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MAY-JUNE 2022

# Kaktos Komments

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



*Cereus peruvianus*  
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**

I want to thank Kenneth Bader from the Austin Cactus and Succulent Society and Dick Hoban from the Fort Worth Cactus and Succulent Society for their articles on agave pests. Thank you also to everyone in our group who contributed to this KK.

**Membership****Andrea Varesic**

On March 23 at 7 PM we had our monthly membership meeting. It was attended by 11 members in person. Thank you Joseph for helping us set up our first live stream zoom meeting! It was attended by five members on zoom. We discussed our May sale and the upcoming field trips. The potting party will be on April 2nd at 10am at Liliana's house. Details will come in a separate email. Our presentation was given by me and it was called "The Giant Saguaro: Venue for Nesting Birds". The cactus of the month was given by Joseph Rodd on the *Gymnocalycium strigianum* and the succulent of the month, *Kalanchoe fedtschenkou*, was presented by Karina Boese. One correction from my last months membership is that Liliana Cracraft is the affiliate representative between HCSS and CSSA. The Cactus & Succulent Society of America (CSSA) is the largest society in the United States.

We look forward to continued in person meetings and future zoom links.

On April 27 we had our monthly meeting. We had 16 members attend in person and four members attend via zoom. We welcomed new members Benjamin Stroble and Nancy Gibbins, returning members Keith Schwabe and Lana Sands. Wally Ward presented a tray of various plants that will be available for purchase at our May sale. The cactus of the month, *Echinocereus rosanthus*, was presented by David Van Langen. David also presented a show and tell of various cacti from a past Big Bend trip. Many were hybrids of the Claret Cup cactus and not *Echinocereus rosanthus*. David was also the recipient of our door prize, a *Sanseveria*. The succulent of the month, *Trichodiadema densum* was presented by Leighton Webb. We look forward to seeing everyone at our May sale.

**Calendar:**

<b>May 6-7, 2022</b>	9:00am-5:00pm, Spring Sale, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
<b>May 11, 2022</b>	7:00 pm Board Meeting via Zoom
<b>May 21, 2022</b>	10:00 am, visit to Tom Cardinal's garden.
<b>May 25, 2022</b>	7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Program by David Van Langen "Fooling Mother Nature"
<b>June 22, 2022</b>	7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Program: Cacti and Succulent Collection of Mercer Botanic Garden by Jacob Martin
<b>July 1, 2022</b>	Deadline for submitting articles for the KK.

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**May Cactus of the Month****Andrea Varesic****Echinocereus pentalophus**

It is also known as Ladyfinger Cactus, Alicoche, Dogtail Cactus and Devil's Fingers. It can be found in South Texas, along the coast around Brownsville to Mc Allen and up to Corpus Christi. Also, it is found in central and eastern Mexico. To be grown outdoors, it needs zone 9a-11b. The stems are green, 1 inch or less in diameter. They have five, sometimes four, ribs with evenly spaced clusters of 4 to 7 short white or yellow spines. In branches profusely and stems can be several feet long. Flowers are large and pink. It blooms in the late spring and each flower can be up to 6 inches across. If it bears fruit, the fruit is green. It is propagated from cuttings or seeds and it is slow growing. Echinocereus pentalophus prefers full sun, and wet soil needs to be avoided because it is prone to root rot. It is vulnerable to mealy bugs and aphids. It is readily available in local nurseries.

References: Lady Bird Wildflower Center, Succulent Network and World of Succulents



## May Succulent of the Month

Sara Ortiz

### **Haworthiopsis attenuata**

Common Name: “Zebra Plant”; “Zebra Haworthia”

Scientific Classification:

Order: Asparagales

Family: Asphodelaceae

Sub-Family: Asphodeloideae

Tribe: Aloeeae

Genus: Haworthiopsis

Species: *H. attenuata*

Note: Formerly known as *Haworthia attenuata*.

Native To South Africa (Eastern Cape).



