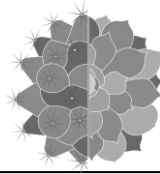


British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

Our clocks changed at the weekend but it normally takes me a few days to adjust to the one hour difference. I work for a US company and in the US, the clocks changed three weeks ago so it can get quite confusing when meeting times change by an hour and then go back to normal.

My conservatory roof was recently changed from a dark polycarbonate plastic to clear polycarbonate and I can already see that it is much brighter in there. I am hoping this will allow more plants to flower than has been the case in recent years after the roof was first fitted.

Last Month's Meeting

The May meeting will be our cultivation meeting so we needed some ideas on what people wanted to talk about, as well as volunteers to host some of the sessions. More details are included by David on the last page – please make you read this so that you can participate fully next month.

Donations for raffle prizes are always appreciated. Going forwards, we will start be starting our meeting at 7:45pm rather than 8:00pm – this will allow the meetings to finish a few minutes earlier than they do at present.

The Great Outdoors – Gardening with Cacti and Succulents

Today's speaker was Paul Spracklin and he would talk about growing succulents plants outside. He describes himself as an Exotic Gardener. He lives at Southend on Sea and mentioned that he benefits from a unique microclimate, with a relatively low amount of rainfall.

Key factors for all plants are the amount of sunshine and drainage. Raised beds are a good idea if fitted with good drainage e.g. clinker/screed which is a waste from coal fired power stations. He doesn't use soil (it would keep the plants too wet) so he just plants things out in the porous drainage material. Air circulation is also important. And if you can provide some protection for the winter in the form of fleeces or coverings to prevent the plants being fully exposed then you can greatly increase the range of plants you can grow.

Paul showed a poly tunnel which he had adapted. Some friends of his from North Essex had experienced temperatures of -15°C but under a polytunnel, they were able to keep a border area completely dry and they kept *Agave weberi* growing from a young plant until it flowered. That's not a plant he can grow outside with it getting damaged. He also showed Tom Hart-Dyke's poly tunnel covering large areas of his plants in Kent – it does get very cold there. Something simple like fleece or a fleece blanket can protect plants. He showed *Agave gentry* which he said had survived for 25 years.

He would start by showing us some big plants – growing plants outside means the sky is the limit compared to the limitations of a plant grown in a greenhouse. Some plants which are impossible in a glass house can do very well outside. *Yucca recurvifolia* is now called *Yucca gloriosa v. tristis* – and it has been grown in this country for about 200 years. If you manage to kill one of these, then perhaps think about a different hobby! *Yucca faxoniana* is a giant - the trunk is huge and it has very large flower spike. It can withstand -20°C. *Yucca aloifolia* is one of the more exotic *Yucca* species you are likely to encounter – it is very dangerous, with thin leaves which are very stiff and it has very leaf sharp tips - he planted his next to the front porch which wasn't a good idea. He dug it up and moved it but the roots left in the ground kept throwing up new offsets, even 15 years later. *Yucca linearifolia* is his pick of the exotic yuccas. he has seen it in habitat in Mexico and it grows on the north side of the mountains or the shady side of canyons. It is cold hardy. and a friend in Belgium

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has grown it at -22°C. It has thin silvery blue leaves. It is sometimes seen under the name *Yucca linearis*. *Yucca torreyi* is the pick for flowers. It starts off with a deep purple bud which extends and branches out and produces a wonderful spectacle of flowers which are slightly lemon scented. *Yucca queretaroensis* is one of the most beautiful ones to grow – it forms a shimmering globe of fine leaves and looks good on a sunny day. It is not as hardy or as tolerant as *Y. linearifolia*.

We saw Tom Hart-Dyke at his World Garden with a flowering *Hesperoyucca whipplei* ssp. *parishii*. It takes about 15 years to get it to flower but it forms a stout spike of flowers and also offsets before it dies - what a way to go. Tom had to put corks on the tips of the leaves to protect visitors to his gardens.

Dasyliirion is a great genus with about 17 or so species. They have left narrow flat leaves and teeth along the margins. Sometimes the tip dies and frays into a tuft. Some also have four angled leaves. A famous American plantsman David Ferguson (DJF collection numbers from the 1980s) had a view that there was a green one with teeth, a blue one with teeth and a green one without teeth and these three types covered the entire genus. We saw *Dasyliirion acrotrichum* which is perhaps the pick of the green ones with teeth. It is quite hardy and flowers regularly for him, with male and female flowers on different plants. He had two of the same age flower and he was able to set some seed. He said he was grimacing in the photo since he doesn't like his picture being taken, but it showed us the scale of the plant. Also the plants do not die after flowering.

