

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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## Editorial

The days are beginning to shorten and it is time to think about repotting any plants as the end of the growing season approaches. Average temperatures are dropping and I suppose this month is the one where there's a possibility of frosts starting to appear.

## Announcements

The branch put on a successful display at **Romsey Show** on 14<sup>th</sup> September. Thanks are due to Ivor, Bruce, Ben and Dot who manned our stand, and we did very well, with the display winning a gold medal and a cash prize. Plant sales were also good during the event.

A total of 8 people took advantage of the Branch's offer of a subsidy when visiting the **CactusWorld Live** event at Lullingstone Castle. Tom Hart-Dyke gave some guided tours of his "World Garden", where quite a few large cacti and succulents are planted out and also in protected areas. The event itself was quite busy on the Saturday, but the threat of heavy rain reduced the attendances on Sunday, although the rain itself hardly materialised.

The **Annual Branch Dinner** will be held on the evening of Friday 8<sup>th</sup> November, at the Luzborough, which is situated between North Baddesley and Romsey. Please contact Robin Caddy if you would like to attend this event.

David has obtained a supply of **BCSS calendars** for 2020. These are available at a price of £6 which is a couple of pounds cheaper than the mail order price.

## Last Month's Meeting

### *Gardening with Succulents*

Our Chairman Adrian introduced Paul Spracklin, who mentioned it was nice to speak in a room full of people - many branches these days have only a handful of members attending their meetings. He told us we were going to be guinea pigs because he was, for the first time, going to try out an amplified headset so that people at the back of the hall could hear him.

He mentioned he wasn't a collector of succulents - he's more of a gardener, and he has been interested in growing exotic plants for over 30 years. He wanted a jungle in his back garden, with plants like bananas and tree ferns and other things with large leaves. He lives in South Benfleet in south east Essex and this happens to be amongst the driest places in the UK, only getting 52cm of rain a year, which is less than place like the Lebanon or Rome. Given the low rainfall, he started to consider growing other plants that were more suitable for a drier climate but which were still architectural in their form.

He joined the Southend branch and asked them what succulent plants could he grow outside? He was told "as soon as it's cold and wet, they will die". But he persevered, and hoped that after hearing his talk today, people would learn that there are plants which can successfully be grown in gardens. There are also different approaches one can take - some plants are hardy without protection, others are hardy but need some form of protection in the coldest months and others are suitable for bedding out in the summer months.

He showed pictures of Cotswold Wildlife Park at Burford - the head gardener Tim Miles has landscaped areas to resemble the natural habitats of some of the animals and has planted out many succulents - it's well worth a visit. They also get large plants donated to them and have staff who know what to do with these. Some plants are kept out all year and others are overwintered in glass houses. Another garden he liked was an exotic garden established by Will Giles in Norwich - Will

passed away a few years ago but the garden used to be open to the public every weekend during the summer months. It was a very effective display of plants, and a larger proportion of plants were bedded out, compared to Cotswold. Next we saw some views of his garden. He also has many plants planted out and does provide some protection in the winter for some of them, but the majority are open to the elements throughout the year. In practice, quite a few small cacti and succulents can survive low temperatures in winter if kept on the dry side and they can be put out in the garden as bedding. We saw his main rock garden, planted out with cacti and succulents. He mentioned there was a steep slope in the part of the garden.

There are certain things to consider when planting something out. The provenance of the plants (where they come from and what weather they experience in habitat) is important, as is the drainage of the soil, and the air movement they will experience. In some cases, winter protection may be necessary. He showed some diagrams to illustrate the effects of different weather. Nearer the equator, the sun is more intense, and plants grown further north or south will experience less intense sun. With altitude, the higher up you are, the cooler it is. With rain, you tend to get more rainfall on the seaward side of a mountain, along with moist air, and there tends to be a rain shadow on the other side of the mountain.