It is a small, slow-growing succulent. It forms rosettes of 6 to 12 cm in diameter, and it can form dense groups in its natural habitat. Its leaves are dark green and are furrowed with white lines on the outside of the leaves and have white spots with small bumps on the inner side of the leaves. It is one of the species most frequently cultivated as an indoor plant. It is a polyform specie, with differences between the varieties in tubercle patterns and color of the leaves, even between young and adult plants.

This succulent plant blooms in spring and early summer. Its flowers are petite and tubular. They are greenish-white and appear at the end of a long stem of about 30 cm. Like most succulents, *Haworthiopsis attenuata* prefers soil that dries out between waterings. Water infrequently, about 2-3 times per month in Spring and Fall, when their growth is more active. They can be watered as seldom as once every two weeks in the winter. When this plant is mostly dormant during the hottest summer months, water just enough to keep the leaves from shrinking.

*Haworthiopsis attenuata* is one of my favorite plants because of its beauty and attractiveness. I always keep it close to the window where it does not receive direct sunlight and water it every two weeks. It doesn't like full sun, but it will thrive in bright indirect light. It also doesn't mind shady spots. It is hardy to 30 degrees F. Small offshoots will sprout from the main plant and easily propagate if removed carefully and planted directly into an excellent succulent-cactus mix. It is non-toxic to humans and pets.



#### References

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**June Cactus of the Month****Josie Watts*****Mammillaria spinosissima* 'un poco'**

Family: Cactacea

Genus: *Mammillaria*Species: *spinosissima* 'un poco'

This plant is named 'un poco' because it has only one spine per areole. There are many pictures of this plant, but mine is my favorite because of the length and color of the spines, which are pure white. It grows in Guerrero and Morelos, Mexico in habitat at approximately 5,000-6,000 ft. It is usually solitary, but can also clump. Its full height is reached after 5-10 yrs. It grows up to 12" tall with a 4" diameter. It has pink flowers which form a ring, which is typical of mammillaria. The berries are bright red and club-shaped. It is propagated by seed.

The plant likes low humidity and full but filtered sun. It needs to be watered every 2 weeks during its growing season, and water should be withheld during the winter. It likes well-draining soil. The only cited pest is mealy bugs.

The plant has been grown in cultivation since 1835. James Forbes, gardener for the Duke of Bedford, actually acquired it in Europe. It was also identified in habitat in the 1970's.

On a personal note, I acquired my plant in 2017 from Darrell Rebrovich at our show and sale. It lives in my greenhouse. It was very small, and has grown beautifully with no difficulties. I find it very striking because of the long, white spines.



## June Succulent of the Month

Bruce Moffett

### Dasyilirion Texanum

(Texas Sotol)

Dasyilirions texanum, known by the common name Texas Sotol, are a genus of perennial flowering shrub-like plants that are native to the southern United States and Mexico. There are over 15 individual species, and, with their long, spiky foliage, they have an ornamental grass-like appearance. The tall flower stalks that emerge from the foliage, however, can reach up to 15 feet with cream-colored flowers. Texas Sotol has light green slim leaves that spread out in a rosette form from a thick, compact central trunk. Although the top of the trunk can sometimes be visible, it is often buried underground.

This slow-growing, long-lived species is perfect for very hot and dry gardens as it is tough, low-maintenance, and particularly drought-tolerant. It's also surprisingly cold hardy too. With the right conditions, Texas Sotol can live for decades.

Dasyilirion texanum isn't just used in landscaping. There is an alcoholic drink called sotol that is made from the plant's fermented inner cores. The plant has also been used as a food source by indigenous people and to produce materials for baskets, roofing, and rope.

Dasyilirion texanum is a tough and versatile plant, but it does need a well-drained site and a full sun position to thrive. It's known for being tolerant of urban pollution and is ideal for a hot, dry, xeric regions, or for somewhere that moisture conservation is required.

Despite their ability to cope with drought conditions, Dasyilirion texanum are fairly tolerant of moisture too. They can handle the violent thunderstorms that their native regions are sometimes prone to in the summer. One thing they can't handle, though, is standing water and soggy conditions. This is why they need a well-drained site to survive.

