

Cactus Comments

New York Cactus and Succulent Society

est 1962

May
2012

Next Meeting

Thursday, May 17th, 2012
6-7:45 pm
331 Madison Ave (near 43rd St)
7th Floor New York, NY
www.nycss.org
Hybrid Asian Cacti and Succulents

Members are encouraged to bring in specimens of Thai hybrid Euphorbia Milii and specimens of hybrid Japanese Hibotan and Super Kabuto Astrophytem Asterias and Myriostigma cacti.

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 Bernard
•webmaster@nycss.org
Editor- Stephanie Ciparis
•stephanie.ciparis@gmail.com

Directors

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

Contents

Featured Article

Edible Succulents.....1

Genus Spotlight

Yucca.....2

EDIBLE SUCCULENTS

Earlier this year we covered the fruits and tastier parts of many edible cacti. This month we'll take a look at various succulents that people have found palatable. This list is nowhere near comprehensive. Please note that I have not eaten or prepared any of these plants myself. Use caution and do your research before trying a plant for yourself. Keep in mind that not all edible plants are tasty or easy to prepare.

Aeonium haworthii: The Pinwheel is native to the Canary Islands, now naturalized throughout California.

Aptenia cordifolia: Heartleaf Iceplant is another South African succulent that has become popular as a groundcover in the western United States.

Bulbine bulbosa and *B. glauca*: The plant's tubers and roots were a traditional food in Australia.

Carpobrotus chilensis: The Seafig originates from South African and can now be found throughout the United States and South America. It hybridizes readily with Ice plants (*Carpobrotus edulis*), another edible relative.

Dioscorea bulbifera: Cheeky Yam is a popular and traditional food of Australia. The plant's tubers were shredded, roasted and soaked for several hours in water before being eaten. They have high water content and vitamin C, with a rather hot, spicy flavor. They are poisonous if eaten raw, so should be properly soaked and prepared.

Dudleya cymosa and *Dudleya virens*: Both are native to the California coast. These plants provide nectar for hummingbirds and are excellent for vertical wall plantings.

Portulacaria afra: The leaves of the Porkbush can be eaten and have a tart flavor. The plant is a significant food source for animals on the Eastern Cape. Elephants and goats eat the plant from the top downwards and the plants from the ground upwards. Because of this feeding habit, it is often easy to determine the type of wildlife in the area.

Portulaca oleracea: Munyeroo, was an important staple food and water source, especially in the drier inland. All parts of the plant were either eaten raw or cooked. It was the most widely eaten Australian native vegetable by early European colonists and inland explorers. This plant is also a naturalized weed in the Northeastern United States often referred to as common purslane.

Ruschia Putterellii: The Woody Iceplant is hardy to zone 7 and has tasty succulent new growth.

The leaves of all Sedums are edible but the following are said to be of merit.

Sedum album: The White Stonecrop can be found north as far as zone 3.

Sedum confusum: The Lesser Mexican Stone Crop, vigorous and hardy to zone 7. Beautiful yellow flowers.

Sedum divergen: Spreading Stonecrop, was eaten by First Nations people in Northwest British Columbia. The plant is used as a salad herb by the Haida and the Nisga'a people.

Sedum reflexum: Stone Orpine is occasionally used as a salad leaf or herb in Europe, including the United Kingdom. It has a slightly astringent sour taste.

Sempervivum tectorum: Young leaves and shoots of the Common Houseleek can be eaten raw in salads.



Greek Salad prepared with *Portulaca oleracea*
Photo: Wiki Commons

GENUS SPOTLIGHT

Yucca

where east meets west in the landscape.....

Although thoughts of spring are creeping into all of our minds, let's not get ahead of ourselves seasonally. A plant with superb winter interest may sound like a killjoy, but yucca looks great year round.

Yucca may be a plant that you've seen sitting forlornly on the property of an older relative, full of weeds and looking just plain ornery. Though some can be ornery, especially with small children, many have soft leaves and are anything but plain. For bold, eye-catching architecture in your garden, they can't be beaten.

Members of the Agavaceae family, yuccas tolerate a variety of soils from alkaline to acidic, sandy to loamy, anything but wet. They love full sun, but can grow and thrive in partial shade as well. The flower stalks on yucca can be quite impressive, and in mid-summer (later in cooler areas) they thrust skyward to anywhere between 3 and 6 feet tall with pendulous, tulip-shaped white blooms that hold for weeks. Many people are surprised to learn that many of these South Western U.S. natives are quite hardy....some to zone 5 and even zone 4 in protected sites. Slow growing, most reach to between 2 and 4 feet, but a few species are trunk forming and can grow to about 12 feet.

Many of the trunk-forming varieties are hardy to zone 7, including *Yucca elata* (Soap Tree) and *Yucca scotti*. *Yucca rostrata* is the real beauty of this bunch, and it is hardy to zone 5b. A native of Mexico, *Y. rostrata* is an elegant and hardy blue-leaved yucca that can eventually grow to be 10 feet. It will grow a bit faster in alkaline soil. This branch-forming yucca boasts leaves that are more user friendly according to Tony Avent of Plant Delights Nursery. By that I think he means that they are less likely to poke your eye out. 'Sapphire Skies' is a cultivar with magnificently slender, powder blue foliage.

Yucca filamentosa is a non-trunk-forming variety, commonly called Adam's Needle. It shows exceptional cold hardiness and is rated as zone 5. This species has rough, thick leaves whose margins are covered with a fine, thread-like filament. Some cultivars include 'Bright Edge', 'Garland Gold' and 'Golden Sword'. 'Golden Sword' is a personal favorite, and it is a pleasure to see the bright yellow-centered leaves radiating upwards. These yellow margins really pop in winter, and look almost like you can spread them on toast. Last but not least is 'Color Guard', a fabulous variegated cultivar that shines in any garden and turns shades of pink and coral in the colder months.

An interesting species is *Yucca recurvifolia*, and from it was produced 'Margaritaville' and 'Banana Split'. These cultivars both have a weeping habit and add a graceful touch to the garden. 'Margaritaville' has creamy white and green variegation, while 'Banana Split' has an intense yellow-centered leaf. Both are zone 7 to 9. *Y. recurvifolia* can be especially prone to spotting its roots linger amongst too much moisture in the winter, so remember to supply a properly draining soil. *Y. recurvifolia* eventually forms a trunk and may come to resemble a smallish palm, in which case you can dig it up and start again if the look offends your eye.

Continued...

Yucca rostrata
Photo: Wiki commons



Spanish Dagger is the common name for a particularly wicked plant, *Yucca gloriosa*. Like many wicked things, *Y. gloriosa*, especially cultivar 'Variegata', is also beautiful. Be very cautious around this plant. The leaves can impale a lumberjack. It is listed as zone 7. *Yucca aloifolia*, also decidedly wicked, is hardy to zone 6, but dislikes too many consecutive days at or below 0 degrees. *Y. aloifolia* 'Variegata' has a bi-color margin of light green, edged with creamy white, and culminating in a very pointy leaf.

So, you can see there are many options available to yucca enthusiasts, as well as neophytes. Plant a few and see if their usefulness and beauty pierce your heart like Cupid's arrow...just have some bandages ready.

Matthew Morrow is a Gardener with Madison Square Park Conservancy
Contact: turkeybotdot@gmail.com



Just some of the many Euphorbias on show at this year's Connecticut Cactus & Succulent Society Annual Show and Sale

Photo: Stephanie Ciparis

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