

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month August 2001 – *Succulents of Brazil*



Jatropha gossypifolia

Our knowledge of the succulent plants of Brazil is dominated by the *Bromeliad* family. Although this is a wonderful family of plants, this domination is unfortunate, because two under-explored areas of Brazil, the Atlantic Montane Forest and the Catingia or scrub brush must have a wealth of succulents, tuberous caudiciforms, pachycaul shrubs and other wonders.

A few of these have been found and described, and a small selection will be described here.

Araujia sericifera is a wonderful combination of an caudiciform asclepiad and an insect eating plant. Related very distantly to *Fockea* and the

caudiciforms of Africa, and more closely to the caudiciform asclepiads of Mexico and central America.

Chorisia speciosa, a common street and garden tree in Southern California, with a spiny trunk is a native to Brazil.

Fucraea gigantea, an *Agave* relative and look alike with glossy green leaves, and hooked teeth. A number of variegated forms are in cultivation

Jatropha dissecta (*J. gossypifolia*) with a type locality in Paraguay is a widespread beautiful *Jatropha* also known from Brazil, and widespread throughout the world. There are dozens more not yet in cultivation.

Pedilanthus smallii is a member of the *Euphorbia* family, and closely resembles some of the Mexican *Pedilanthus*.

Phytolacca dioica is a one of several species of *Phytolacca*. This pachycaul tree, with its swollen trunk is well known in California gardens, and even occasionally appears in a show pot. In the ground, it is a very fast grower, and can quickly get out of hand. In pots, it gets a swollen base, and makes a very nice bonsai specimen.

Portulaca is a world wide genus, with succulent member principally in South America, South Africa and Australia. There are several members of the genus native to Brazil, *P. conico-operculata*, *P. grandiflora* (with flowers that justify the name), and *P. poellnitziana*.

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Turning to the Bromeliads, virtually all of the Dyckias are native to Brazil.



Dyckia fosteriana

These succulent plants grow in clumps. There are dozens of species, varieties and cultivars, with many of the best being produced locally by Bill Baker.



Orthophytum sp.

Another succulent Bromeliad genus is Orthophytum. These plants are less succulent than Dyckias, and grow in more humid areas. As with Dyckia there are a wealth of cultivars and hybrids, with the center of hybridization in Florida.

There are other succulent Bromeliad species from other genera, Aechmea, Cryptanthus, Tillandsia, and others all have a few truly succulent members in Brazil.

Many succulent collections include some of the larger bulbs of South Africa, Boophane, Ammocharis, Brunsvigia and other members of the Amaryllis family. South America, and particularly Brazil have their equivalent. One of the most sought after is the Blue Amaryllis, from the Serra dos Orgaos, which has lavender-blue flowers. It is difficult to keep alive.

Hymenocallis speciosa is a member of a genus that stretches from Virginia to the temperate regions of Argentina and Chile.

Hippeastrum (also known as *Amaryllis* in United States Garden Shops) is a mostly South American genus, with many beautiful species, not at all like the Dutch Cultivars seen everywhere at Christmas. *H. angustifolium*, *H. aulicum* and *H. brasiliensis* are all Brazilian species relatively easy to find and grow.

Rhodophiala is another amaryllid, with several red large-flowered species found in Brazil. *R. bifida* is the best known Brazilian species.

References:

A. Jacobsen, **A Handbook of Succulent Plants**
T. Howard, **Bulbs for Warm Climates**

Tom Glavich July 2001