

The Eastern Spine

Newsletter of the National Capital

Cactus & Succulent Society

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(NCCSS Home Page)

www.washington-dc.cactus-society.org

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THIS MONTH'S MEETING - April 21, 2013

Potting Soils for Succulent Plants

Presented by Bob Stewart

NCCSS member Bob Stewart discusses one of the important aspects of growing succulent plants, potting soils. Areas covered will include: (1) the chemistry and structure of a successful potting soil, (2) the components of a good potting soil, and (3) where do you get these components. Bob will bring in samples of his favorite potting mixes as well as samples of potting mix components. As always, questions and comments from everyone are encouraged and welcomed.

Our Next Regular Monthly Meeting is scheduled for **Sunday, April 21, 2013**. It will be held at the **St. Anselm's Abbey School at 14th & South Dakota Ave. N.E Washington, DC**. The meeting begins at **10:30 am** and ends at **Noon**. The Board of Directors meeting, which is open to all members, begins at 9:30 am and ends at 10:15 am.

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New World Natives: Cacti Lecture

The U.S. Botanic Garden in Washington, D.C. will host a lecture on *New World Natives: Cacti* on **Saturday April 27, 2013. 10:30 to Noon**. Todd Brethauer, USBG Volunteer, will discuss the evolution of the Cactus family, their numerous adaptations to conserve water, their close relationship with their pollinators, the important role they have as food sources for those that live in the desert and the unique role that they played in American history. The lecture is free but pre-registration is required. More info at:

<http://www.usbg.gov/events/2013/02/14/new-world-natives-cacti-lecture>

NCCSS HAPPENINGS

It's Your Society - Get Involved

Meadowlark Botanic Garden

Our Annual Plant Sale and Information Day at Meadowlark Botanic Garden in Vienna, Virginia is scheduled for Saturday May 18, 2013 from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. The purpose of this event is not necessarily to make money, but to introduce our society to people in northern Virginia who might be interested in succulent plants. Offering and discussing plants for sale is a great way to attract the public and provide information on our, and hopeful their, favorite plants. If you would like to participate (volunteer help is always needed and appreciated) or have questions contact Donna Kuroda at 703-264-9633 email at DKuroda@aol.com



New Member

The NCCSS would like to welcome new member **Ali Tharrington** from Washington, D.C. If you see Ali at an upcoming meeting please say hello. The

strength and life of our society are our members. Welcome Ali.

HELP (Still) WANTED LIBRARY ASSISTANT

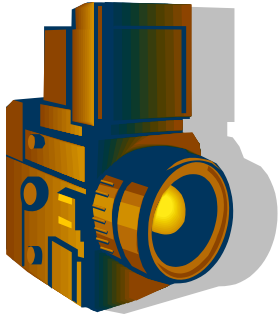
Ben Burkhardt, our society librarian, wants to make it easier for members to browse and borrow books and periodicals from the library. However, due to work constraints, Ben cannot attend every meeting. He would like to have someone willing to step in and serve as librarian during meetings he is unable to attend. If you are willing to serve in this role, please contact Ben or NCCSS President Donna Kuroda.

Ben Burkhardt bburkhardt@ctia.org
Donna Kuroda DKuroda@aol.com

NCCSS ANNUAL SHOW AND SALE is scheduled for **August 2-4, 2013** at Brookside Gardens, in Wheaton, Md. It is time to look over your plants and get those Show winners picked out, and give them the special care they need for their weekend of fame in August.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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|-------------------------|---|
| April 20, 2013 | (This months meeting will be a field trip to Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, PA For more info on CSSM contact Ingrid Fritze at (410) 256-9417 or cactusladybug@hotmail.com |
| April 21, 2013 | NCCSS regular monthly meeting. Bob Stewart will present a program on potting mixes for succulent plants. |
| May 11, 2013 | CSSM Cylburn Market Day Plant Sale. |
| May 18, 2013 | Meadowlark Botanic Garden Plant Sale and Information Table from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. |
| May 19, 2013 | NCCSS regular monthly meeting. Ric Tursan will give us a tour of cacti & other succulent web sites and how to find them. |
| June 15-19, 2013 | CSSA 35th Biennial Convention. Austin, TX |



