

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month June 2001 – Mesembs. (Except Lithops, Conos)

The *Mesembryanthemaceae* are along with cacti one of the largest of the succulent plant families. There are about 123 genera, depending on the date and author, and several thousand species. A few of the mesembs are very common, used as ground cover around the world, and grown by people who would ordinarily have nothing to do with a succulent plant.

Many others are favorites of many collectors, *Lithops* and *Conophytum* each having their own cults and specialists, and each having a well deserved prominent place on our show tables. There are some other genera that are commonly seen, with only one or two species represented. *Faucaria tuberculosa* and *F. tigrina*, *Cheiridopsis denticulata*, *Trichodiadema bulbosum*, are seen at nearly every show, but are just a few select members from a wealth of species.



Figure *Faucaria Super Warty*

Most of the mesembs are easily grown and propagated. Seed is readily available for many common and uncommon species. Seed can be sown in either the spring or fall, some growers starting all their seed in the fall, some splitting the sowing between the two seasons. Germination is quick, usually 10 days to two weeks. The seedlings grow quickly, often doubling in size in just a few weeks, and capable of withstanding slight droughts even at a month. Reasonable size plants and flowers are possible in a year, and certainly in two for almost all genera.

Many of the species do well from cuttings, as long as a small piece of stem is included.

Some mesembs are very particular about water out of season, and will rot quickly if watered at the wrong time of year (usually summer). Others are very tolerant, and grow whenever watered. Almost all mesembs come from areas where there is very little organic matter. They look their best given little fertilizer, and grown in a mix that has only small amounts of organic matter.

Magnificent Mesembs

Aloinopsis is a small genus, related to *Titanopsis*. The species of this genus vary from shiny smooth (*Aloinopsis schooneesii* shown below) to velvet textures as *Aloinopsis orpenii*, to very pebbly and rough surfaces plants like *Aloinopsis malherbei*.

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Figure Aloinopsis schooneesii

Argyroderma fissum and *A. testiculare* are two wonderful species of this genus of small gray to green smooth skinned plants.

Cheiridopsis cigarettifera is known from many localities, each with a different variety (filter tipped, menthol, and all the rest). These are wonderful miniature plants, and like many of the *Cheiridopsis* have different shaped leaves for summer and winter. This is one of the richest of the genera for collectable plants. *C. derenbergiana*, a small tight species, *C. peculiaris*, which has very different summer and winter leaves, *C. pilosula* and *C. velox*, rarely seen, but very different are all worth acquiring and growing. They are easy as long as minimal water is given when dormant in the summer.

Fenestraria rhopalophylla commonly known as 'baby toes' are wonderful small windowed plants that grow in clusters.

Glottiphyllum is a variable genus, with almost all members easy to grown, but hard to grow well. When given too much water or fertilizer (any is too much) they grow big and flabby, with all the charm of an inflated rubber glove. Grown in a mix with few nutrients and bright light, they color up, stay small and are beautiful plants. *G. nelii* is one to try, and *G. regium* one to avoid.

Mestoklema tuberosum is the most commonly seen, with dense dark roots usually raised. *Mestoklema arbiforme* is more upright, and can grow into a small tree in the wild.

Orthopterum waltonii is a small clumping species with smooth leaves. One of the two species in this genus, it forms a small caudex.

Pleiospios nelii, *P. bolusii*, and *P. simulans* are all wonderful species from a genus of only 4 species and 4 subspecies, but with considerable variation in shape and texture depending on locality.

Titanopsis is a genus consisting entirely of gems. There are only five species, but each is represented by several localities, and each locality has its own variation on form, color, growth habit and size. Everyone of these minor variations is worth growing. The easiest to grow is *T. calcarea*, and this has the most and most variable growth forms. It is easy from seed, which is the only way most of the variants can be obtained.

References

E. J. Van Jaarsveld, U. DeVilliers Pienaar. **Vygies Gems of the Veld**
G. Smith et al. **Mesembs of the World**