Although this plant is native to the hot, dry landscapes of the southern United States and Mexico, it is surprisingly frost-tolerant and has even been known to survive through short periods of hard frosts all the way down to 20 °F.

Texas sotol are low-maintenance plants and don't need much attention in terms of pruning. The leaves that do die back, however, begin to sag and form a skirt around the lower trunk. In fact, this characteristic is where the literal translation of their botanical name comes from. Dasy means shaggy, and lirion means lily. So, if you want to get rid of this shaggy appearance, pruning the dead leaves is all that is needed. Just be careful when handling this plant because of the spiky margins on the foliage.

Botanical Name: Dasyilirion texanum

Common Name: Texas Sotol

Plant Type: Perennial

Mature Size: Up to 15 ft. tall flower stalks

Sun Exposure: Full Sun, Partial Shade

Soil Type: Sandy, Well-drained

Soil pH: Acid, Neutral, Alkaline

Bloom Time: Summer

Flower Color: Creamy-white, Green

Hardiness Zones: 7 - 11, USA

Native Area: North America



This article is taken with permission from the Austin Cactus and Succulent Society's Cacto-Files April 2022, p. 3

## The Agave Snout Weevil

by Kenneth Bader

This month I decided to share some photos and information on a major pest of Agave: *Scyphophorus acupunctatus*, also known as Agave snout beetle, Agave weevil, and Sisal weevil. *Scyphophorus* is fairly large for a weevil, with a total length of 9-19 mm. They are shiny and black, with longitudinal ridges on their elytra (wing coverings) and the club at the end of each antenna is cup-shaped (Fig. 1-2). The long, curved proboscis is used to chew 1-cm-wide holes into plant tissues; they are otherwise harmless to people. Agave are the primary hosts for *Scyphophorus acupunctatus*, however they have also been reported on *Dasyllirion*, *Dracaena*, *Furcraea*, *Polianthes tuberosa*, and *Yucca* in cultivation. I have observed this species twice at Doeskin Ranch at Balcones Canyonlands. No Agave are present at that location; they may be feeding on the local *Yucca rupicola*. A closely related species, *S. yuccae* is found in Southern California, where it feeds primarily upon *Yucca*.



Fig. 1

In nature, these weevils lay eggs in the stems of dead or dying Agave and the larvae help decompose old stumps. Female weevils are flightless, and usually have to walk long distances between plants. Holes are often bored into the cone of leaves at the apex of the plant. The hole passes through multiple developing leaves; infested plants can be identified by the presence of 1 cm holes near the leaf bases.

In cultivation, large numbers of plants being grown in close proximity allow the population of weevils to explode. The movement of weevils between sick and healthy plants transmits a variety of bacterial and fungal infections that rot away the heart of the plant. These infections, sometimes called "Agave Decline" are lethal. Early symptoms include the drooping and death of the outer leaves, followed by the withering and collapse of the stem (Detailed photos are available in the bioone link below).

*Scyphophorus* weevils are native to Mexico and the Southern United States, but the mass cultivation and sale of Agave has spread these pests and their pathogens throughout the world. While they are a serious problem for the tequila and sisal industry, the larvae are also edible and are often marketed as mescal worms. Topical insecticides are ineffective against the larvae, which are protected inside the plant. The use of systemic pesticides could work against minor infestations, but they will not stop the bacterial or fungal infections spread by the weevil. An infested or dying Agave should be removed and destroyed by burning to control these pests. The large number of dead Agave and other succulents after the 2021 Valentine's Day Freeze may have provided plenty of opportunities for Agave snout weevils in Austin, so keep an eye out for these shiny black beetles around your plants.



Fig. 2

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#### Figures

Fig. 1-2: Adult Agave Snout Weevils (*Scyphophorus acupunctatus*) captured while hiking at Doesskin Ranch on the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge.



This article was taken with permission from Fort Worth Cactus and Succulent Society's The Cowtown Connection, April 2022.

