

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Cactus of the Month March 2001 - *Echinocereus*

Echinocereus is one of the earliest recognized genera of Cacti; first described in 1848 by George Engelmann from a plant collected in 1846 in what is now New Mexico. The type species (the first one found, and after which the genus is named) is *Echinocereus viridiflorus*, a widespread species with a distribution that ranges from Southern Wyoming, South Dakota, and Kansas to Eastern New Mexico. As the name suggests, it has brilliant green flowers.

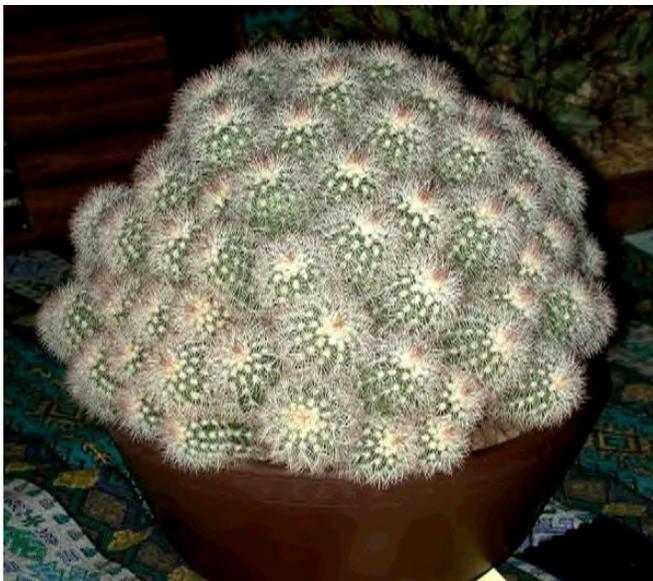


Figure Vince Basta's *Echinocereus baileyi* from the 15th InterCity Show

Echinocereus species can be found throughout the Western United States, and the range of species stretches through the American west and through Northern and Central Mexico to about Mexico City. As might be expected from a genus covering such a large range, *Echinocereus* are extremely varied in form, ranging from nearly spineless green balls such as *E. knippelianus*, to very spiny short columnar species such as *E. engelmannii*, to pencil thin sticks such a *E. poselgeri*.

In general, *Echinocereus* is an under appreciated genus. Most growers have one or two, but having killed a few in their early collecting days,

usually because of over watering, concentrate on other genera. Most of the species are in fact easy to grow. Many of the species are quite variable, and exhibit different spination and flower colors depending on the local environment. As a result, a large number of species were named. These are being reduced to a more conservative 30 to 50 species. The varieties and local growth forms provide an enormous range of interesting plants to grow.

Most *Echinocereus* have spectacular flowers, giving rise to such common names as Claret Cup, Strawberry Cactus, Calico Cactus. These common names are often attached to more than one species. *Echinocereus* flowers erupt through the skin, leaving scars. Offsets also erupt through the skin.

Almost all the species need bright light and warm temperatures to grow well and flower. Some are quite easy, but most have somewhat fragile root systems that are prone to rot. They often benefit from being slightly underpotted. Good drainage is a must.

Propagation from seed is fairly easy. Seed germinates in a few days to about two weeks in warm weather, as long as soil mixture is kept moist. Once germination occurs, the seedlings need to be moved to an environment with moving air. They need to be kept damp until they have hardened off.

Propagation from cuttings is relatively easy, but attention needs to cleanliness is important. Use of Rootone, or another rooting compound containing a fungicide helps ensure success.

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Excellent Echinocereus

Echinocereus delaetii - spines are reduced to white hairs. Flowers are pink to purple, with a very obvious green stigma. One of the more difficult to grow. (from Coahuila, Mexico)

Echinocereus engelmannii - from the Southwestern United States and Northern Mexico. A clumping species with stems 2 to 3 inches thick with generally light tan spines and rose like flowers.

Echinocereus knippelianus - dark green body, with slightly lighter ridges, nearly spineless, clustering, and slow. Lots of pale pink flowers. Sensitive to over watering. (from Coahuila, Mexico)

Echinocereus nivosus has dense white needle like spines, with a dark green body. It clumps freely, and has large pink flowers, with bright green stamens. If this plant wasn't natural, it would be in bad taste. (from Coahuila, Mexico)

Echinocereus poselgeri was formally *Wilcoxia poselgeri*, and is one of several tuberous rooted species that have above ground pencil thin stems. They have bright pink flowers, and make an odd sight and an interesting addition to any collection. (from Texas, Coahuila, Mexico)



Figure Charles and Joanne Spotts *Echinocereus rigidissimus v. rubispinus*

Echinocereus rigidissimus - columnar, with bands of red, pink and cream spines. A classic, and a frequent show winner. Every collection ends up with one sooner or later. (from Arizona, New Mexico, Northern Mexico)

Echinocereus sharpii, discovered in 1971 by club member Peter Sharp near La Asencion in Nuevo Leon, is one of the more difficult to grow, and infrequently seen in cultivation.

References

- L. di Martino Cactus & Co., **Echinocereus**
- C. Innes and C. Glass, **Cacti**
- J. Pilbeam, **Cacti for the Connoisseur**
- Cullmann, Gotz & Groner, **The Encyclopedia of Cacti**