*Agave montana* is perhaps ideal – it comes from north east Mexico, growing at altitudes of 3000m on the wet side of mountains. It grew well for him and he described it as a houseleek on steroids. We saw some habitat pictures of the plant taken in Mexico, featuring his friend Phil who has been on trips with him. A plant such as a water lily needs standing water and won't survive if planted out in soil, and by the same token, a cactus or succulent needs to be planted out in the right type of soil. The soil we have in our gardens is too heavy and the drainage needs to be improved and raised beds are one way of doing this. He obtained 20 tons of clinker (slag) from the power station which used to operate at Tilbury and this proved to be suitable for mixing into the soil. *Nolina nelsonii* comes from one of his favourite group of plants. He mentioned you tend to have much more room outside than inside a greenhouse. With air circulation, his wife had told him that washing dries more quickly outdoors than if you stick it where there is no air movement – and the same principle applies to plants growing in a garden - air circulation removes moisture and helps to reduce the chance of rot.

As for winter protection, when he first grew plants outside, he only wanted to grow plants which would

need no protection, so that the plants could be freely viewed throughout the year. He started growing all sort of things, starting in the mid 1990s. Things were fine until December 2009 – for 13 years, the winters had been milder than average, and he was becoming increasingly reckless in the type of plants he was trying to grow. However, the winter of 2009/2010 saw low temperatures of -8°C, snow persisted for two weeks and this also included 2 weeks where temperatures didn't rise over freezing throughout the day or night. The following spring, he had to hire a skip to dump all the plants that had died. He had huge losses but also had some huge successes. He also considered it encouraging to realise that if he had been more careful in using some fleece or a blanket or even cheap plastic umbrellas for protection to keep snow and wet off the plants, then many more plants would have survived. So now, he does protect some of his plants. The need for protection is especially true for things that have just been planted out.

Some friends of his live in the border between north Essex and Suffolk. They had a triple length garage and alongside this they made a border filled with plants and then erected a lean-to poly-tunnel which they put up at the end of October until the end of March. This allows them to keep the border dry in the winter period. They were able to grow a large selection of plants in this way, despite having temperatures reach as low as -15°C. *Agave weberi* was doing well, which is a plant he has struggled with. So this is another approach that can be used.

We saw a south facing view of his plants, including a *Soehrensia*. He made a similar lean-to poly tunnel cover to cover up these plants in the winter. Some plants bedded out were too tall and had to poke through the cover. If you do install a cover, you do need to make sure it can survive the high winds we get at certain times of the year. Storm Eleanor did a number on him, and with the “beast from the east” a couple of years ago, snow arrived just when the plants were waking up. A question from the audience asked what material he used for the cover, and the answer was that it was just a cheap polytunnel he got from Ebay, there was no insulation. Snow by itself can be an insulator - but in England we get the wet slushy kind which is more harmful to plants. In particular, the rosette forming plants are designed to collect water and channel it to the heart of the plant. Here in Hampshire snow is relatively rare and the south coast is without doubt the best place to grow exotic plants in the UK.

A friend of his lived on Hayling island and grew a large *Yucca recurvifolia* for many years. If you can't grow that, you might as well give up. *Yucca*

*faxoniana* is a behemoth of a plant and forms a huge rigid stem. It comes from Texas and is a spectacle when it flowers. *Yucca aloifolia* is one of the more commonly encountered exotic species. The leaves are narrow and quite strong and have sharp yielding points, so it needs to be positioned appropriately. *Yucca linearifolia* is one of the better ones to try and grow - some forms are blue and some are green. It is a very hardy adaptable species, which grows in the shady side of canyons or the north side of mountain ridges - it very rarely grows in fully sun. It can re-root from a trunk piece or a top piece easily. A friend of his in Belgium grows it outside and it has survived temperatures down to -22°C. *Yucca torreyi* is a bit of mess in terms of the leaves but the flowers are beautiful. The bud is a blonde-purple colour and the individual flowers are greeny white with a purple back. *Yucca queretaroensis* is similar to *Y. linearifolia* except the dome is bright green and the leaves are skinnier.

