

VOL. 59
No. 1

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2022

Kaktos Komments

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



Aloiopsis schooneesii
by Karina Boese



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

From the Editor**Karla Halpaap-Wood**

Happy New Year! With covid numbers rising again I am worried what the year will bring. But let's at least make the KK even better. Everybody can contribute. Send me notes and pictures what you observe with your own plants, study a new to you plant and send a report, or on anything cactus and succulent related you read or hear.

Membership**Andrea Varesic**

On November 17 the HCSS met at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center. Ten members were in attendance and two visitors. The visitors were Hung N. Lam and Pat Hudnall. The door prizes were a cactus keychain provided by Karla Halpaap-Wood and the Sanseveria hawaii open pollinated grown by Wally Ward. Wally presented photos from the 2008 trip of the society to Big Bend National Park. November cactus of the month is *Leuchtenbergia principis* by Andrea Varesic and the succulent was *Obrea melanantha* by Karla Halpaap-Wood. The business discussion included our first Cactus Sale, since the pandemic, to be planned in May and an early fall trip to Big Bend. We also hope to have a few field trips in the spring.

Our Christmas party was held at Riva's on the December 5th. Seven mighty attendees enjoyed a night of good company, a gift exchange and good food. A membership email was sent by Karla for 2022. Please forward any questions to me at avaresic@att.net

**Calendar:**

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| January 12, 2022 | 7:00 pm Board Meeting via Zoom |
| January 26, 2022 | 7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Zoom
Program: Richard Stamper "My Latest Adeventures with Seedlings" |
| February 23, 2022 | 7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
Program: Liliana Cracraft "Cooking with Cacti" |
| March 1, 2022 | Deadline for submitting articles for the KK. |

Dear Fellow Cactophiles,

I'd like to start by wishing everyone a Happy New Year. It's a hard time to write a message. The board of directors has made plans for the spring sale and the autumn show and sale, and I have been thinking of field trip ideas. It has been so much fun to be at the meetings in person, even if we were distanced and masked. It's fun to meet our new members and watch their enthusiasm about the plant exchange, learn and share, and to get together with old friends. Now, once again, Covid is rearing its ugly head in yet another variant. I am making an executive decision to return to zoom for the January meeting because of this. It's so hard to watch the long lines for testing and vaccinations, the flights being cancelled and hospitals being in crisis due to so many employees being sick, and schools struggling to make informed decisions. Once again, we will have to consider each meeting and event according to what is best for our members. I truly hope this new variant will pass quickly after the holiday surge in cases. I will keep you posted. I can't wait to incorporate our new members into our regular activities, as well as having them assume more responsibility and learn how the club operates. We were lucky to have meetings, a really fun potting party, and a Christmas party before everything went south again. I guess my message is to ask you to bear with us a little longer, and to take care of yourselves and those you love, and to try to keep your chin up during these troubling times. Hopefully my next message will be a more upbeat one with a resumption of plans and better times.

As always,
Josie Watts, President
HCSS

Greetings:

With the New Year it's time to renew your Houston Cactus and Succulent Society (HCSS) Membership for 2022. Please remember dues are only part of our annual income. With COVID-19 still active we were unable to continue live monthly meetings with the raffle table until the last few months. Our Spring Sale and Show and Sale in September were cancelled which limited our income for 2021 to membership dues only. Thank you to the members who contributed additional funds to the club last year. We still incurred expenses for printing the KK, Zoom membership and website hosting, etc.

We look forward to having all of membership renew and having members from our Facebook page join our Club. Membership fees remain at \$20 for individual and \$25 for family. Please indicate your choice on the Membership Application (<http://www.hcsstex.org/HCSSmembership.pdf>) and mail to the address listed. Please write clearly to have your information entered into the Membership Rooster correctly. Membership Dues are due no later than January 31, 2022.

Thank you.

Cindy Gray
Second Vice President
Houston Cactus & Succulent Society

January Cactus of the Month

Wally Ward

Name: *Melocactus concinnus* Buining & Bredero

Synonyms:

- *M. concinnus* subsp. *axiniphorus* (Buining & Bredero) P.J. Braun & Esteves
- *M. axiniphorus* Buining & Bredero
- *M. pruinusus* Werderm
- *M. robustispinus* Buining & Bredero
- *M. zebneri* var. *robustispinus* (Buining & Bredero) P.J. Braun
- *M. seabraensis* HU 214 West of Seabra, Bahia, Brazil L. Horst & W. Uebelmann



Common Names: None

Habitat/Distribution: Central Bahia State to north-central Minas Geras State, Brazil. Lives in Savanna habitat. Grows in the open and beneath low to tall trees in stony soil, quartz sand and gravel, and between crystalline rocks. Habitat includes caatinga (xeric shrubland thorn forest which consists of small, thorny trees that shed their leaves seasonally) and the like.