The Photo Page

In This month's Photo Page, I celebrate the growing expertise of CSSM and NCCSS member Ingrid Fritze. Ingrid and her husband Kurt live in Perry Hall, Maryland just N.E. of Baltimore. Ingrid has a great collection of cacti and other succulents. If you have photos of your plants you would like show here on the Photo Page, contact me, Bob Stewart at stewart723@gmail.com

Pachypodium namaquanum → **The Halfmens**

When I (your editor) first began collecting succulent plants in the 1970's *Pachypodium namaquanum* was one of the most sought after plants. It is more common in collections now, but still not an easy plant to grow to any size. It is native to Northwest South Africa and parts of Namibia. I took this photo of Ingrid's wonderful *Pachypodium namaquanum* during our 2009 summer picnic graciously hosted by Ingrid and Kurt.



Astrophytum asterias **Super Kabuto**

A beautiful plant with a beautiful flower describes this astrophytum grown by Ingrid. The Super Kabuto group of astrophytum hybrids are very popular and Ingrid has a collection of great plants. Moreover, she is hybridizing some of her plants and growing some interesting seedlings. Let us hope she will have a few of her extra plants on the sales table at our 2013 Show and Sale in August at Brookside Gardens.



Mammillaria theresae

Some plants are a challenge even for experienced growers, and *Mammillaria theresae* is one of those challenging plants. However, it is such a great plant, with unique and interesting spines, and wonderful, large and colorful flowers, that you grow it anyway you can and Ingrid has chosen to grow it as a graft. For those plants, such as *M. theresae*, that often rot at the soil surface, or easily lose their roots, grafting is a way to prevent such disasters. The grafting stock (the lower piece of graft), has a stronger root system and lower stem that resist rotting. In the photo on the left, you can see a small side shoot, also known as a pup, beginning to grow. Over time *M. theresae* will produce many of these pups and the plant will develop into a clump of many stems and many more flowers. *M. theresae* is named for Theresa Bock, who discovered the plants in Durango, Mexico, in 1966/67.

Plant of the Month

The Genus *Titanopsis*

The genus name *Titanopsis* is derived from a combination of Greek words *titanos* (chalk) and *opsis* (appearance), referring to the knobby, calcium-filled warts on the leaf surfaces. Fittingly, *Titanopsis* is a "mimicry" succulent, small plants that quietly blend into their habitats and remain virtually invisible until they flower.

According to the book *Mesembs Of The World*, there are five species of *Titanopsis* and one variety. All six species are small growing, clumping plants with raised bumps on their club-shaped leaves. Leaf colors are varying shades of gray, with whites, reds, and purples tastefully blended. The five species are *T. calcarea*, *T. fulleri*, *T. hugo-schlechteri*, *T. schwantesii*, and *T. luedertizii*. There is also *T. hugo-schlechteri* var. *alboviridis*, a lovely whitish green form.

Habitat and Flowers

All of the titanopsis are native to southern Africa. They are found from southern Namibia in the west, through Bushmanland and east to the Great Karoo. The generally grow in habitats covered in loose, quartz gravel. With stone-like leaves, they easily blend into their surroundings.

The flowers are about one half inch in diameter and primarily yellow, although in several species the flower petals are infused with orange and red. These plants flower primarily in winter, although for cultivated flowering times can vary depending on when the plants are watered.

Titanopsis calcarea

The best known and most often cultivated titanopsis is *T. calcarea*. This is due to its ease of cultivation in comparison with the other species. *T. calcarea* can be watered throughout the year but seems to perform best with spring and summer watering and a dry winter. If *T. calcarea* begins to flower in late winter, which it often does, a little water at that time can increase and prolong the flower display.

General *Titanopsis* Care

Titanopsis requires plenty of sun, a coarse, well-drained container media, and a watering period of spring and early summer. Give less water in mid to late summer. Keep plants dry through late winter unless they begin to flower, when you can then water lightly. If the potting media is well drained *T. calcarea* can usually handle water anytime of the year.

Acquiring Plants

You can usually find *Titanopsis calcarea* on a number of mail order nursery lists. The other titanopsis species are much more difficult to find. Of course, you can acquire nearly all of them if you are willing to grow from seed. Mesa Garden <http://www.mesagarden.com/> has a large selection.