Dasyliirions are remarkably good garden plants and there are around 17 species. Dave Ferguson from the US (DJF collection numbers) has travelled through USA and Mexico and he thinks there are only three types you need to grow - blue ones with teeth, green ones with teeth, and a green one without teeth. A number of species are available and all the ones he has tried have been hardy. Many we can buy come from growers in Spain and Italy and may be labelled *D. glaucophyllum* (blue), *D. serratifolia* (green and teeth) and *D. longisima* (green and no teeth). These species are actually very rare in habitat. and most likely the correct names for these plants may be *D. wheeleri*, *D. acrotrichum* and *D. quadrangulatum*.

Nolinas are his favourite group of plants. *Nolina nelsonii* is beautiful, and looks like a giant silver starburst. It's a "look at me plant" which is hardy to -12°C. He gave Tom Hart-Dyke a small plant which has been put in Tom's "Mexico" garden, which is covered over in the winter. With *Nolina longifolia* the leaves collapse a bit and it then puts out a huge plume of greeny-white flowers. It's quite impressive when several thousand of the small flowers are open. The plant takes a while to recover after flowering. *N. longifolia* is the least hardy of the nolinas. *N. hibernica* is the hardiest - it comes from the same mountain as *Agave montana*. The plant forms a remarkable petticoat of dead leaves which insulates it against the cold and also helps protect the main plant when fire goes through the habitat. He has visited the habitat 4 times and didn't see any flowering plants the first three times. In the fourth visit, a fire had gone through in the previous year and had charred the plant stems, and nearly every single plant was flowering. Some Nolinas develop trunks underground, almost like pampas grass.

Nolina leaves can have fine serrated margins and the teeth can be sharp. There used to be three pampas grasses at the arid end of the Princess of Wales conservatory at Kew and one turned out to be a Nolina which eventually produced 40 flower heads - it had been there for decades. *Nolina lindheimeriana* forms underground stems and is very cold hardy.

Agaves are another plant to consider. We saw *Agave montana* again - this one was growing in East Ruston, where the old vicarage garden has a desert garden featuring an acre of Agave, Yucca, Nolina and Dasyliirion plants. It is one of the very best agaves for outdoors and can reach 5 feet across. *Agave ovatifolia* has bright silvery white leaves and seems even tougher than *A. montana*, surviving to -12°C. It appreciates a bit more moisture in the dry rest period. The leaves curve out rather than in and it looks like a spiny giant tea rose. It is a strikingly beautiful plant. *Agave salmiana* is quite tough and we saw the wild form - some can grow down to -10°C. *Agave gentryi* was previously called *A. macroculmis* - some forms have pronounced teeth along the leaves. *A. salmiana* ssp. *crassispina* is more compact and is sometimes listed under the synonym *A. coarctata*.

Moving on to cacti, he has two giant plants of *Trichocereus terscheckii* and the largest one is 15 feet high. It was planted in 2003 and has grown about 6 feet in those 16 years. He added other plants including *Trichocereus pasacana* which was 7 feet high. When he was doing landscaping work, he found a wholesaler in Kent who had 3 plants in a glass house and they were still there 2 years later - he bought the 3 plants for £300 and managed to sell the other two so that his was free. He kept tabs on the two he sold and he gave his to a friend of his. Eventually it developed a hole at the base - and the top piece was cut off and a 7 foot top cutting was brought back to him. He used cat litter as a medium after letting the cut callous over, and 2 years later, new roots developed. In the wild, the distribution of *T. terscheckii* vs *T. pasacana* is determined by climate. A view of a *Trichocereus* in flower showed it had 2 dozen flowers which opened at dusk and until mid-day next day. Another plant was protected by placing a sombrero on it.

We saw an Aloe hybrid called cv. "Hercules" - this is a hybrid between *A. barberae* and *A. dichotoma* and it's hardier than either of the parents. He managed to get a plant of this at enormous expense but sadly it didn't survive its 2nd winter. Last September he visited a visitor in Newport who had one growing in his garden. It was 8 feet tall and is protected in the winter with a sleeping bag and a

temporary glasshouse over it. He will have another go at growing it if he can find it again. Here on the south coast it might not need that much protection.

