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MARCH-APRIL 2022

# Kaktos Komments

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



Haworthia attenuata f. variegata  
by Karina Boese



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

## Membership

**Andrea Varesic**

On January 26 at 7 PM the HCSS held the monthly meeting remotely. We had 18 members join the meeting. Echo Pang was lone guest to join us. Wally Ward presented the cactus of the month, *Melanocactus constinus*. The succulent of the month, *Euphorbia unispina*, was presented by Liliana Rodriguez. Our presentation was given by Richard Stemper and was entitled "Cactus Shack Seedling Review", adventures in seedlings. Mr. Stemper discussed growing from seed many rare cacti and succulents in his home in Georgetown. Josie discussed our May sale, which is scheduled for May 6th and 7th (a Friday and a Saturday with the set up happening on Thursday the 5th). This is a departure from our usual Saturday and Sunday schedule because we are going to avoid a \$150 fee for using the facilities on a Sunday. In the coming year we will have a potting party, preceding the sale, and hopefully resume field trips.

On February 23rd, the HCSS met at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center. There were thirteen members in attendance. Our spring sale has been confirmed for May 6 and 7, a Friday and a Saturday. The set up will be on Thursday. Liliana will be hosting the potting party a few weeks prior to the sale and the date will be announced as we get closer. A field trip to Tom Cardinal's house is planned for the spring, a rescheduled event due to the pandemic. The American Cactus Society has extended a special invitation to cactus societies. HCSS members can now join for only \$20 and have access to all of their presentations and their seed depot. The invitation was emailed to our members already. All the door prizes were donated by Liliana. Liliana also gave the evening's presentation. "Cooking with cactus and succulents" discussed the history, the recipes, and the cactii that are used in the traditional cuisine of Mexico. Karla presented the succulent of the month, *Senecio hebdingii*. Andrea presented the cactus of the month, *Espostoa melanostele*. I hope that spring has finally sprung for us all and our cacti.

Please send membership news to me at [avaresic@att.net](mailto:avaresic@att.net)

## Calendar:

<b>March 9, 2022</b>	7:00 pm Board Meeting via Zoom
<b>March 23, 2022</b>	7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Program: "The Giant Saguaro: Venue for Nesting Birds" by Andrea Varesic, HCSS
<b>April 2, 2022</b>	Potting party at Liliana's house.
<b>April 27, 2022</b>	7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Program: TBA
<b>May 6-7, 2022</b>	Spring Sale, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center

## March Cactus of the Month

Joseph Rodd

### *Gymnocalycium striglianum*

**Common name:** “black chin cactus”

**Habitat/distribution:** Mendoza and San Luis Provinces (the western part of central Argentina)

**Description:** *G. striglianum* is a gorgeous little cactus. Usually solitary, it can reach 8-10cm in diameter. Its color depends on how much light it receives; usually it appears blackish-purple, but it can be also be dark blue-green, grayish-brown, or even take on a reddish hue if exposed to full sun. It has 8-12 ribs containing fuzzy white areoles, out of which emerge 3-5 black radial spines that beautifully match its dark body and turn gray with age. Flowers are creamy white and about 5cm in length.



**Cultivation/growth:** relatively simple to grow, *G. striglianum* does best in partial shade. As with all members of the genus, it appreciates regular water in summer but very limited watering in winter. Hardy to 10°F, it can easily handle the occasional freezes we get here in Houston.

**Availability:** I got mine from Miles Anderson (miles2go.com). Although he does not currently have it listed for sale, presumably he might again in the future. Mesa Garden (mesagarden.com) has seeds available.

#### References:

- Demaio, Pablo et al. (2011). “Molecular phylogeny of *Gymnocalycium* (Cactaceae): Assessment of alternative infrageneric systems, a new subgenus, and trends in the evolution of the genus.” *American Journal of Botany* 98: 1841-54. DOI:10.3732/ajb.1100054
- “*Gymnocalycium striglianum*.” *Llifle Encyclopedia of Cacti*. [http://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/21417/Gymnocalycium\\_striglianum](http://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/21417/Gymnocalycium_striglianum)
- International Plant Names Index. <https://www.ipni.org/>
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**March Succulent of the Month****Karina Boese**

NAME:

**Kalanchoe fedtschenkoi** [kal-un-KOH-ee, fed-tscheng-koh-eye]

Family: Crassulaceae

Tribe: Kalanchoeae

Genus: Kalanchoe/Bryophyllum

Synonyms: Bryophyllum fedteschenkoi

COMMON NAME(S): Lavender Scallops, Kalanchoe Stonecrop, South American Air Plant, Gray Sedum.

Kalanchoe fedtschenkoi is native to Madagascar where they can grow prolifically up to 20" tall. This Kalanchoe is now widely available in the U.S. and has established itself in the wild in some southern parts of the U.S. (mostly Florida region). This specific variety is named in honor of a Russian plant pathologist and botanist, Boris Fedtschenko (1873-1947).

