

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Cactus of the Month September 2003 – *Cacti of Chile*

The cacti of Chile include *Browningia* (s), *Copiapoa*, *Corryocactus*(s), *Echinopsis*(s), *Eriogyne*, *Neoporteria* and *Neochilenia* (now in *Eriogyne*), *Eulychnia*, *Maihueiopsis*(s) and other *Opuntias* in various forms and shapes.

The ceroids are rarely collected. Seeds are available, and some of these can even occasionally be found at local nurseries, but they get large quickly. Of the rest, the two genera that form the basis of most collections are *Copiapoa* and *Eriogyne*. *Eulychnia* is rarely grown, but has wonderful spination, and does not deserve the neglect it gets.

of view, and new species are still being described and additional species will be found in the future.

Copiapoa are relatively easy to grow. They respond happily to the same potting mix, watering, and fertilization as most cacti, growing many times faster than they would in habitat. *Copiapoa* are easily propagated from cuttings or division of clumps. Seed is available from the CSSA seed bank, and most cactus seed houses, and germinates quickly in the spring.

All of the *Copiapoa* are worth growing. This is a genus unparalleled in excellent species.



Copiapoa krainziana
(Picture by T. Nomer)

Copiapoa is a genus of spectacular plants from the North Coast of Chile. The genus has no close relatives, and is confined to a region of ecological change, becoming steadily drier for the past several hundred years. *Copiapoa* grow along the coast and in river valleys cut through the coastal mountains. Some of the species live completely on dense fogs that appear regularly for months at a time. The hills and valleys of Northern Chile are still not well explored from a botanical point



Copiapoa humilis v. tenuissima

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Eriosyce (including *Horridocactus*, *Islya*, *Neoporteria* and *Neochilenia*) is a genus from the Central and Northern Coasts of Chile, and the Southern Coast of Peru. This area has a Mediterranean climate, with rain in the winter, and mostly dry summers. The climate is similar to Southern California, but generally somewhat drier. Fogs are more frequent, and can sometimes be the predominant source of water.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Fred Kattermann and others have taken a closer look at the relationship between *Neoporteria* and another similar genus, *Eriosyce*, and have placed all of *Neoporteria* into *Eriosyce*. *Eriosyce* is the older genus, first described in 1872 by Phillipi, so the name has priority. Work in this area is still going on and is still controversial. DNA studies over the next few years should clarify the name problems considerably. *Neoporteria* is often separated from the rest of *Eriosyce* in our shows, and in most seed catalogs.

Cultivation of all the *Eriosyce* is similar to *Copiapoa*. They will do well in pots in Southern California, and require protection only from excessive water and rain in the winter. The tuberous root would normally grow between rocks or in a crack in a rock face. The large root is often used as a distinguishing characteristic between *Neochilenia* and *Neoporteria*, but it's not reliable. The root is the primary storage organ, and in dry times the head of the plant will shrivel and sink into the soil. The one significant challenge in growing this genus, and particularly *Neochilenia* is to get growth started in the spring without cracking the body. Growing in a very open potting mix (almost all pumice) helps prevent this.

In habitat these are often solitary, but in cultivation they often clump. Propagation by removal of the offsets is an easy and reliable method of propagation. The offsets quickly form a characteristic tuber. Grafted plants will quickly clump, and these heads can be removed and re-rooted. Seed for many species and localities are available from a number of suppliers, and these generally germinate well and grow strongly.



Neoporteria choroensis

References:

- Edward Anderson, **The Cactus Family**
Cullman, Gotz and Groner, **The Encyclopedia of Cacti**
Preston-Mafham, Cacti, **The Illustrated Dictionary**
Charles, G. **Copiapoa**
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