Description: *M. concinnus* is one of the more dwarfish and elegant Brazilian Melocactus species, usually reaching a diameter of around six inches and reaching a height of around five inches before generating a cephalium. *M. concinnus* is a globose cactus with 8-12 sharp ribs. The spines are at first red or black, later passing to gray except for the darker tips. The cephalium is a bristly, round-to-elongate structure in which the deep-pink flowers and fruit are protected. Plant growth is exclusively in the cephalium once it forms. Roots are horizontal and delicate.



Cultivation/Growth: Melocactus can be challenging to cultivate. Soil mix should be a very porous standard cactus mix. The species *M. concinnus* is hardy in Zones 10+. Gunter Andersohn in his book *Cacti and Succulents* recommends using an acid soil mix for Melocactus species generally at a pH of 4.6. I have not done so. Given that the root system is broad, horizontal, and weak, it is better to grow Melocactus in shallow, bowl-shaped pots and to take great care in transplanting. The plants are very sensitive to cold, and I bring in my plants if nighttime temperatures fall below 50. Water with tepid water free of lime. These plants do well in the

growing season with moisture but need well-drained substrate. In winter keep warm and dry. Never transplant after the cephalium forms since all growth at that point is focused in the cephalium.

Uses: I have found no uses for *M. concinnus* except as a hobby plant.

Availability: This species is widely available as a cultivated plant. I obtained my seeds for this species from Mesa Garden in 2005, at a time when Mesa offered a large variety of cactus and other succulent seeds. According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), *M. concinnus* is of "least concern," although its habitat in Brazil is diminishing.

References: Andersohn, Gunter. Cacti and Succulents. London: A&C Black Publishers Ltd. (1983).

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species Version 2121-3, <https://www.iucnredlist.org>

LLifl Encyclopedia of Living Things: http://www.llifl.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/11349/Melocactus_concinnus%20

Taylor, Nigel P. The Genus *Melocactus* (Cactaceae) in Central and South America. *Bradleya*, 1991(9): 1-80 (1991). <https://doi.org/10.25223/brad.n9.1991.a1>

January Succulent of the Month

Liliana Cracraft



NAME: *Euphorbia unispina*

COMMON NAME: Candle cactus

HABITAT/DISTRIBUTION: This plant grows in Guinea and east Mali, Nigeria, and southern Sudan. *Euphorbia unispina* occurs on rocky hills and slopes in savanna. As a (semi-succulent *Euphorbia* species, its trade is controlled under CITES appendix 2.)

DESCRIPTION: *E. unispina* is a spiny succulent compact tree with a stout sparsely branched stem that can grow up to 13 feet. These trees are branched and each branch is one inch in diameter or thicker. The silver-gray branches are covered with shallow tubercles, and horny spine shields with a single spine. The branches bear a few wedge shaped to linear-lanceolate green leaves near the tips. Each leaf is often rounded or two-lobed at the tip, and somewhat curled among the margins. The leaves are variable even in one and the same species. **FLOWERS:** The flowers are yellow green, with 5 lobes, up to 0.2 in. in diameter. They appear at the end of the dry season before new leaves are formed. There is only one female flower on each cyathium surrounded by many male flowers. **FRUITS:** Fruits are obtusely 3-lobed capsule c. 6 mm in diameter, glabrous, 3-seeded. Seeds are ovoid shaped.

CULTIVATION/GROWTH: Needs good drainage and warmth (sunlight). Unlike most succulents, *E. unispina* does not handle long drought periods very well. During the summer, it may need weekly watering, but when dormant, very careful attention to watering is needed. Don't let them sit in wet soil which can cause root rot. You can also add some organic matter or fertilizer. Hardiness from 25° to 50° degrees F.

*E. unispina* flowers*E. unispina* Fruit

PROPAGATION: It can be grown from seed, but they are very difficult to germinate. Additionally, the seeds are virtually never available. The best method of propagation is by cuttings. *Euphorbia unispina* is easily propagated by stem cuttings. These should be at least 20 cm long, preferably cut at the base of a branch where the cut surface will be woody. After cutting they should be allowed to lie in a shaded place for at least 2 weeks for a callus to form on the cut end.

REMARKS: This is the first time that this plant has been presented as Succulent of the Month in the 58 years history of HCSS. *E. unispina* is a plant extremely rare in collections, and actively sought by collectors. Another similar species, *E. poisonii*, can be distinguished by its floral characteristics. Two of plants are approximately 30 years old, and are 10 feet high. They survived the 2020 February freeze, most likely because they were dormant.

AVAILABILITY: Very hard to find. Occasionally available from Arid Lands or Out of Africa.

