

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Cacti of the Month July 2003- *Common Cacti*

This month the plant of the month subjects will be a little different. The first two will be narrowed down to specific species while the third will be a somewhat neglected genus. What all three have in common is that they are readily available, easy to grow, and for many of us will have been among some of our first cacti. The three categories here are very small representation of cacti that are often passed over by collectors because they are seen as too common or too easy to grow. A complete list is obviously much larger.



Mammillaria elongata

First up is *Mammillaria elongata*. If you look at the selection of cacti at any home or garden center you'll almost always see some variety of *Mammillaria elongata* or a hybrid of it. They are quite attractive with their dense gold spines and often times even the small plants being offered are beginning to cluster.

There are several forms of *Mammillaria elongata*. Most common is the classic gold spined form. A dark spined cultivar called "Copper King" is quite nice. "Pink Nymph", an *Mammillaria elongata* hybrid, is also a popular plant that grows larger than *Mammillaria elongata* and has large pink flowers instead of small yellow flowers.

Mammillaria elongata is tolerant of a wide range of soil mixes and watering regimes but will rot if kept constantly wet. Given a bright location and even minimal care it will form a good sized cluster in a year or two. Plants are easily started from offsets. New plants can also be grown from seed with a little more effort.

Next we have *Gymnocalycium mihanovichii*. Not quite as common as *Mammillaria elongata* but this is another species that seems to suffer from being too common and easy to grow for many to take serious. It too is often seen in the home and garden centers cacti section but it will usually be as a member of a dish garden.



Gymnocalycium mihanovichii

Gymnocalycium mihanovichii is also tolerant of a wide range of growing conditions but looks its best when given protection from full sun.

Gymnocalycium mihanovichii offsets when fairly small to form a small cluster and is a reliable bloomer. Even very small plants can flower if conditions are right and larger plants can bloom from spring through summer. Propagation from offsets is easy as is propagation from seed. In fact, seeds germinate so easily that many will germinate next to the mother plant without any special help.

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Our third candidate for cacti that “don’t get no respect” is the genus *Echinopsis*.

Most of us who grow them do so for their incredible flowers, a good reason without a doubt, but many are quite attractive plants even when not in bloom. Spines range from nearly absent to close to an inch in length. Many have a globular, clustering growth habit but a few tend to remain solitary and some are semi-columnar.



***Echinopsis* “Johnson’s Hedgehog crest”. This normal pup formed on a crest and now flowers. Note size of flower compared to size of plant!**

Echinopsis hybrids have been popular for quite some time. Many of the hybrids offered by Johnson and by Paramount back in the 1960s and 1970s are still in collections today. Some of these “classics” are still offered by various growers from time to time.

Many of the more recent creations have come from Bob Schick via The Huntington ISI offerings. Several other growers and countless hobbyists are also busily creating even more. In fact, hybrids are so abundant that an unnamed plant given to you by a relative or neighbor is more likely to be a hybrid than a species.



***Echinopsis* “Los Angeles x” at rear, *Echinopsis* “Epic” in foreground.**

Rather than being delicate, fickle plants as their spectacular flowers might suggest, most *Echinopsis* fit in the “hard to kill” category. While proper care such as bright but not direct sunlight and adequate fertilizer & water will net you better plants and more flowers, the plants will survive under very harsh conditions. Propagation is easily accomplished by removing pups from clustering forms. Others can be forced to pup by damaging the growing point at the top of the plant thereby forcing it to offset. Seeds are also easy to grow and may produce a new, interesting hybrid.

Tom Vermilion June 2003