

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month - November 2001 *Sansevieria*

The world is divided into two types of people, those who like *Sansevieria* and those who don't. Fortunately many members of the San Gabriel Valley Society are *Sansevieria* lovers. Recently an International Sansevieria Society was formed, with members in several countries, including the United States.



***Sansevieria pinguicula* entered in the 2001 Winter show by Lillian and Leo Pickoff**

There are about 60 species of *Sansevieria*, but since many of the species are variable and have widespread habitats, there are more names than this. There are also dozens of cultivars, particularly of variegated *Sansevieria*. They are currently in the *Dracenaceae* family, but have moved through the 'dumping ground' families. In older references, they will be found in the *Lilaceae*, *Aloinaceae*, *Agavaceae*, and

other families. Most *Sansevieria* are native to Africa, although some come from India, Asia and the South Sea Islands.

They are among the easiest of all succulent plants to grow, requiring only a pot or a spot in the ground. They are tolerant of incredible neglect and abuse, but most grow rapidly and well if watered and fertilized regularly. They do well in Southern California outdoors or in, and suffer damage only if they are cold and wet for extended periods. They are free from most pests, suffering only rarely from scale. They are prone to fungal rusts, particularly in damp weather. The only cure for rust is to cut off the infected leaves, sterilizing the cutting tool after each cut (an alcohol wipe will do) and then spray the entire plant with a fungicide such as Funginex. Prevention is much easier. Bright light, and moving air prevent most rusts.

Sansevieria propagation is remarkably easy. Cut a piece off, let it dry for a few days, and stick it in some potting soil. They propagate readily from leaves (tips are best), rhizomes, roots, etc. They can also be propagated from seeds. In Southern California *Sansevieria* flower frequently, particularly when grown outdoors. The flowers are extremely fragrant, and can perfume an entire house. Each rosette only blooms once, so after flowering, the new rosettes should be kept, while the old ones are discarded. They are usually self fertile, and produce orange berries, each containing a single seed.

Variegation is very common in cultivated *Sansevieria*, and variegated plants form the majority of some collections. For a few species, variegated forms are much more common than normal forms. Variegation is

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produced apparently at random. A variegated pup will appear on an otherwise normal plant. The variegation can be preserved by removing the pup and a portion of the rhizome, and growing it on. If this is not done, the variegated pup, being weaker than the rest of the plant will not reproduce. Variegated plants are slower growers than normal plants, and are much more sensitive to cold and wet conditions. They need protection, particularly in the winter. They are also sensitive to standing water in their crowns, quickly rotting if water is allowed to remain.

Variegated plants are likely to produce pups with new variegated patterns. These can be removed and grown as a new cultivar. This is the source of many of the cultivars we now know.

Selected Species

Sansevieria aubrytiana is a beautiful thick leaved species, now sometimes included in *Sansevieria kirkii*. From Malawi, Tanzania and Zanzibar.

Sansevieria bacularis grows with thin stems up to four feet long, but only half an inch in diameter.

Sansevieria kirkii a thin leaved, rapidly growing species has leaves that turn copper colored in bright light. Several cultivars are known.



Sansevieria patens entered in the 2001 Winter Show by Karen Ostler

Sansevieria parva, is not particularly good looking, but it is a rapid offsetter, and frequent bloomer with extremely fragrant blooms.

Sansevieria patens, with an unknown, but probably Kenyan origin, is shown above. This is one of the most architectural of all of species.

Sansevieria pinguicula, also from Kenya makes small hard rosettes supported on stilt like roots, and offsets by aerial branches. It is very slow. A plant of any size at all does well in all shows. The plant shown on the previous page is a fine example.

References

- A. Stover **The Sansevieria Book**
- U. Egli, Editor **Monocotyledons**