Kalanchoe fedtschenkoi is considered a soft succulents, they will not survive a hard frost. Hardiness zones: 9b to 11b. They tolerate our mild winter. I cover them with frost-cloth, or bring them in, if we have frost warning in the winter. Most Kalanchoes prefer bright locations (not necessarily a full sun). Intense sunlight can easily burn their leaves, but this variety seems to respond well under full-sun in Houston. Their leaves turn reddish pink if they are in full-sun. They will show more bluish-green colored leaves, if they are in partial sun.



Stressed color leaves under Texas full-sun, winter 2022



The leaves turn blueish-green under partial shade.

The flowers are pink, purple-ish or reddish-light brown. They put quite a show, especially in large groups. The bell shaped flowers hang in loose clusters and attract pollinators. Like most Kalanchoes, they bloom in winter time and have long-lasting flowers. Unlike *Kalanchoe thyrsiflora* (Paddle Plant) or *K. gastonis-bonniei* (Donkey Ears), this type of *Kalanchoe* is not monocarpic. They do not die after they finish flowering. Once the flowers are spent, just cut it back down to the biggest leaf pair you'd like to keep.



Their sterile (non-flowering) stems can take root wherever they touch the soil. They produce a lot of aerial roots, which some people do not like because they can look messy. You can safely trim out the aerial roots if you want, and it will not bother the plant. New plantlets grow along its leaf edges, making them easily spread and propagate.



*Kalanchoes* thrive in poor soil but ensure they have good drainage when they are potted. They do not need a lot of water and are very drought tolerant. In the winter, you should water the plant a little if you see the leaves start shriveling.

Aphids and scale insects are usually the common pests on this plant, so do some preventative maintenance on all your plants. Use systemic pest control or check your plants daily or periodically in order to do a quick intervention if necessary.

Picture of aerial roots on *Kalanchoe fedtschenkoi* 'Variegata', commonly called Tricolor Lavender Scallops.

**Personal experiences:**

All the pictures of the plants in this article belong to me. I have had this plant for more than 12 years. That was the time when I did not fully understand what succulent plants were. It was potted in regular potting soil and survived in the same pot for 8 years (the plastic pot crumbled then it was repotted in a terracotta pot). It has been cut, trimmed, and shared with many friends. This plant is one of the easiest succulent plants that I ever experienced. *Kalanchoe fedtschenkoi* is very easy to grow and will survive on neglect!

**REFERENCES:**

<https://worldofsucculents.com/>

[http://www.llifl.com/Encyclopedia/SUCCULENTS/Family/Crassulaceae/29101/Kalanchoe\\_fedtschenkoi\\_f.\\_marginata](http://www.llifl.com/Encyclopedia/SUCCULENTS/Family/Crassulaceae/29101/Kalanchoe_fedtschenkoi_f._marginata)

**April Cactus of the Month****David Van Langen*****Echinocereus russanthus***

*Echinocereus russanthus* is a pretty cylindrical shaped cactus of Northern Mexico, West Texas and into southern New Mexico. The stems are typically less than a foot tall and 3-4 inches across and are generally covered with shaggy, bristly red spines that conceal the stem. Some plants are single while others form small cluster. While the general appearance of the plant is based on red spines, many of the radials can be white or yellow, most of the long shaggy centrals are red with some browns and blacks mixed in. The red flowers are fairly small and emerge from the side of the stem and not near the top.

From personal experience and recollections !!-- I've observed that these plants are common in the Chisos Mnts in Big Bend and outlying areas that are igneous or volcanic in origin. They are readily seen in high elevation deserts and mid elevations but less common in lowest elevation, at least in Big Bend. I do not have any pictures of *E russanthus* growing on limestone-- they are replaced by the common *Echinocereus dasyacanthus*- or Texas Rainbow.

The Texas Rainbow is found all over West Texas and in BBNP, is common in the eastern half of the park, - places like Dagger Flats and Hot Springs. *E russanthus* is very common in the volcanic rubble surrounding the Chisos and extending down towards Santa Elena Canyon. *E russanthus* differ from *E dasyacanthus* as the red flowers emerge from the side of the stem - unlike the large showy flowers that adorn the crown of the Texas Rainbow. *E russanthus* has unkept spines unlike the tight spination of the Rainbow Cactus. The tip of *E russanthus* is usually a bit more pointed than the flat/ squared of top of the Rainbow stems.

When it comes to taxonomy--- its a big ugly mess !! To some, the russanthus belongs as a subspecies of the *E viridiflorus*. Others list it as a species while some lump it in with the chloranthus group! All are closely related



but never agreed on!!

