

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month July 2003 – *Stem Succulent 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 and possibly exceeding that found in the *Cactaceae*, *Crassulaceae* and *Euphorbiaceae* families. Growth form runs from trailing vines, to stem succulent, to caudiciforms. This month's species are the stem succulents.



Huernia plowesii

The stem succulents include cactus-like forms such as *Hoodia* and *Trichocaulon*. Most of the *Hoodia* have a similar appearance, with soft spines. Their flowers are simple, open, and moderately odoriferous. The most outstanding quality is their resemblance to pink, purple, gray or brown radar dishes. They are easy to grow, but need heat, and protection from excess moisture in the winter. They can be propagated from cuttings fairly easily. *Hoodia gordonii* and *Hoodia bainii* are often available, and are strong growers. *Trichocaulon* are similar, but have smaller flowers.

The weak stemmed sprawlers such as *Caralluma*, *Huernia*, *Orbea*, and *Stapelia* are all grown for their spectacular flowers. The flowers of these genera are all very complex, with a central raised zone, and interesting color patterns. They generally have an odor of rotting meat, and many have small hairs that move in the slightest breeze, simulating the hairs that grow on rotting meat. All of the weak stemmed species are easy to propagate from cuttings. A cutting is taken, allowed to dry, and simply placed on top of damp potting soil. Cuttings root in just a few days.

Seeds of the asclepiads are hard to come by, except through the International Asclepiad Society, which makes seed lists of rare and common species available several times a year. A subscription to their journal and access to the seed list is well worth the price. Seeds of most of the asclepiads germinate very quickly, and for the most part are easy to grow.



Stapelia glanduliflora

Photo T. Nomer

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All of the stem succulents are susceptible to a black rot that can reduce a plant from a show quality specimen to a pot of black slime in just a few days. The fungus causing this black rot travels through the plant extremely quickly, and the plant is often doomed by the time a problem is noticed. Many growers propagate two or three cuttings of every species, so they have a spare, in case rot appears. Rot of all sorts can be best prevented by avoiding damp stagnant air. Good ventilation gives the best growth and the strongest plants.

There are literally dozens of great species in this group and you can hardly go wrong regardless of what you grow. Favorite species are *Stapelia glanduliflora*, shown above. *Caralluma socotrana*, while a challenge to grow is particularly beautiful, even when not in flower. *Huernia* has a wealth of interesting flowered species. *Huernia pendula* has dark purple flowers, and is a rapid grower. *Huernia plowesii* shown above has great red and yellow flowers.

Stapelianthus is a genus of small stem succulents confined to the island of Madagascar. The species of this genus are often intricately patterned, in near black and white. *Stapelianthus decaryi* is a choice representative of this genus.

Quaqua is a mostly South African genus of small succulents with small velvety flowers. The color of the flowers varies from a royal purple to purple and green stripes to white. *Quaqua arenicola* has one of the best (and largest at about 1/2 inch) purple flowers.



Pseudolithos migiurtinus

Pseudolithos and *Whitesloania* are two genera of mostly rare species with well deserved reputations of being difficult. *Pseudolithos migiurtinus*, shown above is fairly forgiving and grows well in a greenhouse. It needs protection from cold and damp, but doesn't like to get bone dry, even in winter. A few species of *Pseudolithos* have become available in the past few years, with *Pseudolithos migiurtinus* being the most readily available. *Pseudolithos dodsonianus* is also now available, with the species showing the close relation between this genera and *Caralluma*. *Whitesloania* resembles in shape an *Astrophytum*.

References

G. Rowley, **Name that Succulent**

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

Tom Glavich June 2003