Now for a tapestry of smaller plants. *Agave bracteosa* doesn't look like a typical agave - it is supposed to be hardy if given good drainage. It offsets from underground and in nature grows on cliff faces. With *Agave parryi* there are lots of different forms around. Not all are hardy but some are. This clone was obtained a few years ago and two other people got it from the same shop as him and it's proven to be hardy. The Huntington form of *A. parryi truncata* is not that hardy unfortunately. *Agave schidigera*, *A. filifera* and *A. multifilifera* all look similar and have varying numbers of "hairs" peeling off the leaves. He bought a plant marked *A. filifera* but thinks it's *A. schidigera* and it's been with him for 25 years. *Agave striata* very much reminds you it is an agave - the leaf tips have very sharp points. When it flowers it produces new offsets in the axils of the existing rosette, so the rosette carries on even after the main head dies. It eventually forms a clump. His has flowered 4 times and the last time it flowered, it produced 3 flower spikes. *Agave stricta* looks very similar and it's hard to tell these 2 species apart. *Agave lophanta/univittata* is another plant he's grown for 25 years. *Agave polianthiflora* is small and compact and quite precocious with its flowers - it produces tubular red flowers.

Moving to Aloes, *Aloe striatula* is renowned for being cold-hardy, and *A. striatula* v. *caesia* is more compact, greyer and more inclined to branch. Also, the flower spikes are less orange and the flower tubes shorter and more horizontal. A friend of his had grown *Aloe striatulata* in Hampshire and it survived winters down to -18°C when many other plants perished - it came back from underground. *Aloe aristata* can also survive outside and we saw one of the compact forms. *Aloe* "Cosmo" is another tough plant - it is a hybrid, perhaps incorporating *Gasteria*. The cold hardiest Aloe is *Aloe polyphylla* which comes from the mountains of Lesotho. *Aloe mutabilis* is similar to *Aloe arborescens* - it's a big chunky Aloe worth a go.

Beschorneria is related to some of the plants we had already seen and the two most common species on offer are *B. yuccoides* and *B. septentrionalis*. The latter is a bit hardier and comes from further north. Other species which are sometimes available are *B. rigida*, *B. calcicoa* and *B. tubiflora* and these are all smaller plants which are worth seeking out, with *B. rigida* being the best. *B. albiflora* is the most tender but he can grow it.

Bromeliads are not really succulents but they grow in amongst the cacti and succulents and some are capable of being grown outdoors - he has two dozen taxa of bromeliads in his garden. *Fasicularia bicolor* seems to be cultivated in 2 forms - one in the west country with short fat leaves and a diamond leaf cross section and very succulent, smaller flowers and this one is more often - longer leaves u-shaped leaves broader more colourful flower. It is hardy to -15°C and it will flower in the shade or when grown in a tree. He likes it and it is one of the few things that badgers leave alone in his garden. *Aechmea* are usually tropical plants but *Aechmea recurvata* is hardy to -10°C and there are various forms, varieties and hybrids of it. *Bilbergia nutans* has been growing in his yew tree for 20 years. It wasn't that happy in the bad winter but it recovered and seems OK now. *Dyckias* are not readily available but he has a few which are doing quite well.

Puyas are nasty horrible things, almost impossible to live with. The spines on the leaves are terrible - for the first two thirds of the leaves the spines point outwards and the other spines point inwards. This may be some sort of adaptation to trap rodents or birds which stray into the plants. The plant he showed was a Puya hybrid with intensely silver foliage - in the full moon it is striking. It survived the bad winter of 2009. A plant labelled as *Puya coerulea* had flowers of the wrong colour so it must either be a hybrid or misnamed. *Puya alpestris* has metallic turquoise flowers. *Ochagavia carnea* is a terrestrial bromeliad from Chile and his clone came from the Tresco gardens. It looks like a Puya or *Fasicularia* but when it flowers it puts out a striking pink inflorescence. It is hardy to -12°C.

