

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Cactus of the Month October 2001 - *Ariocarpus*



***Ariocarpus retusus* entered in the 2001 Intercity Show by Vince Basta**

Ariocarpus is one of the treasures of the world of Cacti. This genus, from Central to Northern Mexico and Southern Texas has some of the most spectacular species of the entire family. Some succulent growers, who otherwise avoid cacti, make this genus their sole exception. There are collectors who collect nothing but *Ariocarpus*, and have hundreds of plants in their collections. Rare specimens can change hands for hundreds of dollars. Rare cultivars with unusual tubercles can be sold for even more, particularly in Japan. There is no denying that this single genus has generated a world wide cult of devotees.

With all of this, you might expect *Ariocarpus* to be difficult to come by, and difficult to grow. Nothing could be further from the truth. They are no more difficult to grow than many other central Mexican genera. All of the species and all of the varieties are readily available, and nearly all are affordable. This genera is well within the range of even beginning novice growers. Field collected specimens are occasionally available, and these are much more expensive, and much harder to grow. Recently collected specimens are now almost always illegally obtained.

With all of the fuss we make over this genus, it is important to remember that the plants have had important ethno-botanical uses. The tubercles have a sticky mucilage, and this was often used as glue to mend broken pots. *A. kotchybeanus* was boiled and used as a cure for rheumatism, and several species were used as a 'false peyote' in religious ceremonies.

Cultivation is not difficult, when the home environment of these plants is remembered. They grow in mineral soils, with very little organic matter. They all have large tuberous roots. They grow in areas that are very hot in the summer, and that have summer rainfall. If they are protected from excess organic matter, particularly peat, and watered heavily only in hot weather, good growth will result. They need protection from winter rains.



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Admirable *Ariocarpi*

There are six species, several varieties, and a near infinite set of cultivars.

Ariocarpus agavoides, as its name implies resemble agaves. Discovered only in 1941, it is rare in nature and cultivation. It comes from just a few areas in Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosi.

Ariocarpus bravoanus, has flattened triangular tubercles. A beautiful species, it is slow growing and rare, although seedlings are now often available. This species also comes from just a few localities in San Luis Potosi.



Ariocarpus fissuratus

Ariocarpus fissuratus is much more common. This species spreads from the Pecos River in Texas south to Durango. The wide area over which this species grows, and the isolation of some of the populations has given rise to many forms. This species is also one of the more collectable species, with many cultivars produced, with extra hair, wide tubercles, etc.

Ariocarpus kotschoubeyanus is the miniature of the genus. This species never gets above ground. It is widespread in Mexico, occurring in silt plains from Coahuila to Queretaro. In habitat, this species is sometimes under water! It is relatively easy to grow, requiring only a good, quick draining potting mix. Multiheaded specimens of this species are especially appreciated.

Ariocarpus retusus was the first species discovered, first described in 1938. This is an easily grown species. It is widespread throughout the Chihuahuan desert. A subspecies *A. retusus ssp. trigonus* has more triangular tubercles. As with *fissuratus*, there are dozens of cultivars, variants, variegates, etc. of the species and the subspecies.

Ariocarpus scaphiostriis is another of the small, rare and harder to grow species. Seedlings are available, usually as grafted plants. It is native to Nuevo Leon.

References:

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