Nolina is his favourite genus. We saw *Nolina nelsonii* which is a stunning plant which would make his top 3 outdoor plant list - and it's as showy as any yucca. It forms a 2m crown and the rigid leaves slowly make a trunk. It is hardy to -12°C with covering and way below that with some protection. When *Nolina longifolia* (now *Nolina parviflora*) flowers, it puts up a huge plume of tiny flowers. The genus has separate male and female plants. They do not have nasty teeth but do have fine serrations which will cut you just as much if handled carelessly. The very best of the trunked *Nolinas* is *Nolina hibernica* which grows at 3000m the dead leaves remain on the plant as a petticoat - they keep the plant warm and also help moves forest fires through the plants quickly. This also stimulates flowering - one year, they went through an area where there had been a fire and every single plant was flowering. The latin name means cold and wintery. There used to be a *Nolina* in Kew at the Princess of Wales of conservatory - there were three

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clumps of pampas grass but one was actually a giant *Nolina* (the largest in the country) but they removed it eventually. *Nolina lindheimeriana* forms long flower spikes which are two or three times taller than the plant.

Agave montana grows 4 to 5 feet across and has 100+ leaves at maturity – it's like a houseleek on steroids. This one was growing in a garden in Taunton – he said his climate in Essex is a little dry for it. Growing next to it in Taunton was *Agave ovatifolia* which is one of the best agaves to grow outside – it will also reach a size of 4 or 5 feet across at maturity. It has wonderful pleating and ribbing on the leaves and does like extra moisture. *Agave salmiana* ssp. *crassispina* is good, and *Agave gentryi* is related to *A. montana*, he has had it for 25 years and it's handled all the worst winters. *A salmiana* flowered after 30 years. It formed a 15 foot flower spike with bright golden flowers and these were overflowing with nectar – the insects were attracted to it for a couple of months.

Moving on to some cacti, *Trichocereus terscheckii* now stands 16 foot high, but he planted it out at a height of 8 feet in 2003 - so it's grown 8 feet in 20 years. It's an unusual plant growing outside, and visitors laugh when they see it. It flowers spectacularly, and in the best year, it had 40 blooms on it – they open one afternoon and close the next day, and fall off after a couple more days. The first year he had it, he put a hat on it but once that blew away, he has not put any protection on it and it's been fine. *Trichocereus pasacana* was a smaller plant but it's been trying to catch up – the bumps on the stem represent the growth per year and it seems to be growing around 8 inches per year. The spines seem to get shorter and longer in different years as well.

He said these plants were the tip of the iceberg compared to what it is possible to grow. We saw some more agaves. *Agave bracteosa* is the least agave-like of them but it just grows whatever the conditions are. It also seems to be one of the hardiest ones he knows, it doesn't matter how wet it is. It's a scruffy thing but a proper agave - it goes by the common name of squid agave, due perhaps to the curved arching leaves. *Agave parryi* is one of the USA species, it is also found in Mexico. It varies a lot and has a lot of subspecies - where they come from determines how hardy they are. The clone he has seems to be indestructible. *Agave schidigera* was bought labelled as *Agave filifera* but he only learnt the true identify when it flowered - *Agave schidigera* has a 15 feet flower spike as opposed to 8 feet for *Agave filifera*. *Agave striata* has a

distinctive appearance and is like a rosette of knitting needles. It has flowered for him 5 times. It behaves differently from other agaves. The bit that flowers dies and new plants grow from the axils so it doesn't appear to die after flowering. The flowers are little yellow-white stars and it forms a slim rat tail spike as well.

Now for Aloes. There are some good Aloes you can grow outside. With *Aloe striatula* the top growth is hardy to -6°C but it will sprout again next spring if damaged. The lower part is hardy to -10°C and some of his have grown in temps as low as -18°C. A variety called var. *caesia* has yellow flowers and is more attractive and is perhaps hardier. There is also an orange form available, and there's also supposed to be a red form which was mentioned in an old book but it doesn't appear to be in cultivation. *Aloe aristata* (now renamed to *Aristaloe aristata*) is hardy to -8°C. A variety often sold as "Cosmo" is probably a Gasteraloe but it is usually just called Aloe "Cosmo". *Aloe polyphylla* comes from the Drakensberg mountains in Lesotho and it is grown as an alpine. It is very cold hardy but is tricky to grow, although some people seem to find it easy. It is a beautiful plant with the leaves arranged in a perfect spiral. We saw it flowering in Cambridge in Clarke Brunt's back garden - he provides the seeds of this species for the BCSS seed list.

