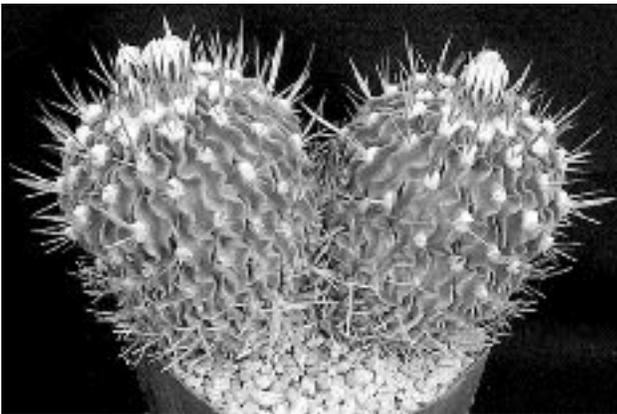


San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Cacti of the Month April 2003- *Echinofossulocactus and Stenocactus*

Echinofossulocactus and *Stenocactus* are the same genus. The name of this easy to grow and uniquely ribbed genus has been a subject of contention since the 19th century. The genus was originally described in 1841 by George Lawrence, but the description was invalid. It was re-described in 1898 by Karl Schumann. Various attempts to straighten out the names went on for the next hundred years. With blessings from the Committee for Spermatophyta, (no one else knows what it means either), Kew Gardens, and the International Cactaceae Systematics Group, the name *Stenocactus* seems to have finally triumphed.

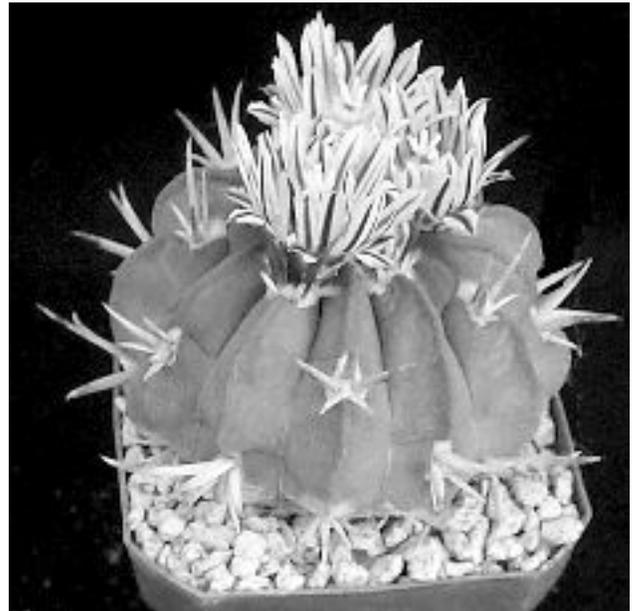


Stenocactus xiphicanthus Photo by Rene Caro

Echino traces to Echinus, which is Latin for Hedgehog, a spiny porcupine-like rodent from Europe, and also, equally likely, and much closer in appearance, a spiny, edible sea urchin from the Mediterranean. Stenos is Greek for narrow, an obvious referral to the many narrow ribs on almost all of the species.

They are all spiny plants, collected much more for the appearance of the spines and the wonderful curved ribs than their flowers, although the flowers can be quite showy. All of

the species (there are ten) are very variable, and as a result, there are numerous varieties and forms that can enhance any collection. Most of the species are reasonably small, flowering at two years, when only an inch or so in diameter. A good representative collection can be kept on a table.



Stenocactus coptonogonus Photo by Rene Caro

Stenocactus are native to Central to Northern Mexico. The genus is closely related to *Ferocactus*, differing by the lack of nectar glands, the lack of a ring of hairs above the stamens, and size.

Stenocactus grow in grasslands, and need some protection from full sun. They are easy to grow, putting on most of their body weight each year in the early spring to summer. Plants growing outdoors will grow slowly during the winter using just the water from winter rains. It is important not to fertilize during the darker days of December, January or February, or etoliation or stretching of the body will occur.

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The narrow ribs, the woolly areoles, and the dense spines are an ideal habitat for mealy bugs. Frequent inspection of the plants will prevent them from spreading. Older plants sometimes get corky near the base. Keeping the plant in continuous growth delays this, but in some species the cork is inevitable.



Echinofossulocactus phyllacantha entered in the 2001 Intercity Show by Charles and Joann Spotts

Identifying the species of an *Stenocactus* is as difficult as identifying the genus is easy. For the most part, they tend to look alike, and there are far more names than there are species. However, a few species do stand out.

Stunning Stenos (AKA Enchanting Echinops)

*Stenocactus (E.) albatu*s has a white woolly apex, and dense white spines that almost hide the ribs.

Stenocactus (E.) crispatus has short white spines that set off the wavy ribs. It is one of the classic *Stenocactus*. The species has swallowed several others, including the popular and easily found *Echinofossulocactus lamellosus*.

Stenocactus (E.) phyllacanthus is generally a solitary species as pictured. It is one of the best of the genus, as shown on the previous page.



*Echinofossulocactus tricusp*idatus entered in the 2001 Intercity Show by Petra Crist

*Stenocactus (E.) tricusp*idatus, shown above as a multiheaded species has been moved into *S. phyllacanthus* in the most recent revisions. Comparing the two pictures shows how different the species can look.

Stenocactus (E.) vaupelianus has dense yellow spines and a woolly apex.

References

E. Anderson, **The Cactus Family**
Cullman, Gotz & Groner, **The Encyclopedia of Cacti**

Tom Glavich March 2003