

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month March 2001

Caudiciform and Tuberous Asclepiads

The *Asclepiadaceae* or Milkweed Family is a large family of succulent and non succulent plants. The family has a wealth of growth forms, rivaling that found in the *Cactaceae*, *Crassulaceae* and *Euphorbiaceae* families. This month we are concentrating on the caudiciform and tuberous rooted species, popular plants in all of our shows.



Figure *Fockea edulis*

The caudiciform genera, *Fockea*, *Brachystelma*, *Matalaea* *Raphionacme* and some of the *Ceropegia*, are all really vines. The caudex is generally below ground in habitat. The caudex is grown most quickly by keeping it below ground, in a large pot. All of these species should be repotted once a year to encourage caudex growth.

Fockea edulis, shown on the left is one of the most popular. Easily grown from seed, an impressive caudex can be grown in just a few years, if it is left below soil level in the pot. All of the *Fockea* are easy to grow, perfectly happy outdoors, even with temperatures near freezing. Other commonly seen *Fockea* include *Fockea crispa*, with a corrugated caudex and crinkly leaves, and *Fockea multiflora* which has a more upright conical caudex.



Figure *Raphionacme flanaganii*

Raphionacme are a bit more temperamental, and are easier to rot. They need protection from cold and wet. The most common species is *Raphionacme flanaganii*, shown above, with a magnificent white caudex. Another species seen

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with increasing frequency is *Raphionacme africana*, a species first introduced in London in 1822, and then lost for nearly 130 years.

Matalaea is a new world genus of caudiciform asclepiads, that is only recently coming into cultivation. Two species currently available are *Matalaea condusiflora* a native of Venezuela, and *Matalaea cyclophyllus* a native of Mexico. These are grown similarly to *Raphionacme*. They form very large caudexes relatively quickly, and like *Raphionacme* and all of the more tropical asclepiads, are sensitive to simultaneous cold and wet.



Figure *Ceropegia renaldii*

Ceropegia is a genus from the Canary Islands and South Africa stretching to East India. Not all of

the *Ceropegia* are caudiciforms. Some grow as swollen sticks. *Ceropegia renaldii*, from the Transvaal in South Africa, is one of the more common species grown. The most common of all is *Ceropegia woodii*, often sold as a house plant. It has heart shaped leaves, and small tubers that form at the nodes of the vines.

All of the *Ceropegia* have interesting flowers. The flowers are almost always spotted, and the corolla lobes (equivalent to petals) are joined at the top, leaving five small holes for insects to enter and leave during pollination.

Brachystelma generally have round potato like caudexes. They are the most difficult of all of the asclepiads to grow, preferring to rot at any opportunity. The flowers are notoriously smelly. Nonetheless, the flowers are also spectacular, and for the advanced and patient grower, these are plants well worth growing. They aren't seen as often as they should be.

References

G. Rowley, **Caudiciform and Pachycaul Succulents**

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

Photos by T. Nomer at the 1999 CSSA Show

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