All of the titanopsis are attractive and relatively easy to grow. Fred Dortort, in his book, *Succulent Plants of the World*, compares the surface texture of titanopsis to that of exotic reptile skin. If you want to start with the easiest, it is *Titanopsis calcarea*. Hope to see some of your titanopsis in one of our future plant shows.

The Plant of the Month for
May 2013 will be

***Echeveria* 'Alfred'**

Sometimes It's All About the Pot

If you have to have your plant in a pot, why not make it something special!

Clay, plastic, and ceramic are all traditional container materials for succulent plants, and there are good reasons. They are inexpensive, traditional, easy to move around, usually light in weight, and readily available. However, why not exercise a little innovation and stretch the limits of a container home for a few of your favorite succulents. Why not show them a little succulent love by giving them special digs.

Imaginative containers are all around you. Abandon shoes are naturals, just short lived. Kitchenware no longer in use can provide utility living quarters, perfect for working class succulents such as the houseleeks. If you believe your aristocrat echeveria deserves more, consider that silver chalice collecting dust.



Of course, you can go retro, and use that old coffee cup; or even better, that favorite coffee can. There are endless possibilities; they're just waiting for someone to conjure them into existence. Why not you?

On The Practical Side

- proper drainage

All containers need a way for excess water to escape. Succulents don't tolerate waterlogged roots. If you have a special container, but drainage holes just are not going to happen, consider cache potting. Plant your succulent in an inexpensive plastic pot and place that inside the "must use" container. A few thoughtfully chosen and positioned stones can help hide the interior helper pot. Excess water will collect in the bottom of the main container and must be removed.

- plant to pot ratio

A small plant in a large container looks lost. Strive for balance. Keep the opening of the container that holds the potting media about 25% larger than the diameter of the plant, or group of plants. A mix of succulents in a large, unusual container commands attention. Instead of a loaf of bread, create a loaf of succulents.



- rot prevention

If you are using container that is going to rot, consider lining the interior with plastic. Just leave the bottom unlined to allow excess water to escape.

- make your own

Stalking the yard sales and second hand shops can turn up some container gems, but you can also make your own. One type of do it yourself container well suited for succulents, is hypertufa. You make hypertufa by mixing two parts peat moss, one part perlite, and one part cement. Mix these components thoroughly, then add one part water. Use the resulting, slightly moist mix to fill a mold. Coming up with the mold is the creative part of the process. The simplest mold is a flower pot placed within a slightly larger flower pot and the hypertufa mix added to the void between the two pots. Once you gain a bit of



Hypertufa Trough

experience, you can move on to creating all kinds of interesting types and shapes of molds. You can use mortar dye to colorize containers. You can embed pieces of tile in the sides of the container as the hypertufa dries and hardens. For outdoor use containers you can induce moss to grow on it.

For more info on making hypertufa containers check the web. There are plenty of sites with instructions and hints. Or, ask our local hypertufa guru Bob Petza at our April meeting.



Directions: The gardens are located off Beulah Road, between Route 7 and Route 123, south of the Dulles Access Road. To reach Meadowlark Botanical Gardens from the Beltway, take Route 7 toward Tysons Corner. Drive 4.5 miles west on Route 7, turn left onto Beulah Road and drive 2.5 miles to the gardens entrance on the right.

Meadowlark Botanical Gardens (100+ acres) are botanical gardens and an event venue located at 9750 Meadowlark Gardens Court, Vienna, Virginia, 22182.

Beauty, conservation, education and discovery flourish throughout the year at this 95 acre complex of large ornamental display gardens and unique native plant collections. Walking trails, lakes, more than twenty varieties of cherry trees, irises, peonies, an extensive shade garden, native wildflowers, gazebos, birds, butterflies, seasonal blooms and foliage create a sanctuary of beauty and nature.

The National Capital Cactus and Succulent Society will hold a plant exhibit and sale at Meadowlark on Saturday, May 18 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. We need volunteers to meet and greet visitors and help with plant sales. Our goal is to introduce the wonderful world of succulent plants to the people of Northern Virginia. If you have a few hours to spare on May 18, please join us and help spread the word on these super plants. Spread a little succulent love.