Beschorneria yuccoides throws out a ridiculously flamboyant flower spike which 3 metres long and 2.5 metres across, with scores of green and red bells dangling. *Beschorneria septentrionalis* should be hardier since it comes from further north but some people find it tricky. *Beschorneria albiflora* grows a trunk - the name suggests it should have white flowers but they are green so perhaps it was misnamed. It is not as hardy as the other two, it grows in Mexico down into Honduras and it grows in a damp cloud forests.

After the mid-meeting break we resumed with Bromeliads - they are succulents as far as the world is considered except for the BCSS who don't allow them to be entered in our shows. They often grow in close proximity to cacti and succulents and they are good companions to grow in the garden. *Fascicularia bicolor ssp. canaliculata* in flower is exceptionally showy and one of the the hardiest ones - it can survive to -15°C. It looks like grass and then produces a very exotic flower. *Aechmea recurvata* is a tank bromeliad - it grows on trees and has a vase (tank) and it will catch water and insects in the centre. It will survive to -8°C or -10°C, and lower if covered. *Bilbergia nutans* has been growing in his garden for 25 years and it has survived the

worst winters. It grows in a yew tree and is protected by a canopy of the evergreen leaves and this probably helps it. It grows as an epiphyte quite happily. *Dyckia* is a terrestrial bromeliad and there are several species to try, including *Dyckia brevifolia*.

Puya are amongst the most horrible things to grow because of the spines. The flower spikes can tower for many feet above the plants. The leaves are horrible, they are covered in sharp hooked spines - on the front 2/3rd of the leaves these point forwards and in the final third the spines are hooked backwards - it is almost impossible to remove your hand without injury. We saw *Puya alpestris ssp. zoellneri* and *Puya venusta* (which might actually be *Puya coerulea*) - it's a silvery *Puya*. He's had both of these outside for 25 years and they have only suffered minor damage in all those years. *Puya* flowers look like they are fashioned from wax with a metallic sheen and some are amazing and have two tone colours. You can see some of that colour in the pictures. The flowers are beautiful but the plants are dangerous due to the spines - some are referred to as sheep eaters presumably because animals which get entangled can't free themselves. We saw *Puya alpestris* growing at the East Ruston Old Vicarage Garden on the North Norfolk coast - it has a remarkable turquoise colour to the flowers. Another species *Puya berteroniana* had "marker pen" yellow flowers.

He grows 3 members of another genus of terrestrial bromeliad called *Ochagavia* outside, including *Ochagavia andina*. He mentioned he really like to try bromeliads and grows over 30 different taxa outside.

Finally some cacti - why has it taken over an hour to get here? He admitted they are not his first love. There are quite a few big ones you can grow outside and he was going to focus on these, but there are many more smaller cacti you can grow outside but he doesn't grow them so would not be discussing them. *Trichocereus (Soehrensia) tarijensis* flowered and it confirmed the species. The column was about 4 feet tall. It gets a little damaged sometimes but the flowers are spectacular. A barrel cactus *Soehrensia bruchii* has burnt orange flowers but he has another one with pillar box red flowers. It comes from the temperate grasslands of North West Argentina. *Soehrensia formosa* is a higher altitude plant - it has much denser spines and yellow flowers. The next plant was the same species and it was the oldest plant he has - it is probably over a 100 years old. The sun shining through the spines is attractive. He was asked does he protect these plants from rain in

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the winter? He said he didn't use to - then he did for a while - and now he doesn't bother any more. We also saw *Echinopsis oyygona* cultivars. The species can go down to -10°C.

