

POINTS OF INTEREST

September 2003 Volume 6, Issue 9

Presidential Thoughts

Summer's End, Plants Come In

Well, summer is almost to an end, and it's the time of the year to bring our plants back inside. Because my plants are indoors nine months of the year, summer is the only time they really flourish.

Bringing the plants back in is always more time consuming than taking them outside. First, I clean them really well, making sure to wipe off any watermarks and to get rid of spider webs. Being outdoors, they collect leaves and excess dirt, which I remove with a fine brush, or I transplant the plants into bigger pots. Most of them have grown quite a bit and need to be transplanted anyway. This is also a great time to bonsai or do some pruning. I also spray them thoroughly with insecticides to get rid of any unwanted pests. I use diluted Neem oil or Schultz indoor plant pesticide.

Once the plants are brought inside, I set up my lights. My plants are placed in a northeast window, so needless to say, they won't be getting much sunlight. I use a timer for my lights, which I have set for 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. I usually shorten the time as winter approaches. I also minimize my watering considerably, mainly to force them into dormancy and because my house isn't 90°F. More adjustments are made as winter ends and spring approaches. It's really nice to have my plants outside during the summer months because I don't fuss over them, whereas rest of the year I have to.

This time of the year is a lot like spring cleaning. You may have noticed evidence of this during our August meeting, when many of our members, as well as nonmembers, donated plants to give away. I had brought in cuttings of *Stapelia*, *Rhipsalis*, *Senecio*, *Epiphyllums* and other plants to give away, as well as few flats of plants to sell. In addition, David Martin, who did a wonderful presentation on *Haworthia*,

brought in flats of his *Haworthia* collection to give away.

Before our meeting, Harriet Olds and I visited Annamie Spann, who had contacted me about some plants that she wanted to donate to our society. She said that the plants are getting too big and it has become a chore to haul them back in. (I'm sure many of you have been there.) I don't blame her after seeing her collection. Harriet and I brought several hybrids of *Epiphyllums* (orchid cactus), *Haworthia*, and a fine specimen of *Gasteria* to our meeting. Annamie has many more that she would like to give away. If you are interested, please call her at 303-781-2430 to make an appointment to see her. Her address is 4801 South Galapago, Englewood. Most of her collections have been with her for many years, and she is looking for a good home for her plants.

I also wanted to mention that Dick Kohlschreiber, who visited us last year to do a presentation on *Epiphyllums*, recently had heart surgery. I know that many of you still keep in contact with him and may still get cuttings. I thought that you'd like to know that he is recovering very well and is busy as ever. If you'd like to contact him via email, his address is kohlpedro@msn.com.

During our last meeting, I met Paula, a member of the Gardens of America in Colorado. She would like to know if any of our members are interested in being a guest speaker. Paula informed that they reserve their guest speaker two months in advanced, so please call her at 303-347-2426 if you want to volunteer. She is looking for a speaker for October 23 at 7 p.m. at the Waring house.

--Rebecca J. Spurling
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September Meeting: Show and Tell

The next meeting of the Colorado Cactus and Succulent Society will be held on Tuesday, September 9, at 7:30 p.m. at the Denver Botanic Gardens, Waring House. Tuesday's meeting will be a show and tell time. All members are invited to bring a favorite plant or photo and share something interesting about why you brought it.

Don't be shy. This is a great opportunity to learn from each other about our cactus and succulent obsessions. Some things you might mention are:

What is its name?

What do you like about it?

How do you take care of it?

Where is its native habitat?

How long have you had it?

A short presentation of Jim Sykes' slides will be given on Tuesday night as well. Jim was an enthusiastic member of CCSS. After his death, CCSS honored him by naming the Jim Sykes Trophy for Best Cactus in the novice category after him. As

I write this, I have no idea what gems I will find in the big box of Jim's handed down slides and photos, but I will do my best to let Jim's love for cactus inspire and fascinate you.

After the presentation, I will introduce show and tell members. You may let me know you will be presenting or surprise us at the meeting.

