it's warm, but possible to do just about any time of year.

Easter Cacti

Because both Thanksgiving and Christmas Cactus bloom twice each year, between October and February, then again between March and May, many folks tend to confuse them with Easter Cactus. Many of the leading botanists did the same for many years until these plants became much better known.

The Easter Cactus is *Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*. In some respects it is superficially similar to *Schlumbergera*. However, it blooms only once each year, in April (about Easter) and its flower is very different. It is not nearly as popular as the *Schlumbergeras* because it is rather more difficult to grow well, and it has the disconcerting habit of shedding its cladodes at the slightest draught, or whenever over- or under-watered. It may refuse to bloom for no apparent reason. Treat these in the same way as *Schlumbergeras*, except be more careful about watering and draughts. *R. gaertneri* is the species, with scarlet flowers. 'Crimson Giant' and 'Rainbow' are some of the cultivars. All are beautiful when in bloom.

Rose Easter Cactus is not at all likely to be confused with *Schlumbergera*. The flowers are pink, and small, and the plant can be described as a "miniaturized" Easter Cactus. It is quite magnificent, but even more temperamental about dropping all its stem segments. To compensate, however, all of these shed components will take root easily. Just leave them on top of the soil. 'China Doll' and 'China Rose' are some of its cultivars, both quite splendid.

~ C. Spotts