USES: The latex of *E. unispina* is very caustic and toxic, and very irritating to the skin and mucous membranes. It can cause blindness when in contact with eyes. Despite its toxicity, it is medicinally used. In Guinea, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire the latex is applied to the neck to cure sleeping sickness, because it is believed that the disease is caused by ganglia in the neck. In Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria the latex is applied to leprosy sores. Two drops of latex on an egg are eaten as an anthelmintic. In Benin stem ash is inhaled to treat asthma; palm oil with latex is taken to treat constipation and colic; a macerate of the cut stems in water is applied to skin diseases and hemorrhoids. In northern Nigeria the latex is rubbed onto the body to treat mental illness. In Cameroon the latex is placed in a carious tooth to relieve toothache or to help to loosen the tooth and render extraction easier. Dried leaves are smoked in a pipe to treat bronchitis.

In addition to medicinal uses, the latex is widely used in the preparation of arrow poison, though always mixed with other ingredients, such as seeds of *Strophanthus* species. It is also used in fish poison and animal traps. In northern Nigeria the latex is reported to be used as a poison to commit murder and suicide. The latex is applied to scarifications to thicken them.

In West Africa *Euphorbia unispina* is sometimes is planted in gardens as an ornamental plant, or as a hedge around fields and graveyards. In Europe and the United States it is a rare potted plant in succulent collections.

REFERENCES:

- [Lflife.com/Encyclopedia/Succulents](https://lflife.com/Encyclopedia/Succulents) (Accessed 12/30/2021)
- <https://prota4u.org/database/protav8.asp?p=Euphorbia+unispina+N.E.Br.> (Accessed 12/31/2021)

February Cactus of the Month**Andrea Varesic****Espostoa melanostele**

It goes by many other names; *Cephalocereus melanostele* (basionym), *Binghamia melanostele*, *Cereus melanostele*, *Espostoa haagei*, *Haageocereus melanostele*, *Pseudoespostoa melanostele*. It is commonly known as the Peruvian Old Lady Cactus because it is found in Peru and Ecuador.

It displays an abundance of long, woolly spines that cover and hide the body of the stems, including sharp, up to 1.5 inches (3.8 cm) long, white, yellow, or red spines. It slowly grows up to 7 feet (2.1 m) tall in its natural habitat, but raised in a pot, it will reach up to 10 inches (25 cm) in 10 years. Even at a very young age, as the cactus matures, all the spines become darker. The stems are erect and columnar and branch at the base to form a clump. Flowers are white, nocturnal, and up to 2 inches (5 cm) in diameter. Fruits are berry-like with edible black seeds.

If grown in the ground it will branch. In a pot it is limited. It requires full to partial sun and well draining soil. During the winter it can be watered twice a month. If it is in a pot, the roots will grow quickly and become bound. It is suggested for it to be repotted once a year in the spring or summer. It is winter dormant. Fertilizer to be given in the spring at half strength.

It is cold hardy to 20F (-6.7C).

It is readily available for purchase at the big box stores and most nurseries. However, in its natural habitat it is rare and endangered.

References are World of Succulents, California Cactus Center and Wikipedia.



February Succulent of the Month

Senecio hebdingii

Synonyms: *Kleinia hebdingii*, *Notonia hebdingii*

Senecio is a genus of flowering plants in the daisy family (Asteraceae)

There was very little I could find about this plant in the literature, but it was first published as *Notonia hebdingii* in *Kakteen und andere Sukkulenten*, 38 (11) 1987, p. 270 (1987)

When Werner Rauh found this plant he first thought it's *Notonia descoingsii*, because this was a known *senecio* to grow in that area of Madagascar. He took some plant material to the Jardin botanique "Les Cèdres" in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, France, which also grew the *N. descoingsii* there. René Hebding, the botanist there was a very good observer and realized that this was a different species, so the plant was named after him.

Habitat/Distribution: This plant is native of Madagascar. It grows in limestone in the Fiherenana river valley near Anjamala village.

Description: It is a small bushy plant, round branches up to 40 cm in habitat, can be slightly taller in cultivation, 7 mm thick, waxy-gray green in color with three darker veins that radiate downwards from the leaf base. It has tiny deciduous leaves. It has clusters of small cream colored flowers similar to other *senecios* and is daisy like.

Cultivation/Growth: This summer-dormant succulent is native to Madagascar, and loves bright, direct morning sun. They are winter growers and typically don't need much watering through the summer. They are mildly cold-hardy (down to 40 degrees F) and produce yellow powder-puff blooms.

Availability: Dave Thomas, Arid Land Greenhouses, East Austin Succulents and others

My experiences: I got this plant many years ago from Dave Thomas at the Houston Home and Garden Show which is always in February. It must have bloomed at the time, because I liked it a lot and thought I had never seen anything similar. And for me the flowers are the prettiest of this plant. It blooms in winter, mostly February, but I think will be maybe a little earlier this year.