*Trichocereus tarijensis* was bought as *T. pasacana* but when it flowered the large pink trumpet shaped flowers were a surprise. He had been growing it for 20 years before it flowered. The floral display was spectacular. We also saw *Notocactus ottonis* v. *vencluianus* which produces red/orange flowers. *Soehrensia bruchii* is an old name - he had it for a number of years and then lost it and found a replacement which happened to be the red-flowered form. David said it was from Brazil and Uruguay so he wouldn't have expected it to be frost hardy. We also saw *Echinopsis oxygona*. *Denmoza rhodacantha* is another tough plant which is very hardy. For the size of plant and flower, it's hard to beat *Echinocereus reichenbachii* ssp. *baileyi* - it has wonderful pink flowers. You could fill up the garden with *Echinocereus* because there are so many that are hardy. e.g. *Echinocereus coccineus* and *Echinocereus triglochidiatus*.

*Gymnocalycium subgibbosum* was a plant he had grown from seed, and it was one of his first cacti. *Sohrensia formosa* looked spectacular with the low evening sun shining through the spines. *Echinopsis schickendantzii* is a weird plant – it shows no inclination of growing upright and prefers to snake along the ground. It draws a lot of comment since you'd never expect a cactus to grow in this way. It flowers spectacularly but the flowers are short lived.

For completion, there are some horrible nasty things that you can grow. With the flat padded opuntias, there are dozens that can be grown outside, but many collapse when they get to a certain size. *Opuntia sheerii* is a good choice and we saw a close-up of the pad. You can also touch it without getting glochids all over you. *Cylindropuntia whipplei* and *Cylindropuntia echinocarpa* are choices amongst the smaller growing opuntias.

We now saw some of the mesembs. *Delosperma* can be grown outside and we saw *Delosperma cooperi*. *Lampranthus* have better flowers but they not as hardy. *Drosanthemum micans* has one of the nicest flowers of all – many of these plants are bicolors. We saw some other colour forms of *Lampranthus aurea*. *Faucaria* are hardy and he has been growing them outside for years, even with snow sitting on the plants. He has 4 or 5 different types, all growing quite happily and has never lost one. *Titanopsis calcarea* was growing in a crevice.

A mound forming euphorbia *E. clavaroides* v *truncata* is quite unusual. *Sedum rubrotinctum* has brightly coloured leaves and there are several forms. *Graptopetalum paraguayense* is reported to grow to -15°C. With *Sedum palmeri*, the leaves can be flushed pink. *Sedum praealtum* and *Sedum decumbens* are tiny things with yellow flowers. *Crassula sarcocaulis* has a tree-like form and can be treated as a bonsai subject.

We saw *Echeveria agavoides* and *Echeveria elegans* growing on a tree. With the latter he had a single plant 30 years ago - and has now loads of them. We also saw *Echeveria secunda* v. *glauca* and the pink form of *Echeveria rosea*, which is an epiphyte in nature. Once he found a red leaved echeveria and sent it to John Pilbeam for identification – John thought it might be *rosea*, but he thinks it might be different. he thinks it might be different. *Aeonium simsii* grows in the coldest area of Gran Canaria it is a winter grower and is dormant in the summer. Another plant from the Canaries is *Aeonium spathulatum*. A hybrid between the two is called *Aeonium x barbatum* and it looks like you'd expect a hybrid of the two to look like. A nursery in Cornwall called Surreal Succulents have produced a

lot of *simsii* hybrids – “Ice Warrior” is a dark colour cross between *A. simsii* and *A. cv “Zwartkop”*. *Aeonium cuneatum* is hardy to -5°C.

*Dudleya pulverulenta* died for him, but he believes this is due to the plant being short lived rather than succumbing to the cold. It produces lots of the white farina coating and it has dramatic red flowers. Lots of *Dudleyas* are hardy. *Sedum oregonense* is another hardy plant which looks interesting. *Umbilicus rupestris* is a British native succulent which is good for damp shady areas.

