

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month June 2003 - *Madagascan Pachypodiums*

Madagascan Pachypodiums

<i>ambongense</i>	<i>horombense</i>
<i>baroni</i>	<i>lameri</i>
<i>v. baroni</i>	<i>rosulatum</i>
<i>v windsorii</i>	<i>v.rosulatum</i>
<i>bicolor</i>	<i>v.eburneum</i>
<i>brevicaule</i>	<i>v.gracilis</i>
<i>decaryi</i>	<i>v. inopinatum</i>
<i>densiflorum</i>	<i>rutenbergianum</i>
<i>v. densiflorum</i>	<i>v. rutenbergianum</i>
<i>v brevicalyx</i>	<i>v. meridionale</i>
<i>geayi</i>	<i>v.sofiense</i>



Pachypodium brevicaule

Plant W. Minnich, Photo T. Nomer

Pachypodium are members of the *Apocynaceae* or *Periwinkle* family, and are most closely related to *Adenium*, and more distantly to *Oleander* and *Plumeria*.

Pachypodium are native to only Southern Africa and Madagascar. There are more Madagascan species than there are African, due to the geography of the island of Madagascar, with isolated regions that encourage the development of unique populations of plants, animals and insects isolated from others of the same genus. New species are still being discovered as botanists explore the more remote and regions of Madagascar.

The Madagascan species are easy to grow, with the sole difficulty being their sensitivity to cold and wet. If they are protected, either by being brought indoors during the winter, or protected from rain and cold in a cold frame, or even a garage, they will survive and grow quickly.

Propagation from seed is easy. Seeds are simply placed on good wet potting soil, and germination generally occurs within a week. Seeds should be sown in the spring. Protection from direct sun is necessary until the first few leaf pairs have formed, and then gradual movement into strong light, with an increase in feeding and water will bring quick and strong growth.

Some Southern California growers are starting seeds and growing *Pachypodiums* in a mix of Coir (ground coconut husk) and pumice or perlite. This is generally supplemented by a time release fertilizer, as well as frequent feedings. Fast growth, along with very healthy root systems have been obtained. The mix drains very quickly, and prevents the loss of roots from rot caused by over watering.

All of the Madagascan *Pachypodiums* are worth growing.

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Preeminent Pachypodiums

Pachypodium brevicaule, shown opposite, is a ground hugging, nearly flat caudiciform, the shortest of all the species. It comes from east side of Madagascar, near the middle of the island. It's knobby top growth hides roots that anchor it to the soil.

Pachypodium baronii v windsorii comes from a peak named Windsor Castle in the northernmost part of the island. It is a small species, with a bulbous base. Its larger cousin, *P. baronii v. baronii* grows 200 miles further down the coast, and is larger, growing to 6 feet in the wild. Both of these are sensitive to both over and under watering.

Pachypodium geayi is a southern species, similar in appearance to *Pachypodium lamerei*, but more robust. It is the largest member of the genus, growing in a few instances to 30 feet. Like *P. lamerei*, it is a fast grower, but is less tolerant to cold.. The main visible difference is the fine coating of hair or down on the spines, and when in flower, the completely different flower.

Pachypodium horombense, known also as *P. rosulatum v. horombense*, is a Southern species, with a wide base. It is the queen of the Madagascar Pachypodiums, with many people agreeing that this is the most beautiful. It takes a place of honor as one of the oldest plants in the Huntington Conservatory. It is relatively easy to grow. It has open yellow flowers that are easily pollinated by bees, and forms a robust pachycaul trunk even as a young seedling.

Pachypodium lamerei is the best known of all the *Pachypodiums*, available as a "Madagascar Palm" in florists, home centers and even supermarkets. It grows quickly, reaching 12 inches within a year if grown well (lots of food and water). It tolerates indoor life well, and is popular as a house plant. Several cultivars have been created, with more robust trunks, or lower and more frequent branches. It grows in the South and West.



Pachypodium lamerei

Photo by Tom Vermilion

Pachypodium rutenbergianum is the opposite of *P. brevicaule*, reaching for the sky, even as a young seedling. It grows from the northernmost tip to the South East of the island, but in spite of this wide distribution is fairly difficult to grow. It likes warmth, but the roots will shrivel and die if kept too dry in the winter. The tips will freeze and rot, even in the mild winters of the San Gabriel valley.

Reference

G. Rowley, **Pachypodium and Adenium**

Tom Glavich April 2003