## Pest of the Month: Agave Eriophyid Mites

by Dick Hoban

Description: Eriophyid mites are some of the smallest of all plant-feeding mites at less than 1/100th of an inch in length. Related to the arachnid pest family, these mites are so incredibly small, it is very difficult to identify the translucent insects. However, most Eriophyid mite infection identifications will be based on the host plant and the nature of the plant tissue damage observed. There are over 300 different known eriophyid mites with only a few being known as serious pests (for instance, common roseola in garden roses is also caused by an eriophyid mite). These mites are different from spider mites in that they are very particular about the host plants that they choose, so one type of mite attacks aloes, another type attacks agaves, etc. In advanced cases, these mites will begin to spread to other collected plants, primarily by air movement, but also attached to other pests moving throughout your greenhouse, such as ants. It is best to be observant and try to catch an Eriophyid mite infection as early as possible.



The best way to identify an eriophyid mite infection is by observing the kind of damage being done to your plants. Let's review eriophyid mite damage typically found on agaves.

- Agaves: eriophyid mite (aka agave grease mite) damage begins as a spotting on the back side of newest leaf growth emerging in the core of the plant that appears like brownish grease spots or blisters; this damage can eventually consume the entire core and kill the plant. It can start small, perhaps as a brown line that grows in to a brown blister as the leaf grows and infection advances. Remember this damage is on the BACK side of the newest growth leaves. When infected, agave core growth slows or even stops and the plant will not pup; this can be a clue to possible infection.



Treatments: Keen observation is the best way to control an eriophyid mite infection in your plant collection. Watch for the agave grease blisters on the back or underside of new leaves emerging from the plant core. If identified, then rapid active treatment is recommended:

- Agaves: if mite damage is identified, consider discarding the plant. Agave mites can travel easily to other plants, so early detection is critical to prevention of a mite infection spreading to your other agaves. If the infection is caught early, discarding the infected plant can limit your problem. If however you find a well advanced infection (grease spots on several leaves of one or more plants) you should consider treating your entire collection with a miticide, such as Avid or Forbid-4B (both are available on Amazon). Because these pesticides have the ability to penetrate the surface layers of the plant, they have been proven effective in killing mite infections deep within the core of agaves. Unfortunately, no other treatment is known to be as effective in killing eriophyid agave mites. After treatment of infected plants, they should be kept in quarantine for several weeks, until new leaf growth emerges without any characteristic grease spotting (probably at least 2 new leaves should be spot free).

Notes: If you are discarding your infected agave, it is best to coat it with isopropyl alcohol to kill any surface mites before handling the plant. Then use a sealed plastic bag to discard the infected plant. If you choose to keep the pot, treat it with a thorough alcohol coating to kill any lingering mites to help prevent transfer infections. Also, while certain insecticides, specifically the miticides mentioned above, are very effective against eriophyid mites, the most commonly available pesticide products, even those containing Imidacloprid, will probably not totally eliminate these pests from your plant or collection. Always use protective equipment such as face masks, goggles and chemically resistant gloves anytime you use pesticides.

## Potting Party

Andrea Varesic

Our potting party was held on April 2nd. The following member attended and/or donated plants for our sale: Teresa Garcia, Mary Turk, Karina Boese, Dick and Phyllis McEuen, Bruce Moffett and Josie Watts, Joseph Rodd, Wally Ward and his friend from the native plant society, Kellie Shields, Karla Halpaap-Wood.

It was hosted by Liliana & Mike Cracraft. Thank you both for sharing your greenhouses, garden and hospitality. Special thanks to Cherie and Frank Lee for the donation of many beautiful Sansevieras and other plants that were already potted and in mint condition.





### HCSS Leadership and Contact Info

President  
Josie Watts  
josiewatts@mindspring.com

First Vice President  
Wally Ward  
biosparite@gmail.com

Second Vice President  
Cindy Gray  
grayco60@hotmail.com

Recording Secretary  
open position

Treasurer  
Bruce Moffett  
bmoffett@mindspring.com

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

KK publisher  
Imtiaz Bangee  
imbangee@yahoo.com

Membership  
Andrea Varesic  
avaresic@att.net

Education  
David Van Langen  
dvl@pdq.net

Ways and Means  
Rolando Ontiveros  
rolandoontiveros@outlook.com

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