Many thanks to all of you for your input last month on the tee-shirt design for the apparel we offer at the Show and Sale. This month I will show you the new design and talk about some apparel options and prices.

CCSS is also expanding the number of books on cacti and succulents we will have for sale in March. A list of titles from Timber Press we are considering will be available at the meeting. If you have a book that you would recommend we carry, please bring a copy to the meeting.

--Harriet Olds

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***Talinum brevifolium*: A Desert Adventure**

by David Spenny, Pueblo

Talinum brevifolium is a beautiful little plant that had me puzzled for years.

I first encountered *T. brevifolium* in June of 1983, when my wife, Debrah, and I were on an eleven-day backpack trip in a desert canyon near Boulder, Utah. There had been lots of snow during the winter, and we were hiking in southern Utah only because snow still covered the access road to the North Rim trailhead of the Grand Canyon, where we had originally planned to backpack. We had been forced to seek an alternate location for our hike.

There was no snow in that southern Utah canyon, but the heavy snow in the nearby high country meant lots of runoff and especially high spring floods. For several days we hiked down the deep narrow canyon along a creek that normally would have been quite clear, but that spring it was muddy due to the higher than average runoff.

We generally had two choices for how to proceed. We could walk right down the creek or push our way through the brush on the shore. Neither was easy. It was impossible to see where to put our feet in the muddy creek. It was never much more than a foot deep, but we had to slide our feet carefully along the bottom to feel for sudden drop-offs. Alternatively, the brush on the shore scraped at our bare legs if we chose that route. But the canyon was beautiful and we had no shortage of water to purify for drinking. We took our time, traveling only a few miles each day, enjoying the spectacular scenery.

Eventually our creek joined a larger creek and the water got a lot deeper. Our way was finally blocked by deep, fast water filling the narrow slot canyon from wall to wall. We had to cross the waist-deep creek four times to reach a place where we could climb out of the canyon. The second crossing was dangerous with our full packs, but there was a boulder in the middle that slowed the current enough to enable us to cross with minimal risk.

A lot of reconnoitering found us a route that led up and out of the canyon toward the slickrock plateau above. And just a short distance up, there was a nice spot where we stopped to camp and enjoy this amazing place.

It stormed that night and waterfalls formed at several nearby pour-offs. We heard them, but couldn't see them well in the darkness of the night. Our tent was pitched near what had, in the evening, been a pleasant, water-filled pothole, but was now part of a small torrent. But rain is always welcome when you're anticipating a desert backpack away from flowing creeks. We had known that there should be a pothole about halfway back to our car by an "overland" route on the slickrock. Now we knew that the pothole would be full of water and our hike out could be more relaxed.

It was up on the plateau that Debrah first saw some succulent plants that looked like sedums. They grew in a tiny bit of soil in a shallow depression in the slickrock. Water would stay there a little longer after a rain, giving the plants a slight advantage and enabling them to survive the fierce heat of the desert sun that was absorbed and reflected by all that exposed rock.

When we got back to civilization. I tried to find out which sedum species were supposed to grow in that area and came up with nothing that resembled the plant we had found. I began to question my original identification of this plant as a sedum, but not knowing many other hobbyists, I didn't know whom to contact.

Meanwhile a specimen of the plant flowered itself to death in my garden. I had photographed and sketched the flower, so that five years later, when I finally discovered a reference to *Talinum brevifolium* (*Rocky Mountain Alpines*, -1986), my photo, drawing, and memory seemed to match up with what I found there. I hadn't understood much about flowers and their structure, but I began to learn that family differences are clearly seen in flowers. A sedum flower looks a lot different from a flower of the portulaca family. I soon learned that the *Portulacaceae* included a nice little grouping of succulents: *Talinum*, *Lewisia*, *Portulaca*, *Clatonia*, and others. And many of them are winter hardy!