We finished the talk with pictures taken at some gardens around the country. We saw the Ruston Old Vicarge garden, with a magnificent *Yucca shottii*. Tremeneere Gardens is just outside Penzance and belongs to a friend of his, with a good view of St/Michael's Mount. We saw another view of the garden in North Essex we had seen before with nice specimens of *Yucca linearifolia* and *Nolina nelsonii*. At another garden we saw *Yucca faxoniana* and the “xeric equivalent of a garden gnome” - a longhorn cow's skull. We saw *Agave montana* growing in Norfolk and more pictures from his garden. In one area he has a rock face. This is a south facing wall with plants mounted on.

We saw a *Hesperaloe* in flower with a yellow spike, followed by *Puya coerulea* and another *Yucca*. He mentioned he used lava rock for his landscaping – it was obtained from the company he uses for building supplies, and it originated in Turkey. It is very nice stuff to work with, lightweight and easily shaped, but it is quite expensive. We saw a *Dasyliirion* in flower - they sulk for a few years afterwards. This was followed by shots of *Agave salmiana* ssp. *crassispina*. *Lampranthus*, *Agave parryi*, some big *Yuccas*, *Aeoniums*, *Dasyliirions*. Finally, he went to the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, Arizona - as you walk in from the car park to the garden, you can't see the spikey plants for a while – you just see a mixture of soft grasses and wispy trees.

Vinay Shah

## Table Show Results

At the September meeting, there were 12 entries in the table show, and 1 entry for "Plant in flower".

	<b>Cacti – Mammillaria</b>	<b>Succulents – Mesemb</b>
Open	(1) I Biddlecombe Mammillaria sp.	(1) I Biddlecombe Trichodiadema bulbosum
	(2) B Beckerleg Mammillaria lenta	(2) B Beckerleg Glottiphyllum oligocarpum
	(3) -	(3) -
Intermediate	(1) I Biddlecombe Mammillaria schiedeana	(1) B Beckerleg Conophytum herreanthus
	(2) B Beckerleg Mammillaria guelzowiana	(2) I Biddlecombe Lapidaria margaretae
	(3) M Stevenson Mammillaria longimamma	(3) I Biddlecombe Carruanthus peersii

<b>Cacti/Succulent in Flower</b>
(1) B Beckerleg Aloe cv "Christmas Carol"
(2)
(3)

*Ivor Biddlecombe*

## Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on November 5<sup>th</sup> and will feature Keith and Kathy Flanagan from Reading Branch who are knowledgeable on many aspects of our hobby. In the past, our branch has held visits to see their collection at their home in Overton. On this occasion they will be talking about their collection of Agaves.

The November Table Show will consist of **Cactus – 3 Plants** (cacti) and **Succulents – 3 Plants** (succulents), along with "plant in flower". Please note that members can submit more than one entry in any of the classes, and that points will be earned for each placed entry.

The table show classes will use the classifications from the *Guide to Shows 10<sup>th</sup> Edition* (contact me if you don't have a copy of this).

## Forthcoming Events

Sat 12 <sup>th</sup>	Oct	Isle of Wight	Gardening Through the Year - Helen Mount
Sat 19 <sup>th</sup>	Oct	Portsmouth	Lophophoras (includes cultivation) - John Watmough
Tue 5 <sup>th</sup>	Nov	Southampton	Agaves for the Collector - Kathy & Keith Flanagan
Fri 8 <sup>th</sup>	Nov	Southampton	Branch Dinner @ The Luzborough, SO51 9AA
Sat 9 <sup>th</sup>	Nov	Isle of Wight	Topic to be confirmed
Tue 12 <sup>th</sup>	Nov	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting @ Chilworth Hall
Sat 16 <sup>th</sup>	Nov	Portsmouth	Agaves and their Cultivation - Kathy & Keith Flanagan
Tue 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Dec	Southampton	Annual General Meeting, followed by Christmas Social
Sat 7 <sup>th</sup>	Dec	Isle of Wight	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social
Sat 14 <sup>th</sup>	Dec	Portsmouth	Annual General Meeting followed by American Supper

Branch website: <http://www.southampton.bcsc.org.uk>

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