

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Cacti of the Month January 2003 - *Straight Spined Mammillaria Clusters*

Mammillaria is one of the larger genera in the *Cactus* family, and one of the most variable, with some members remaining as solitary columns for their entire lives, some remaining as fingernail size solitary globulars, some clumped and heavily spined with hooks. However, some of the most attractive are the straight spined clusters.



Mammillaria humboldtii entered in the 2001 Intercity Show by Bill Munkacsy

Although most *Mammillaria* are native to Mexico, some species in the genus can be found from Columbia to Kansas and California. With this wide distribution, the cultivation requirements obviously vary considerably. The species from the tropics and warmer areas are rarely tolerant of cold and damp. Those from the drier desert regions are also intolerant of continued damp, but can take considerable cold. With these restrictions aside, most *Mammillaria* are easy to grow.

The secrets to good growth are a continued supply of fertilizer during the growing season, strong light, and maintenance of a clean and insect free growing environment. The appearance of white mealy bug egg cases (*Mammillaria's* worst enemy) on the tips of the spines or the appearance of ants means that mealy bugs are sucking the sap and life of the plant. Immediate treatment is required, with a thorough washing, and spraying with an insecticide.

Propagation of *Mammillaria* clusters is easy. Cuttings can be taken at any time during the growing season (April to early November), left to dry for a few days and replanted in a clean potting mix. Rooting is rapid, with short white roots generally appearing after a couple of weeks. *Mammillaria* are one of the easiest species to grow from seed. The seeds are simply placed on top of a damp potting mix, covered with a light coating of gravel, placed in a plastic bag in bright light, but out of direct sun and allowed to germinate. Germination usually occurs in a week or 10 days. The seedlings can stay in the plastic bag for several weeks until they get large enough to survive unprotected, and should then be removed to a still shaded, but brighter and drier environment. Most will survive, and grow quickly. Show quality plants can sometimes be grown in just 4 or 5 years, and entries can be ready for seedling classes in as little as 6 months.

Classic Straight Spined *Mammillaria*

Mammillaria decipiens subsp. campotricha from Queretaro, long known as the birds nest, has a dark green body and long twisting spines that can vary from white to yellow (most common) to red, depending on the clone.

Mammillaria crucigera produces clumps by splitting dichotomously (each head splitting into two). The body ranges from green to almost brown to almost purple. This species is a slow grower.

Mammillaria elongata, one of the first cacti that everyone grows is easy, and extraordinarily tolerant of abuse. It has the odd characteristic of being very popular and also unfairly neglected, since advanced growers tend to ignore this easy grower, even though there are a variety of forms and colors, many of which can make a spectacular plant.

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Mammillaria geminispina

Mammillaria geminispina, is a variable species with some varieties having short white spines, while others have long flexible centrals. The plant shown above has one head that has crested.

Mammillaria lenta, from Coahuila forms mounds of off-white to white. Slower growing than the somewhat similar *M. plumosa*, described below, it is often a show winner.

Mammillaria luethyi from Coahuila, and discovered in 1996 is now available in cultivation. A breathtaking miniature, it has very short white spines on a dark green body.

Mammillaria nivosa generally has a dark green body, offset with woolly areoles, and open yellow spines.

Mammillaria plumosa is a relatively quick grower, forming mounds of white heads. The heads are covered with white feathery spines, which must be kept dry if the color is to be maintained.

Mammillaria viperiana from Puebla Mexico, is generally a white spined species, that clumps from the body, particularly as the main body elongates.



Mammillaria eichlamii

Mammillaria voburnensis v. *eichlamii* (also known as *M. eichlamii*, pictured above) from Guatemala is a quick and dense clumper, with areoles covered with a yellow wool.

References:

- E. Anderson, **The Cactus Family**
- J. Pilbeam, **Cactus for the Connoisseur**
- R. Craig, **The Mammillaria Handbook**
- A. Innes & C. Glass **Cacti**

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