Denmoza rhodocantha is a good one to grow outside. It's his favourite small cactus by some measure. *Echinocereus reichenbachii* v. *baileyi* is cold hardy down to below -10°C or lower. He's blessed with lots of wildlife badgers and for some reason the foxes dug this up and he does not have it any more. Toby said there are "plenty more available on Ebay". *Echinocereus rigidissimus* ssp. *rubispinus* has specular flowers and it can withstand -7°C to -10°C but it needs to be kept dry. *Echinocereus coccineus* and *Echinocereus triglochidiatus* are amongst the first to flower in mid spring. They can usually withstand -10°C and some clones can go even lower. *Trichocereus (Echinopsis) schickendantzii* is a real talking point. It's been outside for nearly 25 years. It crawls along the ground and only the tip of the spines grows upward towards the light. It now occupies 6 foot x 4 foot of space. In flower it has stunning lemon scented teacup size white flowers that last 12 hours. *Trichocereus candicans* has similar flowers which last longer and they are perhaps more showy. It sprawls untidily as well.

With *Opuntia*, there are dozens of species that could be grown. Generally they grow well until they get to three or 4 stories high then they collapse onto themselves. This one - *Opuntia scheeri* - does not and it also does not have any long hooked spines and is hence safer to grow. It is his favourite flat padded *Opuntia* and is very hardy. Tom grows it at Lullingstone and under cover it's taken -17°C. It has lemon yellow flowers. It has many hairs coming out from the areole. It's never been found in the wild. The cylindrical padded *Opuntias* are called "Cholla" and they are horrible things - they have fracture lines along the pads and are designed to break off easily and attach to anything which brushes past. Paul mentioned *Cylindropuntia whipplei* and *Cylindropuntia echinocarpa* as species to consider growing.

We moved on to some mesembs. *Delosperma cooperi* is very hardy and comes from high up in the Drakensburg mountains - it can take -10°C in an open garden and lower if covered. It has lots of magenta flowers in the summer months. *Lampranthus* is not as hardy - it can take -4/-5°C perhaps. It is completely covered in flowers for around a month and these have very bright colours. He loses them in 3 or 4 winters out of 10 but he trims them back and has hence lots of cuttings each

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year. *Faucaria* can also take a good deal of cold. He has been growing these outside for years and had them flowering while sitting in snow. The species might be *F. tigrina* or *F. tuberculosa* and all the ones he has tried are still there.

The *Graptosedum* he had been growing outside seems to be invincible. *Euphorbia clavarioides* var. *truncata* is very hardy. He would have said it was indestructible, and people have managed to grow it down to -20°C but his plant suffered damage 2 winters ago because it was in active growth when the cold weather came. It had survived the prior 20 years - it's another high altitude South African plant. With *Sedum rubrotinctum*, he treats it the same as the *Lampranthus* it is not that hardy, so he takes cuttings each year. *Graptopetallum paraguayense* (comes from Mexico) is tough and has survived -15°C outside, so it's very hardy. *Sedum palmeri* is very hardy especially if grown on the drier side. *Echeveria agavoides* is hardy too, down to -10°C if covered, perhaps a bit less in an open garden. *Echeveria elegans* is a plant he has been growing for over 30 years. It tinges with pink when stressed by cold in the winter. On one of his trips to Mexico he saw it growing up in a tree and so he grows it on his Yew tree where the roots have merged into the bark. It does benefit from some additional moisture, since in nature it grows in a cloudy/misty environment.

With *Echeveria rosea* there is a pink form and also a splendid bright red form - this is another plant from the cloud forests. His garden is too dry for them but they are hardy enough. *Aeonium spathulatum* is from the Canary Islands. It was self seeding in his garden. The winter from two years killed all of his *Aeoniums*. He is growing it again because it is worth it. *Aeonium simsii* is from Gran Canaria and a natural hybrid between these two species is called *Aeonium* x. *barbatum* and it is better than either of the parents. They are summer dormant winter growers which will flower in spring. The hybrid is something he had grown for 20 years.

With *Dudleya* he has grown a few, and the best was *Dudleya pulverulenta*. The rosettes are the size of a tea plate. It is summer dormant - he grew it for 5-6 years and it didn't come back one autumn. It produces a mealy powdery substance which covers the leaves and this can look like mealy bugs.

We ended with a selection of various bits and pieces. *Sempervivums* are fantastic. *Sedums* are good, as are *Saxifrages*. Alpine growers do grow many of these. Pennywort (*Umbilicus rupestris*) is a native plant, and another species from the Caucasus

mountains is *Umbilicus oppositifolius* - this used to be called *Chiastophyllum oppositifolium*. Both of these species will self seed.

