Cactus Comments

New York Cactus & Succulent Society

est 1962

February 2012

Next Meeting

Thursday, Febuary 16th, 2012
6-7:45 pm
331 Madison Ave (near 43rd St)
7th Floor New York, NY
www.nycss.org
Guests are always welcomed at meetings!

Membership

Joining NYCSS gives you information packed monthly meetings, talks from experts and amateur enthusiasts, demonstrations, slide shows, trips, and our monthly newsletter, Cactus Comments. The 10$ annual dues covers everyone in your household, from September to June.

Mail membership checks payable to

Richard Stone
3777 Independence Ave. Apt 12C
Bronx, NY 10463

Officers & Board of Directors:

Acting President: Richard H. Stone
Webmaster: Suzanne Bernar
●webmaster@nycss.org
Editor: Stephanie Ciparis
●Stephanie.ciparis@gmail.com

Directors

Ivan Black, MD
Norman Bobrow
Lazaro Marrero
●yemaya75@hotmail.com
Carol Smith

Contents

EDIBLE CACTI

Several members expressed an interest in edible cacti and succulents (besides Opuntias) at our January meeting. The list of cacti and succulents is far too numerous for one article so I hope our January attendees can settle for an abridged list at this time.

Carnegia gigantea: Saguaro fruit is highly prized by the O'odham people with wine and jam as the most commonly prepared foodstuffs.

Cereus repandus: This large columnar cactus from South American produces edible fruits known locally as "Pitaya" or "Peruvian Apple". These fruits are thornless, vary in color from violet red to yellow, and are not commonly sold as a food commodity.

Corryocactus brevistylis: Produces tasty berry-like fruits.

Echinocereus: Many of its varieties are famous for their fruit, earning it the name Strawberry Cactus. *E. engelmannii* is particularlly sought after because people remark that it tastes of both strawberry and vanilla.

Epithelantha: All species produce tasty, long, red, candle-like fruit.

Epiphyllum anguliger: These fruits are said to be like gooseberries.

Ferocactus hamatacanthus: Produces edible fruits and slighly less spiny, edible, flower buds.

Harrisia aboriginum: This Florida native produces edible fruits known as "Prickly Apples" which are similar to those of *Peniocereus*.

Hylocereus undatus: Night Blooming Cereus or Dragon Fruit. This sprawling cactus is named for its wavy rib margins and is the most common of the Dragon Fruits. Its red-skinned fruit has white flesh and small black seeds. The fruit is often compared to kiwi because of its mildly sweet flesh and crunchy seeds. *Hylocereus megalanthus* is a yellow skinned variety with white flesh.

Pachycereus pringlei: This is the tallest species of cactus in the world with a maximum height of 63 ft. Cardon, the fruit of this cactus, was an important traditional food for the Seri people in Sonora.

Peniocereus greggii: Arizona Queen of the Night produces a fruit that is similar to Dragon Fruit. Its fruits are not as popular because of their spines.

Pereskia aculeata: Barbados gooseberry also produces edible fruits.

Mammillaria: Many of this genus produces edible fruits known as "Chilitos" that look like tiny, red, chili peppers.

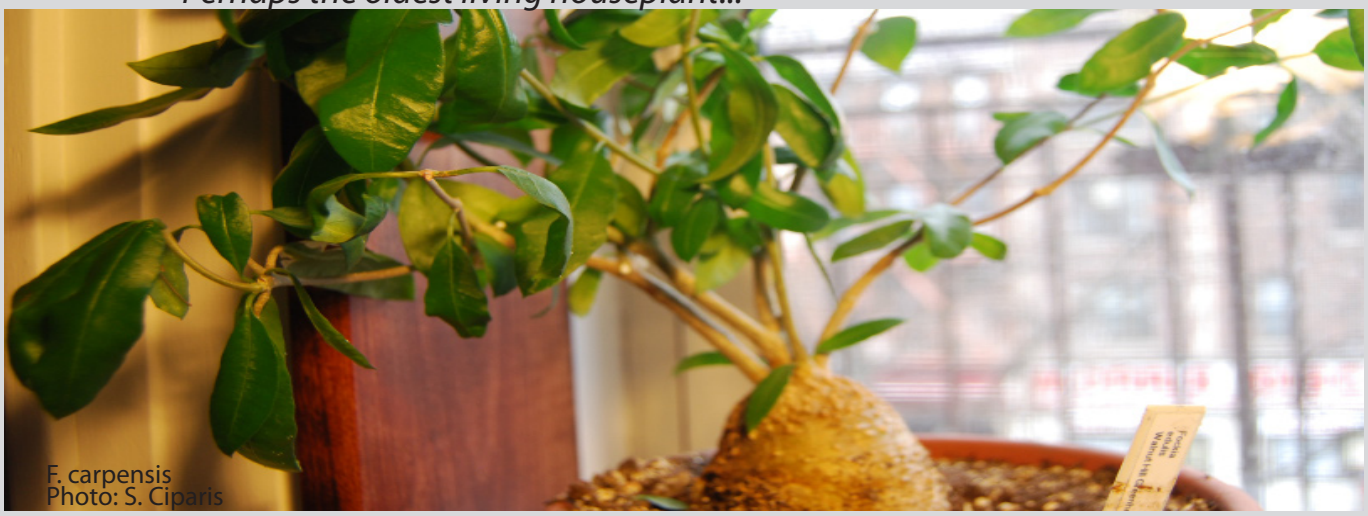
Myrtillocactus geometrizans: Produces edible berries known as "Garambulos" which are like cranberries, only less acidic. The fruit is small, 1-2cm in diameter and resembles Bilberries (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), which the plant is named after.