In cultivation, *Echinocereus russanthus* is a very nice plant to add to a collection. It can handle any temps, hot or cold, that the Houston area may hand out. It does need protection from our rain and would not survive long if planted outside and uncovered. It also seems to be an *Echinocereus* that attracts mealie bugs- and they are difficult to see under the bristly spines. Prevenative action is best if chemicals can be applied. *E russantus* is not an easy plant to find listed for sale. I bought mine from Miles to Go ( imagine that !!-- My favorite !) several years ago and he has not offered them for sale since then. All in all-- If one can provide protection from rain, buy one of these next chance they are listed ! Cheers !!!



## April Succulent of the Month

Leighton Webb

### Trichodiadema densum

**Name/classification:** *T. densum* syn. *Mesembryanthemum densum* syn. *Psilicaulon densum* is a species of succulent in the Aizoaceae family. The reason it is called *Trichodiadema densum* is because 'tricho' is latin for bristle, 'diadema' means crown, and 'densum' means dense. It is commonly called the miniature desert rose

**Description:** The name 'dense bristle crown' sums this plant up nicely. It is a compactly-growing shrubby plant with bristles at the end of every leaf, which have small bumpy grooves all over. Its flowers last a while- up to a week and a half- before they wilt and die. They are magenta in color and radiate from the center, like many Mesembs. Mature specimens develop swollen roots or caudices.

**Distribution:** The miniature desert rose is native to semiarid South Africa. It grows in sandy soil in Willowmore and nearby regions. South Africa has hot daytime temperatures and cool nights; however, its temperature rarely drops below zero degrees Celsius.



**Care:** *T. densum* is a very easy plant to maintain. Like most succulent plants, it requires free-draining soil. It does well if you give it a lot of light. I expose mine the full intensity of the sun for many hours of the day, and it does well without any burns or signs of stress. Water the plant from mid fall to early spring. To fertilize, I mix in low nitrogen fish meal into the soil. This promotes a healthy microbiome in the soil. You will not need

to worry about stretching or etiolation of you give it enough light. Protect it from freezing temperatures

**Availability:** It is not difficult to find seeds or plants online, but you can also buy it at a big box store. I got mine at Lowe's. They are listed at planetdesert.com and mountaincrestgardens.com for reasonable prices.

#### References:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trichodiadema\\_densum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trichodiadema_densum)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trichodiadema>

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<https://weatherspark.com/y/89138/Average-Weather-in-Willowmore-South-Africa-Year-Round>



## Cacti as Means for Artistic Creation

Chaden Yafi

This article was first published in the Fall 2021 in To The Point

Throughout history, humans have had a strange relationship with cacti. They either loved or hated them. Often times, those who loved them, enjoyed the various ways they could use them. For centuries, cacti were used as a source of food both for humans and animals; a source of medicine or protection; and even clothing! Cacti were also used in profitable businesses such as the industry of the cochineal dye for clothing and makeup. This business found its way to Europe, and, unfortunately, its overuse backfired. Many centuries later we are still witnessing the consequences of that business on the environment <sup>1</sup>. There was also a recent attempt by Mexican entrepreneurs to use the opuntia cactus pads as an animal leather substitute. However, it might be too early to tell whether such attempts of exploiting plants for these thriving businesses will help the environment in any way. Only time will tell.

On the other hand, there are many examples of how cacti were admired and loved merely for their aesthetic value and not for consumption purposes. They were chosen as a



Fig. 1

subject for paintings such as the painting by German artist, Carl Spitzweg, entitled: *A friend of cacti* (1856) (Fig 1, Berlin, Alte Nationalgalerie, Carl Spitzweg, *Kakteenfreund*.) The beautiful fruits of Prickly Pear cactus inspired the French painter Auguste Renoir his famous painting: *Still Life with Flowers and Prickly Pears* (1885) (Fig 2, New York City, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Auguste Renoir, *Still Life with Flowers and Prickly Pears*).

Recent history shows examples of how cacti themselves became not only the subject of art but also the means by which an art work is produced.

In 1975, the prominent American composer, John Cage, was on tour in Arizona with a dance company. A dancer in the group put a cactus near the compos-



Fig. 2

er's ear and plucked its spines. The sound that the cactus made inspired Cage to write his famous work "Child of Tree"<sup>2</sup> where a cactus functions as a musical instrument for the first time! To perform this piece, a cactus is amplified. It is connected to a contact microphone and amplifier and is played by plucking gently its spines to create various improvised rhythmical pattern.<sup>3</sup>

The Palestinian artist Ahmed Yasin, who lives in Nablus and teaches art in a local university there, was inspired by opuntia cacti that are common in the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> The name of the prickly pear opuntia cactus in Arabic is Sabr, meaning patience. The opuntia cacti inspired artist Yasin the values of patience, endurance, and perseverance. He relates to the plant in its ability to survive in harsh and arid environments. Thus, Yasin chose to create fabulous paintings with oil and acrylic on the pads of the opuntia cactus plant in his garden (Fig 3, published with authorization from the artist). The cactus was not harmed during the process



