

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Cacti of the Month February 2001 - *Single Headed Mammillaria*

Mammillaria is one of the larger genera in the *Cactus* family, and one of the most variable, with some members remaining as solitary columns for their entire lives, some remaining as fingernail size solitary globulars, some clumped and heavily spined with hooks. This month, the plant of the month is Single Headed *Mammillaria*, regardless of size.



Figure *Mammillaria chionocephala*

Although most *Mammillaria* are native to Mexico, some species in the genus can be found from Columbia to Kansas and California. With this wide distribution, the cultivation requirements obviously vary considerably. The species from the tropics and warmer areas are rarely tolerant of cold and damp. Those from the drier desert regions are also intolerant of continued damp, but can take considerable cold. With these restrictions aside, most *Mammillaria* are easy to grow.

The secrets to good growth are a continued supply of fertilizer during the growing season, strong light, and maintenance of a clean and

insect free growing environment. The appearance of white mealy bug egg cases (*Mammillaria's* worst enemy) on the tips of the spines or the appearance of ants means that mealy bugs are sucking the sap and life of the plant. Immediate treatment is required, with a thorough washing, and spraying with an insecticide.

Propagation of single headed *Mammillaria* is only by seed. Fortunately, *Mammillaria* are one of the easiest species to grow from seed. The seeds are simply placed on top of a damp potting mix, covered with a light coating of gravel, placed in a plastic bag in bright light, but out of direct sun and allowed to germinate. Germination usually occurs in a week or 10 days. The seedlings can stay in the plastic bag for several weeks until they get large enough to survive unprotected, and should then be removed to a still shaded, but brighter and drier environment. Most will survive, and grow quickly.

One of the untold secrets of *Mammillaria* is their beauty as seedlings. Seedlings a year or two old, are amazingly beautiful plants with all of the wool and spination that they will have as adults, but in miniature form. Color in seedlings is often much more intense than it will be in older plants. Given the ease of germination, everyone should try a few.

Magnificent Mammillarias

Mammillaria chionocephala comes from Coahuila and Nuevo Leon. It grows to about 4 inches in diameter, and eventually gets to 6 or so inches tall. The one shown at above is about three years old and three inches in diameter. It's a beautiful species from the start.

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Mammillaria dixanthocentron has long golden yellow central spines that make a graceful drooping arc. It grows to nearly 10 inches high and 3 inches in diameter. The spines can add an additional inch and half to the appearance of the body. It is found in Oaxaca and Puebla.



Figure *Mammillaria gigantea*

Mammillaria gigantea is one of the largest solitary growing species getting growing to 10 inches or more in diameter. It is wider than it is high, and has a woolly center. It is easily grown. It is widespread, reported from many central Mexican states.

Mammillaria hernandezii is the opposite end of the scale from *Mammillaria gigantea*.. Coming from northern Oaxaca, it is one of the smaller of the single headed species, generally only an inch or so in diameter.

Mammillaria sanchez-mejoradae from a very small locality in Nuevo Leon is another of the single headed miniatures. It remains small, an inch or less when fully grown.



Figure *Mammillaria sempervivi*

Mammillaria sempervivi from Hidalgo, San Luis Potosi, and Nuevo Leon, at altitudes of 4000 to 6000 feet. It is slow growing, and eventually gets to 4 or 6 inches in diameter. The white wool between the areoles makes this species a pleasure to look at and grow. It stays flat.

References:

- J. Pilbeam, **Cactus for the Connoisseur**
- J. Pilbeam, **Mammillaria**
- R. Craig, **The Mammillaria Handbook**
- C. Innes & C. Glass **Cacti**