

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month January 2001 - *Hybrid Aloes*



Figure Aloe 'Lizard Lips' (J. Bleck hybrid)

The long blooming racemes of brightly colored *Aloe* flowers are attractive to sunbirds in Africa and hummingbirds in the West. When in bloom, hummingbirds will visit every few minutes, going from plant to plant and yard to yard, fertilizing hundreds of flowers as they make their rounds. Aloes readily hybridize not only with other Aloes, but also with *Haworthia* and *Gasteria*.

This has brought a wealth of named and unnamed hybrids, many occurring naturally where two or three species grow together, many man made, many of 'garden origin'. The classical references on *Aloe* are **The Aloes of Tropical Africa and Madagascar** and **The Aloes of South Africa**, both by G.W. Reynolds. In **The Aloes of South Africa** in particular, each species is followed by a list of naturally occurring hybrids. Some of these have been collected, and many reproduced, and are now in collections world wide.

Hybrids of "Garden Origin" are those produced by natural cross pollination, or a gardener with a

small brush and a short memory. Many of these hybrids are of species that are geographically distinct, and grow together only in the gardens of *Aloe* collectors. They are often found plants, not only hybridized naturally, but sown by the wind and nurtured without human intervention, until they are big enough to be noticed. This casual method of hybridization has produced some strikingly beautiful plants, many of which are now cultivated on their own merits.

Some of the best hybrids have been created by John Bleck of Santa Barbara. Typical of one of his complex hybrids is *Aloe* 'Grande' an ISI release of 1995. This hybrid is (*A. descoingsii* x *A. parvula*) x [(*A. albiflora* x *A. bellatula*) x (*A. descoingsii* x *A. parvula*)]. This means that four separate species were used in making this hybrid. In the first round, two hybrids were created, *A. albiflora* x *A. bellatula* and *A. descoingsii* x *A. parvula*. These hybrids were then crossed to make a second generation, and finally, this second generation was hybridized with one of the original pairs. In each generation a number of hybrids were created, and selections with the best characteristics were then used to make the following generation. The second cross of *A. descoingsii* x *A. parvula* may well have been a different plant than the first.

A second hybridizer, working with slightly large scale plants is R. Grim of San Jose. He uses *A. sinkatana*, *A. harlana* and *A. jucunda* to make beautiful speckled and glaucous hybrids, about 8 inches across.

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Figure A. sinkatana x jacunda R. Grim hybrid

Finally, an Australian hybridizer, David Cummings, (the originator of *Gasteria* 'Little Warty') has produced a number of beautiful plants using some of the same starting material as John Bleck, but with very different results. Typical of his work is *Aloe* 'Elga' [(*A. jucunda* x *A. jacksonii*) x (*A. millotii* x *A. bellatula*)] His hybrids are hard to find, but pictures can be found in the **Haworthiad**

***Aloe* Hybrids worth collecting:**

Aloe 'Grande', *Aloe* 'Pepe' [*A. descoingsii* x *A. haworthioides*], *Aloe* 'Lizard Lips' [(*A. descoingsii* x *A. calcairophila*) x *A. bellatula*], *Aloe* 'Cha Cha'

{(*A. descoingsii* x *A. jucunda*) x [*A. descoingsii* x (*A. parvula* x *A. boiteau*)]}, *Aloe* 'Hey Babe' [*descoingsii* x (*bakerii* x *parvula*)] are all representative of John Bleck's extensive hybridization program. Every plant in his series of hybrids is worth finding and growing. They all wonderful, small plants, great for a table top collection, and well worth entering in any of our shows. *Aloe* 'Lizard Lips' has been a show winner many times.

Aloe 'Doran Black' is a spectacular hybrid, and has appeared on our raffle table a few times in the past year. It is a complex cross, created By R. Wright. Parentage is unknown.

Aloe 'Tegelberg's Triumph' appears to be a hybrid between *Aloe aristata* and *Aloe erinacea*.

Grim Hybrids appear to be mostly unnamed, with only the parentage given. Larger than the others they are spectacular additions to any garden.

Only a few could be listed here. There are dozens worth collecting, almost all small and all easily grown.

References

The Haworthiad

Cactus and Succulent Journal

G. W. Reynolds, **The Aloes of South Africa**

G. W. Reynolds, **The Aloes of Tropical Africa and Madagascar**

A. Sajeve and M. Costanzo, **Succulents, The Illustrated Dictionary**

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