I collected *T. brevifolium* again on another southern Utah backpack trip in May 1988. Once again we found it on the top of the slickrock plateaus at about 6,200 feet (2,000 meters) in shallow potholes and cracks in Navajo Sandstone with just a thin layer of soil. These plants

survived in my garden for about nine years. They flowered prolifically in mid-summer, the lavender to pale pink flowers sometimes nearly obscuring the tiny plants. They grew in raised beds of composted clay soil and often survived -20°F (-27°C) with and without snow cover. I didn't irrigate these plants (Pueblo gets about 9 to 12 inches [23 to 30 centimeters] of precipitation annually), but they did get extra water from my neighbor's lawn sprinkler.

In the winter they would shrivel up and look very dead, so much so that in spring I was tempted to dig up their remains and plant something else. But closer examination would reveal that they were still alive. The plants formed clumps, and the little clumps, only a few inches in diameter and no more than an inch (a couple centimeters) high, got a little bigger each year. But then they became less vigorous as other larger plants started to overgrow them. After about nine years, the last plant failed to come back after winter dormancy. They had survived unseasonably cold temperatures and a sudden snowstorm on the last day of the previous October after 80°F days throughout much of the earlier part of that month.

It has been six years since they died, and I have not been able to replace them. I miss them. They are neat little gems that brought some color to hot, dry places of my succulent garden. They readily produced seed, which seemed to germinate well, so I gave some seeds away to gardening friends and acquaintances.

I hope *Talinum brevifolium* will become more available as time goes on.

Reference

"Plants of the Great Basin and the Western Slopes" in *Rocky Mountain Alpines*, (American Rock Garden Society and Denver Botanical Gardens), p 98.

A big thank you! . . .

to Cal and Carol Wichern for hosting the CCSS picnic in July. Dozens of CCSS members enjoyed the Wicherns' hospitality in their backyard for wonderful food, a plant exchange, and a look at the plant collection in their greenhouse.

A Fig for *Dorstenia*

Description & Characteristics

The genus *Dorstenia* is found within the *Moraceae* family, which includes the figs. The *Moraceae* family currently has around 50 different genera and well over 1,200 described species occurring in a variety of locations, of which the more interesting succulent species of *Dorstenia* found in Africa. Species found within this tropical genus vary from herbs to shrubs both succulent and non-succulent. The genus was named after Theodor Dorsten, a 16th century German botanist and medical professor at Marburg.

The most interesting and distinguishing characteristic associated with *Dorstenias* is their unique flower. While the flowers tend to be very drab in color (green to cream in color), it is their shape that sets them apart from other succulents. The flowers consist of a disk-shaped receptacle with several long bracts coming off the margins and resemble the sun or an octopus.

The inflorescence is really a group of flowers placed together in a structure called a hypanthodium. This cluster of flowers is sometimes referred to as a "shield flower" and is common in most if not all figs. Given that the inflorescence is made up of a group of flowers, both male and female organs are present and only one plant is required for pollination. Care must be taken when harvesting the seeds, because, like *Euphorbias*, *Dorstenias* can expel their seeds up to several feet away making them somewhat of a nuisance in the greenhouse.

The more interesting species, located in tropical Africa, typically exhibit either caudiciform or pachycaul characteristics and tend to stay fairly small in pot culture. Don't be fooled by their succulent nature—*Dorstenias* thrive during their summer growing seasons when given generous amounts of water! From my experience, most varieties seem to benefit from higher levels of humidity, which makes them slightly trickier to grow in drier climates such as here in Colorado. You can easily provide them will additional humidity by misting them lightly a

couple times a day, but take care not to keep them too wet.

In general, *Dorstenias* are frequently found in most growers' collections; however, they tend to be the more common varieties. A number of species are readily available and are fairly inexpensive, except for the more unusual varieties.

Growing Conditions

Those who are unable to enjoy the benefits of a greenhouse will be pleased to know that *Dorstenias* are great houseplants when given a windowsill with plenty of sun. They will thrive in full sun to part shade, but too much shade may cause the plant to become leggy and untidy.

Dorstenias are summer growers and thrive with warm temperatures all year round. In habitat, *Dorstenias* are generally deciduous and all growth will die back each year. However, if warm temperatures are provided in the winter, most will keep their growth all year and flower. A minimum of 60 degrees should be maintained, and you might get away with mid or even low 50's.