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

of painting as he gently moved his brush on the thick surface of its pads. His works express the suffering not only of Palestinians but of all humanity:

"Starting from the idea of the connection between human beings and their land, I made a collection of oil and acrylic paintings that express the suffering of Palestinian people and afflicted people too."<sup>5</sup>

Recently, it seems that cacti found their way into the world of photography and luxurious fashion. In December 2020, photographer Felix Valiente was given the mission of taking photos of the famous Spanish actress, Greta Fernandez, for the cover of the magazine, Lavanguardia. This was to promote the 2021 spring fashion.<sup>6</sup>

The setting was a field of opuntia cacti! He captured the photos of the actress in a very artistic way, where her red dress and handbag matched the redness of the fruits on the pads of opuntia cacti! (Fig 4)

Apparently, using cactus to promote fashion styles was contagious. Other high end fashion brands subsequently announced their luxurious product with cacti around them, such as the handbag of Dolce and Gabbana.<sup>7</sup>

In recent decades, people have shifted their relationships with cacti. They have given them the right to exist for their own beauty and aesthetic value, and not think of them for mere consumption.

Cacti became a subject of fascination for artists of all types, with the many values they could cultivate and inspire. In the light of the recent environmental awakening, perhaps these works of art could inspire us to continue promoting the respect, conservation, and appreciation of these beautiful plants rather than their use and extensive consumption that could lead to abuse and extinction.

## References

- (1) <https://www.kut.org/energy-environment/2021-02-01/an-invasive-bug-could-wipe-out-texas-cactuses-the-story-of-how-it-got-here-spans-centuries-and-continents?fbclid=IwAR1mnmxkcoyuxSv3MIgVxk17NjiSXCAYv2nxAnpTBkU1avacsFVRwRrpsGA>
- (2) [https://johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work\\_ID=40#:~:text=While%20on%20tour%20in%20Arizona,Child%20of%20Tree%20and%20Branches.](https://johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work_ID=40#:~:text=While%20on%20tour%20in%20Arizona,Child%20of%20Tree%20and%20Branches.)
- (3) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBnsBqOx9h4>
- (4) <https://hyperallergic.com/286319/an-artist-paints-hopeful-portraits-of-palestinians-on-cactus-pads/?fbclid=IwAR29SEG--dn26sugSOLd7PqRzlNTmw6QvzX1IN0656YFyScf1EgIQEnW4SY>
- (5) <https://www.behance.net/gallery/75647041/Art-on-Cactus>
- (6) <http://www.felixvaliente.com/portfolio/greta-fernandez-magazine-felix-valiente/>
- (7) <https://www.facebook.com/DolceGabbana/photos/10151604113044977>



Carl Spitzweg- The Cactus Enthusiast  
(Der Kaktusliebhaber)

## NEWS FROM CSSA

LILIANA CRACRAFT



We hope that many of you have taken advantage of the inexpensive supportive membership offered by CSSA for this year. As a supportive member, you will have access to the great Seed Depot that includes many types of cactus & succulents seeds. One of our members, Tom Cardinal, was recently recognized for his donations to the Depot. It takes great dedication to collect, clean, package, and properly mail fully identified and clean seeds. Way to go Tom!!

CSSA is also having a photo contest for its members and their minor children to celebrate and contemplate the plants we love. For the theme of “The Artistry of Cacti and Succulents,” members are invited to enter up to three images. There are two divisions; adult (16 years and older), and youth (younger than 16 years). Prizes will be awarded in each of the divisions.

- First Place: \$100.00 Gift Certificate from B&H Photo – Video, publication of the image in the quarterly publication “To the Point,” and an 8 x 10 inch (approximate) print of the image.
- Second Place: \$25.00 credit toward purchase at the CSSA Seed Depot, publication of the image in “To the Point,” and an 8 x 10 inch (approximate) print of the image.
- Third Place: Publication of the image in “To the Point,” and an 8 x 10 inch (approximate) print of the image.
- Honorable Mention: Publication of the image in “To the Point.”

As there are no entry fees, you have nothing to lose! For more information about entry and the specific contest rules visit: [https://cactusandsucculentsociety.org/photo\\_contest.html](https://cactusandsucculentsociety.org/photo_contest.html)

The contest will begin on March 1, 2022 12 AM PDT, and end on at Midnight, May 1, 2022 PM PDT. Photographs submitted after the expiration of the contest period will not be accepted.

Least, but not last, a Conservation and Illegal Pouching part I video has been released by CSSA. We should all be concerned about these matters. Visit CSSA’s YouTube channel for the Conservation Video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lj6urxK5bls>) and spread the word.

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