

# San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

## Succulent of the Month October 2001 - *African Pachypodiums*

There are only a few species of *Pachypodium* native to Southern Africa, but they make a wonderful collection. They are among the most collectable of all of the *Pachypodiums*, are readily available, and are easily grown.



**Pachypodium namaquanum**

All of the species of African *Pachypodium* can be grown out of doors, year around in Southern California, requiring protection only from severe frost and freezing weather. If given very good drainage, they can survive the winter in pots, with some species even showing some growth throughout the winter months.

All are easy to grow from seed, with seed usually available either at the April Seed

growing Study group, or through the CSSA, or any of the better known seed houses. They are best planted in warm weather, (May is ideal) one seed to a pot. Germination is quick, and small plants are ready for transplantation before the end of the summer.

### **Peachy Pachys**

*Pachypodium bispinosum* comes from the southern tip of South Africa. In habitat, most of the caudex of this plant is wedged between and beneath rocks, giving it protection from the sun and predators. Only the relatively small, and easily replaced branches stick out. This makes this species easy to bonsai, and dwarf. It can develop an impressive caudex even in cultivation.

*Pachypodium lealii* is the most tropical of the African species growing into Namibia and Southern Angola on the west coast and in South Africa and southern Zimbabwe on the east coast. It grows at the same latitudes on both sides of the continent, with the east and west side generally being treated as separate subspecies. The east coast species are *Pachypodium lealii ssp. lealii*, and were the first discovered in 1859. They are easy to grow, but require very good drainage to avoid root rot. They form large trees in habitat, to 30 feet tall, but remain small and easy to handle in pots. The west coast subspecies is *Pachypodium lealii ssp. saundersii*. These tend to be smaller, and in habitat, to have a more spherical caudex than a tree form. It is easier to grow than its east coast cousin.

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*Pachypodium namaquanum* is perhaps the most spectacular of all of the African species. It's common name is 'half man', which is what it appears to be on the hillsides of Namaqualand. It can grow to 6 feet or more. It is the defining plant of portions of Namaqualand, just as the *saguaro* is to parts of the Sonoran desert. These often go dormant in the early summer, sometimes losing all their leaves, sometimes keeping some, but showing no growth. They leaf out again in late July, and grow through the winter.



*Pachypodium succulentum*

*Pachypodium succulentum* is similar in appearance to *Pachypodium bispinosum*. It is

a dwarf species that grows at the Southern tip of South Africa, with a habitat that is larger than and encompasses that of *Pachypodium bispinosum*. The flowers and flowering times are different, and the two do not hybridize in habitat. This species is easy to root from root cuttings. A piece of root is removed, and immediately replanted, with about a quarter inch sticking out above the top dressing. Within a few days to a few months, new leaves will start to form at the tip, shortly followed by new branches and a new caudex. Stem cuttings can also be rooted, though with more difficulty. This species is easy to grow from seed, and like *Pachypodium bispinosum* easy to keep small. The *Pachypodium succulentum* shown in the accompanying figure is about 6 years old from seed, and has been in a 1 inch pot since it was a little over a year old. The entire plant is about 4 inches tall.

### References

- A. Sajeve and M. Costanzo, **Succulents, The Illustrated Dictionary**
- G. Rowley, **Pachypodium & Adenium**

Tom Glavich September 2001