

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Cactus of the Month June 2001 – *Turbincarpus*

Turbincarpus is a small genus of small plants from Northeastern and Central Mexico. It is one of several closely related genera, *Neolloydia*, and *Gymno-cactus*, and *Strombocactus* being the ones most frequently mentioned. In many books, the plants listed below will appear as either *Neolloydia* or *Gymnocactus*. The exact relation of these genera is still being worked out. New species have been discovered and named in the past decade; seeds and plants of these are just becoming available.

All of the *Turbincarpus* species are worth growing. They are small, most full-sized in collections at an inch or two. A few will clump readily, and make impressive show specimens, but still remain manageable. A collection of all the species and varieties could easily fit on a table top.



Figure

Turbincarpus schmedickeanus v. schwarzii

In habitat *Turbincarpus* usually grow under nurse plants, generally shrubs that offer some protection from the worst of the mid-day sun. *Turbincarpus* have large tuberous roots, which are their primary food and water source. Over much of their habitat, rain falls during the summer, and growth is most rapid during this period.



Figure *Turbincarpus pseudopectinatus*

Turbincarpus are fairly easy to grow, if attention is paid to their life cycle. They are dormant in winter, from November through mid-March. As they begin growth, watering has to start slowly. If too much water and fertilizer are given at once, the inside will swell faster than the skin can grow, and its possible to split the skin of the plant. Once growth is going (April and after) water freely. During very hot weather in the summer, the plants sometimes go dormant again for a short period. Attention has to be paid to watering again.

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If a head splits, all is not lost. The entire head can be removed, and the top of the tuberous root left half an inch above the soil. It will usually start two or three new heads. Removing a head is also a great way for vegetative propagation. *Turbinicarpus* can be raised from seed. They are slow for the first year, but reasonable size plants can be grown in a year or two, and flowers the size of the plant will appear by the second year.



Figure *Turbinicarpus lophophoroides*

Terrific Turbs:

Turbinicarpus krainzianus (a.k.a. *Turbinicarpus pseudomacrolele* v. *krainzianus*) is almost always clumping, as shown above. From Queretaro, it has white flowers with yellow centers.

Turbinicarpus laui stays small, rarely more than an inch and a half. It has woolly areoles and a wool crown. From San Luis Potosi it has pinkish flowers.

Turbinicarpus lophophoroides some-times remains solitary, but generally clusters with age. It resembles the genus *Lophophora*. Careful watering away from the body of the plant will allow the areoles to keep their wool. The white crown will offset the white flowers. From San Luis Potosi.

Turbinicarpus pseudopectinatus has small sets of comb like spikes at each areole. It usually remains solitary, and grows to two inches or so high and an inch in diameter. From Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon it has large pink flowers.

Turbinicarpus schmiedickeanus is a very variable species, with at least half a dozen named varieties. This species has the largest spines of any of the *Turbinicarpus*, with the spines often as large as the body of the plant. The named variations differ in the width, color and length of the spines. The spines of this species are hollow with narrow cracks. Water condensing on the spines runs through the spines and is used by the growing plant. This is a widespread species from Tamaulipas, San Luis Potosi, and Nuevo Leon.

Turbinicarpus valdezianus is another small bodied pectinate species with red and white striped flowers. In this species, the pectinate spines are not in the two neat rows as in *T. pseudopectinatus*, but are more spherical, and almost mashed.

References

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