

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month June 2002 - *Caudiciform Euphorbias*

Euphorbias are among the most successful of the plant families, covering an amazing geographical and environmental range. In horticulture, they span the range from English Garden plants to trees, stem succulents, geophytic miniatures, to medusoid globulars to caudiciforms.



***Euphorbia cylindrifolia* v. *tuberifera* entered by Petra Crist in the 2001 Intercity Show**

Almost all of the collectable caudiciform *Euphorbias* come from Africa and Madagascar. These plants use a swollen base or root to store water and nutrients through dry periods that may be from several months to several years long. When the rains finally arrive, the stored water and energy give them a head start over the surrounding vegetation.

Although many caudiciform *Euphorbias* are very easy to grow, with the swollen root making them very tolerant of under watering, some are very difficult, turning immediately to mush when over watered, or watered out of season. Care must be given in watering, keeping them warm and wet while growing, and cooler

and dry when dormant. *Euphorbias* from tropical areas (Madagascar, and central Africa) are particularly prone to rot if left cold and damp while dormant. Protection in a greenhouse, or even a garage for a month or two in the middle of the winter will greatly increase the survival rate.

Most caudiciform *Euphorbias* are easy to propagate. The green stems can be removed, left to dry for at least week or even a bit more, and then replanted. The newly planted stems take a few weeks to establish, and then start growing.

Some cuttings will not form caudexes unless double cut. Once growth is strong, the top of the green shoot needs to be cut off again to force the plant to start a caudex. Some species form a perfectly symmetrical caudex when grown from seed, but form distorted (but often more interesting) caudexes when grown from cuttings.



***Euphorbia groenwaldii* entered by Tom Glavich in the 2001 Intercity Show**

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Eurhythmic *Euphorbias*:

Euphorbia cylindrifolia v. *tuberifera*, shown on previous page, forms a nearly spherical caudex. It is relatively easy to grow, a bit harder to grow as well as that shown. This species is native to Madagascar.

Euphorbia decaryi has similar branches, and is often in flower. The caudex of this species is more a collection of tuberous roots. These intertwine, swell and form great patterns. This species is native to Madagascar.

Euphorbia decidua is a wonderful miniature, with a base that goes from conical to spherical, and only a small showing of deciduous green spiny stems. A hard species to keep, but well worth it.

Euphorbia inornata from Cape Province South Africa has a thick tuberous root, often raised and shown as a caudex. Multiple heads (or single) of cylindrical branches grow during the summer months, and remain during the winter. An easy grower from an environment much like Southern California.

Euphorbia persistens from Mozambique and Northern South Africa has spectacular patterned stems from a well developed caudex. More tropical and more difficult than some, it makes a wonderful specimen with age.

Euphorbia stellata is another South African species, similar in appearance and nearly as easy to grow. It too makes a caudex quickly.



Euphorbia squarrosa

Euphorbia squarrosa is one of the classic caudiciform species. Easily grown from double cut cuttings, it rapidly forms a great caudex. It tolerates being outdoors in Southern California without much protection even during the rainy season. It is native to South Africa.

Euphorbia trichadenia from Angola, into South Africa has a great root like caudex, with grass like leaves sprouting from the top. Although easy to grow it is rarely seen.

References

Gordon Rowley **Caudiciform and Pachycaul Succulents**

Herman Schwartz, **The Euphorbia Journals**

Intercity Show Pictures by T. Nomer

Tom Glavich May 2002