It is relatively slow growing. I normally kept it in the greenhouse also in the summer months, it did not do very much, but never failed to bloom in February. Then last summer I took all plants out of the greenhouse. It was outside in full sun and got lots of rain. This made it green up a lot and I think it really liked the rain. I do not totally agree with it being a winter grower, because the wet summer made it grow. For the winter it is in the greenhouse again and already shows signs of blooms coming up in December. I fertilize rarely, repotted it once or twice in the years I had it.

References:

Werner Rauh, *Succulent and Xerophytic Plants of Madagascar Vol 2 Illustrated Handbook of Succulent Plants: Dicotyledons* p. 34
Kakteen und andere Sukkulenten, 38 (11) 1987, p. 270

Karla Halpaap-Wood



ARIOCARPUS BLOOMS

DICK & PHYLLIS MCEUEN

On October 28, 2021, we observed the best Ariocarpus bloom we have ever had. There are four species of Ariocarpus and one hybrid in the pictures below. The largest pot contains a seven headed plant. It had thirty-one blooms. As far as we can remember, this is the first time that plant has ever bloomed so a very pleasant surprise.



Our Humble, Texas Sunroom Construction in 2011 Celebrating The 10th Anniversary

A home for our Cacti & Succulent Plant Collection

By Thomas Cardinal, HCSS

2021 marks the tenth anniversary since we had a beautiful Four Seasons Sunroom installed. My wife and I dreamed about owning an attached sunroom to our house. A room for cacti & succulent plants to grow. A room to lounge in during retirement years. A room to have morning coffee and enjoy the back yard view. We waited till just before retirement and decided to go for it.

The sunroom is 12 feet wide 22 feet long. Constructed with a lightweight aluminum frame and contains specially coated glass panels that block out much of the harmful UV radiation. The room has a sliding door on each end and sliding glass windows with screens that can be opened for fresh air. Two ceiling fans were added for air circulation. A built in the wall combination air conditioning unit and heater makes the room livable all year long.

Construction began in March 2011 and took about 6 weeks to complete. The first step was the pouring of an adequate cement foundation and an entrance ramp. The Sunroom pieces were delivered and laid out on the back yard grass. Two installers began assembling the room. Attached are photos showing the sequence and progress of construction. The frame went up quickly. Then the side wall panels and finally the roof panels. Electrical wires had to be run to the breaker box for power. Sealant had to be applied to make the room watertight. A patio made of pavers was constructed around the finished Sunroom. Later we added California redwood benches and a potting bench to the room.





The sunroom today 2021

Presently we winterize about 450 cacti inside the room from late October through March. Ceiling hooks were added for hanging plants. In the Spring cacti are transported outdoors onto the patio into the hot sun for the summer months. The sunroom itself faces Southeast direction and the cacti get full sun most of the day. Many people are amazed with the plant collection and sunroom. We do give tours of the backyard cactus garden and open the sunroom to visitors.





CSSA NEWS

LILIANA CRACRAFT



The Cactus and Succulent Society of America (CSSA) created a new membership category to begin in 2022. This new category (Supporting Membership), was established for those that want to support the CSSA and enjoy some of the benefits of membership at a lower cost. The annual cost of a “Supporting Membership” is \$ 20.00.

While this membership category does not include the CSSA Journal, it does include To the Point e-newsletter, CSSA webinars, access to the CSSA Seed Depot, voting privileges, and access to the CSSA Biannual Convention.

The annual cost of a Regular membership is \$50.00

The CSSA Membership forms can be found at: <https://cssa.myshopify.com/collections/join-cssa>

Additionally, CSSA is currently offering a complimentary copy of “To The Point” quarterly e-newsletter to the public free of charge. You can obtain your copy at: <https://mailchi.mp/eef901b778cf/z8k1tpng1v>

HCSS Leadership and Contact Info

President
Josie Watts
josiewatts@mindspring.com

Treasurer
Bruce Moffett
bmoффett@mindspring.com

Education
David Van Langen
dvl@pdq.net

First Vice President
Wally Ward
biosparite@gmail.com

KK editor and Webmaster
Karla Halpaap-Wood
khalpaap@me.com

Ways and Means
Rolando Ontiveros
rolandoontiveros@outlook.com

Second Vice President
Cindy Gray
grayco60@hotmail.com

KK publisher
Imtiaz Bangee
imbangee@yahoo.com

Publicity and CSSA affiliate
Liliana Cracraft and July Olsen
opuntia77@yahoo.com

Recording Secretary
open position

Membership
Andrea Varesic
avaresic@att.net