Stenocereus: Almost all species produce fruits good to eat. *Stenocereus gumosus* is known by the Seris as "Ziix is ccapxl" or "thing whose fruit is sour" because of its acidic nature.

GENUS SPOTLIGHT

Fockea

Perhaps the oldest living houseplant...



F. carpensis
Photo: S. Ciparis

Caudiciform lovers will enjoy the ease of growing fockeas. This small genus contains only six species, making it a reasonably sized group for collectors. Fockeas are well suited to houseplant culture. So well that one specimen has been growing for over 220 years at the Schönbrunn botanical garden near Vienna, Austria. The specimen was collected in the African Cape sometime after 1786 by Austrian explorers sent by Emperor Joesph II. It was believed to be the only of its species in existence for 120 years until South African botanist, Rudolph Marloth, reported the genus as common in parts of South Africa.

The discovery and naming of Fockea species by different British, French, Swiss, German and South African botanists has resulted in many of the species being named multiple times. Invalid names are still seen in the horticultural trade. Plants also exhibit high levels of genetic variation, especially in leaf margin and flower size, making misidentification common.

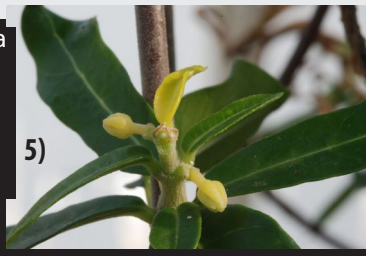
Fockeas are caudiciform subshrubs bearing large underground stem tubers. The tuber is made up of spongy, water holding tissue that helps them surive periods of drought. Every species except for *Fockea multiflora* reside on rocky slopes in its native habitat. Several species can become rather large and have been recorded weighing nearly 100 lbs. Flowers are typically star shaped (5 lobes) and sweet scented. Most are dioecious, requiring both male and female plants to produce seed. There have also been reports of propagation success by cuttings.

1)F. multifolia
Photo as offered by Aridlands Nusery

3)
F. comaru
Photo:
Chris chez ,Alain Mouchel

2)F. angustifolia
Photo: S.Rügheimer et al

5) F. sinuata
Photo:
Sasson D.



4)F. edulis seedlings at 2 months
Photo:
Corona Cactus Nursery

Six species are included in the genus.

Fockea angustifolia (Syn. F. dammarana, Syn. F. lugardii, Syn. F. sessiliflora) is widely found throughout southern Africa in places that receive summer rainfalls. Leaves and flowers are both known to be highly variable in this species. The narrow, grayish green leaves are generally straight, but wavy margins are not unheard of. Flowers are white and display different characteristics by region. Plants found in Natal have the smallest flowers while those from Namibia have the largest. Plants from the northern part of its range in Botswana and Zimbabwe have an elaborate collar fringing on the corolla lobes, gradually disappearing as flower size diminishes in southern populations.

Fockea capensis (Syn. F. crispa) is only found on the southern tip of South Africa. It's gray green, elliptic, finely pubescent leaves can also be found jetting out of rocky slopes. The leaves on *F. capensis* are usually very wavy, leading to the commonly used improper name of *Fockea crispa*. This plant is common in the trade.

Fockea comaru (Syn. Brachystelma comaru) can be found growing in Namibia and South Africa. It is the only species of *Fockea* that can be found in winter rainfall areas. Its stems are short and erect, rather than sprawling and climbing. The plant is somewhat rhizomatous as the stems spread some distance from the tuber before emerging. Leaves are green to blue green and rolled. The flowers range from grayish to brownish green.

Fockea edulis (Syn F. cylindrica, Syn. F. glabra) is the species most commonly found in hobbyist collections. It can be a vigorous climber in its native range of southern South Africa if rainfall is sufficient. The leaves and flowers of this species are similar to *F. capensis,* with the wavy leaf margin in *F. capensis* being the main distinguishing difference. *F. edulis* forms the largest caudex of the group and was commonly eaten by South Africans when food was scarce. The plant contains alkaloids which make it a dangerous food source for those who do not properly prepare it.

Fockea multiflora (Syn. F. schinzii) is the largest species in the genus, reaching heights of 10 meters. Unlike other fockeas that grow on rocky hills, *F. multiflora* is found in low lying areas, hills, and woodlands. Leaves are much larger than that of other species, oblong to elliptic, and slightly hairy. Flowers are grayish-green and pubescent. The fleshy stems sprawl on the ground or twist up to surrounding trees for support.

Fockea sinuata originates from Nambia and South Africa growing in scattered open areas. This species has a very small, erect stem with narrow, brownish-green leaves and undulate margins. Flowers are grayish-green and slightly pubescent. *F. sinuata* is the smallest of the species, and would likely make a great houseplant if it were readily available in the trade.

Among those previously listed as fockeas, *Fockea tugelensis (syn. Fockea natalensis)* is now placed in its own mototypic genus of *Petopentia. Petopentia natalensis* is native to Natal and Transkei in South Africa along the coast and is still relatively new, having been discovered in 1954. I have also seen this plant listed as *Fockea africanensis* at several trade shows.

Caring for fockeas can be fairly simple. A well-draining soil medium is important, especially during cooler temperatures when the tuber is more prone to rot. It is recommended that the caudex be below soil surface for fast growth and that the stems be cut back each year. I cut mine back every fall to keep the plants manageable in winter and pot up every spring. Be sure to check for trends in wilting as it might signify girdling at the bottom and a need to re-pot. Use a low nitrogen fertilizer in the spring. Foliage does best in sun to part shade while the tuber should never be in direct sun.

SUBMISSION OF COMMENTS FOR THE NEWSLETTER OR SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS, ETC.

Comments, stories, or information for our newsletter can be submitted to webmaster@nycss.org

NYCSS
www.nycss.org