Do not keep these plants bone dry in winter. In summer, *Dorstenias* will thrive when given plenty of water.

A common cactus and succulent soil mix should be okay, and additional drainage material would be recommended for the larger, more established plants. I have found that a soil mixture too porous will cause the smaller plants to dry out and die.

Dorstenias will not survive outdoors if the temperature reaches less than 50 degrees and are not suitable for Colorado's cold winters.

Propagation

Dorstenias are extremely easy to propagate by either seed or cutting. Cuttings should be taken in the early spring once new growth starts to appear. Cut off at least a 3- to 4-inch section that has leaves, dip it into a rooting hormone, and allow it to harden off for a couple of days. Once it scabbed over, place the

cutting into a pot with a standard cacti and succulent mix and water well. Do not allow the soil to become dry, but also do not allow the pot to stand in water. From my experience, all cuttings will form typical plants.

Propagation from seed is also very easy and can actually become quite annoying when seedlings start to pop up in nearby pots. All *Dorstenia* flowers are self-fertile and have both male and female parts. They are extremely easy to pollinate, and in most cases, flowers will set fruit without effort. Once ripe, the seedpods will explode and send the tiny seeds flying if means to collect them are not in place. I typically use pantyhose or window screen to deflect the seeds into the pot itself or in a container surrounding the plant. Seeds should be sown similar to the characteristics and requirements of most any cactus or succulent.

Recommended Species (Pachycauls)

Dorstenia crisper & var. *lancifolia*, *D. foetida*
D. gigas, *D. gypsophila*.

Recommended Species (Caudiciforms)

Dorstenia barminiana, *D. benguellensis*,
D. bornimiana, *D. cuspidate*, *D. ellenbeckiana*
D. hildebrandtii

References

Anderson, Miles *The Ultimate Book of Cacti & Succulents*. Lorenz Books, 1998.

Rowley, Gordon D. *Caudiciform & Pachycaul Succulents*. Strawberry Press, 1987.

The Amateurs' Digest, Caudex Vol. #15, (2002): 17-19.

Next month I will discuss caudiciform *Cyphostemmas*. *Cyphostemmas* are a wonderful group of plants found in the succulent grape family. Over time they can become very large and can become quite impressive show specimens.

--Brad Johnson

If you would like to contact me, you can email me at brad_w_johnson@hotmail.com or visit my new picture website at <http://community.webshots.com/user/caudex333>.

Chinle New & Notes

New Members and Vicarious Travels

The last two months have brought quite a few new members into the Chinle Cactus Patch, thanks in part to wonderful publicity in the Grand Junction news media over the last few months. Many of our newest members (and a few guests who joined that evening) joined the "regular crowd" at the August 14 meeting of the Chinle Chapter.

The program started off with a question-and-answer session and plant-ailment diagnosis, followed by one of Don Campbell's excellent slide shows and travelog of his year's cactus (and other) expeditions. If we aren't able to enjoy the actual scenery in person, at least we can look forward to this type of vicarious experience from time to time. Don's tales of tracking elusive and rare cacti with Trevor Wray and a GPS make us want to see some of these sites ourselves, and Don promised he'd consider future field trip possibilities in southeastern Utah.

Our monthly meeting September 11 will continue the member-guided programs, as we show and tell about our favorite plants, plant localities, plant nurseries, plant books, and other plant tidbits. Members are encouraged to bring plants, photos, slides, or any other pertinent materials, and everyone sharing a special insight with the Club will receive a free plant. A similar program a year or so ago resulted in a great sharing session, and we look forward to more. As usual, the meeting starts at 6:30 p.m. at the Mesa Mall Community Room, and all are welcome.

--Bobbie Irwin

--Chinle Newsletter Editor

Greenhouse Field Trip

CCSS is planning a trip to the Crump Greenhouse in Buena Vista on Saturday, October 18.

Attendance will be limited.

Details will be available at the next meeting.

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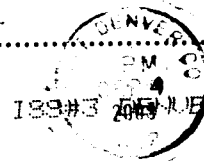
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