

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Cactus of the Month September 2001 - *Astrophytum*

Astrophytum are often one of the first cacti a collector starts with. They are available for pennies (or now quarters) in discount stores, groceries, and home centers. How can anyone resist the \$1.29 special speckled Bishop's Cap? More than a few show plants started out this way. At the same time, growing a perfect, 10 or 20 year old specimen plant is a challenge few growers can master. Fortunately, the genus offers rewards and surprises at every level between, making it one of the most popular of cacti at all levels.



***Astrophytum myriostigma* v. *columnare* exhibited by Dick Hulett in the 2001 Inter-city Show**

Astrophytum are native to Southern Texas and Northern Central Mexico. They grow in a very arid region, with a porous mineral soil. One of the cultivation difficulties with *Astrophytum* is their tendency to split open from sudden increases in soil moisture level. To avoid this, keep them in a soil that is very quick to drain, and which has little organic matter. A mixture of pumice and gravel or very coarse sand, with only a little potting soil is best for these plants.

The roots are designed to pump up as much moisture as possible in as short a time as possible from infrequent rains. In a slow draining potting mix they will do this very effectively, and the body of the plant will swell, but the skin will not. Eventually the body pressure gets too great and the skin cracks.



***Astrophytum capricorne* exhibited by Laura Ostler in the 2001 Inter-city Show**

There are currently four recognized species, however, there are older plants, clearly visibly different from the recognized species available in the trade. There are also varieties of the species, cultivars, and hybrids, all worth growing.

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The Japanese in particular have developed some spectacular clones of *A. asterias*, that go under the name of *A. Super Kabuto* and *A. Miracle Kabuto*. These were developed by careful selection and propagation of selected clones and seedlings.

Admirable *Astrophytums*:



Astrophytum asterias exhibited by Carol and Paul Maker in the 2001 Inter-city Show

Astrophytum asterias is the smallest of the species. It is the hardest to grow well, prone to splitting if over watered. It is the parent plant for many of the best hybrids. From the Chihuahuan Desert of Northern Mexico. It has prominent spineless areoles,

Astrophytum capricorne is generally the longest spined species. The spines are generally twisted and curved. Although young plants are globular, they soon become ovoid, and eventually columnar. It is widespread in the Chihuahuan Desert.



Astrophytum myriostigma exhibited by Vince Basta in the 2001 Inter-city Show

Astrophytum myriostigma is the well known 'Bishops Cap.' Although usually five sided, four sided, six, seven and eight sided clones are also common. Spiral forms, are also well known as are some very large clones. *A. myriostigma* v. *columnare* can grow to several feet.

Astrophytum ornatum from Hidalgo can grow to 12 inches in diameter and three feet in height. The spines are straight, yellow brown, and the woolly areoles tend to come in patches.

References:

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