

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month May 2001 – Epiphytic Succulents

Epiphytic Succulents

Epiphytic Succulents are less common in most collections than epiphytic cacti. Interestingly enough, many of the true succulent epiphytes are much more commonly found as house plants. Several families of succulent plants have epiphytic members, and there are a several trailing or lithophytic (rock loving) plants that are grown as epiphytes. These are included in this month's competition. This is a short survey of just a few.



Hoya kerrii

One of the most common is *Hoya* of the *Asclepiad* family. This distant relative to *Fockea* and *stapeliads* is found from India, through the tropics and subtropics of South East Asia into Australia and the Islands of the South Pacific. Not all *Hoya* are succulents, but many are. In

addition, there have been extensive hybridization efforts to develop particular colors and leaf shapes, flowers and fragrances. As would be expected from their native habitat, *Hoya* like it warm and relatively moist. They need humus and some steady fertilization to look their best, although they will stay alive when neglected. They don't like frost. Two forms with particularly good leaf shapes are *Hoya obovata* and *Hoya kerrii*

A related genus is *Dischidia*. These succulents are found from India through tropical Asia and again into Australia. A distinguishing feature of *Dischidia* is that some of the leaves curl into cups to catch rain water. Roots grow from the leaves into the cups, giving a ready supply of water. About a dozen species and cultivars are available.

There are other epiphytic *Asclepiads*, *Ceropegia woodii* is one of a group of thin stemmed trailing plants, that does not usually grow as an epiphyte in nature, but does well in epiphytic culture. This plant is commonly available, showing up on Supermarkets and discount nurseries. It's worth growing, and very easy.



Tillandsia Sp.

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month May 2001 – Epiphytic Succulents

The *Bromeliad* family is known for its wealth of epiphytic and lithophytic plants. Most of the epiphytic plants come from tropical jungles and rain forests, and have little use for succulence. The genus *Tillandsia* however has an enormous spread, reaching from South America to Virginia. The family is usually broken down into green leafed *Tillandsias*, which are almost never succulent, and gray leafed *Tillandsias*, many of which are. The culture of the gray leafed *Tillandsias* is very different than other succulents. No pot is required. The plants do best wired to a piece of wood or even a piece of chain. They need some protection from the sun, but can take more than most people think. They need to be sprayed every few days, with a spray that contains a weak solution of normal plant fertilizer, with a small amount of Epsom salts. These plants need magnesium to best develop color, and Epsom salts is a good way of providing it.



Tillandsia Sp. Flower detail

Tillandsia cacticola, named for its preferred host is a succulent member of the family with a brilliant pink to purple inflorescence. It is one of the larger members.

Tillandsia ehlersiana is a medium to large size *Tillandsia*, growing to 10 inches across. When well grown and fully mature, this is one of the best of the succulent members of the genus.

Tillandsia streptocarpa has a leaves that twist and curl as they age, providing the same support that the tendrils on a vine do. An interesting plant when grown well.

One of the rarer epiphytic succulents are *Macleania glabra*, and *Macleania insignis* which are epiphytic (or terrestrial) vine and caudiciforms from the cloud forests of Central America. These species are members of the *Ericaceae* family, one not known for succulent members.

One of the more common succulents *Sedum 'burrito'* or the Donkey's Tail is a much neglected plant. Often dismissed as 'too easy', a well grown plant is hard to find and maintain. There are many varieties and cultivars that can be found, some with very small leaves.

References

- H. Shimizu, H. Takizawa **Tillandsia Handbook**, Rainbow Gardens **1997 Catalog**
- A. Rowley, **Name that Succulent**
- B. Jacobsen, **A Handbook of Succulent Plants** Rare Plant Research **2000 Plant List**