Paul moved on to show pictures of some gardens across the country which feature interesting plants grown outdoors. He recommended the Old Vicarage Garden at East Ruston which contain a planting called the “Desert Wash” and Paul said it was the biggest range of Yucca and Dasylirion and Nolina growing outside in the UK – it benefits from a microclimate in North Norfolk. The Garden is open to the public, it is maintained to a high standard and is 32 acres in size.

In Cornwall, the Minack Theatre grows many succulents outdoors – it has recently changed hands and the new owners are growing with design and colour in mind, supported by Penberth Plants. St. Michaels Mount is an island off the Cornish coast and it has a new head gardener and has some wonderful colour co-ordinated plantings. The Ventnor Botanic Garden in the Isle of Wight probably has the best microclimate in the country, but the shame of it is that they have no money at present.

His own garden is half a mile from the Thames estuary and receives 20 inches of rain per year. In total he is now up to 2/3rds to 3/4 of an acre and half of that is planted with the xeric plants. The main bank is on a 1 in 5 slope. Their neighbour passed away 4 years ago and his house came to the market to come on the market as land since the house was falling to bits - they decided to buy, and demolished the house and spread the rubble around the garden – it is around 5 feet deep in some places, He has transplanted some of his plants into the new area. This has kept him busy for the last few years. He planted a lot of Lampranthus and Californian poppies – this all looked great but they smothered everything else, so he will do something different going forwards.

RHS Hyde Hall is his local RHS garden – they recently reconfigured the buildings at the top of the hill. He understands they will be adding more spiky things to their dry garden.

Finally Paul mentioned that he has just finished writing a new book – his first – called “The Dry Exotic Garden”. It will be published by Crowood Press and will be coming out in August, just in time for the Cactus at the Castle event a month later.

Vinay Shah

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Next Month's Meeting

Our next branch meeting will be held on 7th May and it will be our annual Cultivation and Propagation evening, where we aim to discuss a wide range of different topics relating to the hobby.

As usual we will begin with a general chat about how our plants fared during the winter months and whether or not we heat our greenhouses, whether we water any plants in the winter etc. Following on from Paul Spracklin's talk last month about growing our plants outdoors we will hear reports of how our plants coped with the cold and wet winter.

Richard will talk a bit about heating and lighting in the greenhouse, based on a recent article in the Alpine Garden Society bulletin.

Last year the Branch gave everyone a young plant of *Crassula 'Silver Spark'*, and in 2022 we distributed plants of *Rebutia perplexa*, so please bring your plants along so we can see how the plants have fared in different conditions, and we might learn the secrets of those people who have had the most success so far. Please remember to mark the label or pot of your plants with your initials, to avoid confusion about which plant belongs to whom. If we can source some plants in time, there will hopefully be another free plant for everyone at the meeting.

Cath will be leading a chat about seed sowing and the aftercare of the young plants. If you have any seedlings, sown either this year or last year, please bring some of them along so everyone can see how interesting and absorbing this aspect of the hobby is. We hope also to chat a little about vegetative propagation, and Mike might massacre an Echeveria to generate a batch of leaf cuttings! If you have any examples of propagations from the last year or two, please consider bringing them along to show us.

Spring is a wonderful time in the greenhouse, so ask that you bring along a selection of your plants that

are either in bud or flower at the time of the meeting. It is always lovely to see plants that are producing flowers, and we hope that we might see a good range of such plants, for everyone to admire, and for us to chat about.

Ben will be talking about composts and growing media, a subject close to our hearts, and also a little about which pesticides are available nowadays and which are the most effective. If you have discovered any good (or bad!) composts or pesticides please bring along samples to show our members.

As usual, if you have any unnamed plants please bring them along and we will see if we can identify them for you. Similarly, if you have plants that are causing you any problems in cultivation please bring them to the meeting and hopefully someone will have a suggestion to help you grow them better.

These evenings are generally very popular with our members, and we hope that our meeting next month will teach us all something new about our absorbing hobby. Please make a special effort to bring along the relevant plants etc discussed above, so that we have plenty of material to talk about.

David Neville

Forthcoming Events

Sat 13 th Apr	Isle of Wight	Question Time. Your cacti and succulent questions answered
Sat 20 th Apr	Portsmouth	Plant Auction
Tue 7 th May	Southampton	Annual Cultivation & Propagation Evening
Sat 11 th May	Isle of Wight	Cultivation – Vicky Davis
Sat 18 th May	Portsmouth	Social Evening
Tue 4 th Jun	Southampton	Title/Speaker - TBC

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