

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Cacti of the Month June 2003- *Sonoran Desert Cacti*

The Sonoran desert is an area that stretches from South-eastern Arizona to just North of Phoenix to Palm Springs, to San Diego, and then South encompassing most of Baja California, and the state of Sonora in Mexico. The exact boundaries vary with different writers. This is an enormous desert, with a variety of habitats and microclimates that have unique rainfall and temperature patterns that have encouraged speciation.

The Sonoran desert region includes coastal regions where it rarely rains, but frequent dense fogs provide needed moisture. There are coastal regions that get winter rainfall, rain shadows where it rarely rains, and high plateaus where winter frosts are common.

The species lists below are representative lists of species, and are not meant to be complete. There are other genera, not mentioned in this short article, and some of the species listed also occur well outside of the Sonoran desert.

The best known of all cacti is *Carnegiea gigantea*, or the saguaro. This native of the Sonoran desert defines the image of the American west. It does not transplant from its home well. Seedlings are readily available, and grow quickly, but large plants succumb to our wetter winters.

Nearly as impressive is *Stenocereus thurberi*, found mostly in United States in the Organ Pipe Cactus National monument and surrounding areas. It extends throughout Sonora and into Baja California.

The largest of the columnar cacti of the Sonoran desert is *Pachycereus pringlei*; similar to *Carnegiea* in overall appearance, but much

more massive. These magnificent giants are confined to Baja California, the Gulf Islands and Sonora

When wandering through Southern Arizona, the most impressive cactus flowers belong to the *Echinocereus*. Almost all the members of this genus have bright colored, usually red, flowers.



Echinocereus lindsayii entered in the 2001 Intercity show by Charles and Joann Spotts

The many members of the *Echinocereus* family in the Sonora include:

<i>barthelowianus</i>	<i>maritimus</i>
<i>brandegeei</i>	<i>rigidissimus</i>
<i>engelmannii</i>	<i>scheeri</i>
<i>fendlerii</i>	<i>stoloniferus</i>
<i>ferreirianus</i>	<i>trigolchidiatus</i>
<i>lindsayii</i>	

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Ferocactus diguetii entered in the 2001 CSSA show by Joe Clements

One of the most popular of the genera of the Sonoran desert is *Ferocactus*. The following *Ferocactus* are all found in the Sonoran desert:

<i>acanthodes</i>	<i>herrerae</i>
<i>chrysacanthus</i>	<i>pottsii</i>
<i>diguetii</i>	<i>rectispinus</i>
<i>emoryii</i>	<i>wislizenii</i>
<i>fordii</i>	

The genus *Mammillaria* is represented by the following species:

<i>armillata</i>	<i>pondii</i>
<i>blossfeldiana</i>	<i>poselgeri</i>
<i>boolii</i>	<i>saboae</i>
<i>evermanniana</i>	<i>schumannii</i>
<i>glareosa</i>	<i>standleyi</i>
<i>halei</i>	<i>swinglei</i>
<i>johnstonii</i>	<i>tayloriorum</i>
<i>mainiae multidigitata</i>	<i>tegelberiana</i>
<i>microcarpa (grahamii)</i>	<i>tetrancistra</i>
<i>miegeana</i>	<i>yaquensis</i>

The genus *Opuntia* is also well represented, although less well grown. Species include:

<i>acanthocarpa</i>	<i>fulgida</i>
<i>arbuscula</i>	<i>leptocaulis</i>
<i>bigelovii</i>	<i>phaeacantha</i>
<i>engelmannii</i>	<i>versicolor</i>

A less obvious member of the Sonoran desert is *Peniocereus greggii*, a tuberous rooted scrambler that climbs through shrubs, usually evident only during brief flower periods at night. Surprisingly, this plant is easy to grow, and does well in pots in Southern California. Relatively rare in collections, it is easily grown from seed, and develops a great tuberous root in just a few years.

Cultivation of most of the Sonoran desert cacti is surprisingly easy. They are perfectly happy outside of their normal environments, and do fine in pots, unprotected from Southern California winter rains. The few exceptions include the larger ceroid species, which are more frost sensitive, and suffer from our periods of extended dampness.

Ferocactus and *Echinocereus* are both extremely popular. Many forms and varieties are available, in most seed lists, and on the sales tables at the local shows. Nearly all of these are well worth growing.

References

E. Anderson, **The Cactus Family**
Cullman, Gotz & Groner, **The Encyclopedia of Cacti**
Arizona Sonora Desert Museum Web Page

Tom Glavich April 2003
Photos T. Nomer