

Cactus Comments

New York Cactus and Succulent Society

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October
2012

Next Meeting

Thursday, October 18, 2012
6-7:45 pm
331 Madison Ave (near 43rd St)
7th Floor New York, NY
www.nycss.org

Meeting Topic

Show and Tell

For our October meeting please bring in photos of your collections so we can share how we store our collections and get a better sense of what our members are growing. Send photos to stephanie.ciparis@gmail.com so we can share them on the projector.

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 \$5 annual dues covers everyone in your household, from September to June.

Mail membership checks payable to

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DOOR PRIZE NEXT MEETING

At October's meeting we will be giving away two copies of What A Plant Knows by Daniel Chamovitz.

A quote from the inside front flap:

For centuries we have collectively marveled at plant diversity and form - from Charles Darwin's early fascination with stems to Seymour Krelborn's distorted doing in Little Shop of Horrors. But now, in What A Plant Knows, the renowned biologist Daniel Chamovitz presents an intriguing and scrupulous look at how plants themselves experience the world - from the colors they see to the schedules they keep.

BOTANICAL LATIN, DEMYSIFIED.... PART 2

Last month we covered the basics of Botanical Latin, focusing on the different attributes of the species name. While the species is the minimum and most commonly expressed part of the plant name, sometimes further attributes of the plant will be named and described. For the most part, these designations are uncommon in plant nomenclature but this short tutorial should clear things up should you ever come across them.

Variety or subspecies: A group or class of individuals displaying marked differences in nature. The differences are inherited and reproduce true to type in succeeding generations. Usually a variety has a distinct geographical niche.

Ex. *Gleditsia triacanthos* var. *inermis*
Common Thornless Honeylocust

This variety is thornless and produces thornless seed 90% of the time.

Ex. *Euphorbia tannensis* subsp. *Eremophila*

Subspecies is abbreviated subsp. and also ssp.

Forma: Designates plant variation that occurs sporadically and randomly throughout the population of a native species. The trait is usually unstable and is only reproduced vegetatively.

Ex. *Fagus sylvatica* f. *pendula*
Weeping European Beech

The term forma is often abbreviated to f. and appears in front of the actual term. The term is always italicized and lower case.

Graft Chimera: (frequently called 'graft hybrids') are a plant derived from the union of two distinct cells or tissues each contributed by a different plant. The new plant arises in callus tissue that occurs at the graft or bud union. The cells are not arranged in a defined pattern in the meristematic area and give rise to plant parts on the same plant that reflect the characteristics of each parent.

A large +(plus) sign in front of the generic name indicates a graft chimera. These are relatively rare and unstable.

Ex. + *Ortegopuntia* (*Ortegocactus macdougallii* + *Opuntia compressa*)

Intergeneric hybrid: Result of hybridization between two genera. Although not common, intergeneric hybrids occur and occasionally result in a unique and important plant.

Ex: X *Cupressocyparis leylandii*
Leland Cypress

The Leland Cypress is a chance intergeneric hybrid between *Cupressus macrocarpa* and *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*. Names are always written with a large multiplication sign in front of the generic term.

Interspecific hybrid: Controlled or chance hybridization between two related species.

Ex: *Hamamelis mollis* x *Hamamelis japonica* resulted in *Hamamelis* x *intermedia* from which numerous cultivars have been selected. In this case the small multiplication sign is placed in front of the specific epithet.

Intraspecific hybrid: Generally controlled cross between members of the same species with unique traits that produce uniform offspring when sexually combined.

Ex: *Petunia* x *hybrida* white form times *Petunia* x *hybrida* red form results in pink color
Petunia x *hybrida* 'Pink Beauty'

GENUS SPOTLIGHT

AN INTRODUCTION TO HARDY EUPHORBIAS

I cannot remember a time when my family didn't have *Euphorbia polychroma* growing in our backyard. As a kid our plant sat in the side yard in Northern New Jersey covered in yellow bracts every summer. When my family moved towards the coast, we brought it with us and less than a year later plants were showing up all over the neighborhood. Coastal gardening can provide some serious challenges to gardeners. The sandy soils do not retain moisture and nutrients, open skies bake plants before establishment and coastal weather promises years of no snow followed by blizzards that sit on the coast for days. The poor soils were always the greatest problem. Rather than amend the soil in the entire yard, we opted to find things that could tolerate the harsh conditions. Pines, Optunias, Yuccas and Euphorbias all proved to tolerate the harsh conditions and look great year after year.

Eventually local nurseries realized how well they thrived in the area and began carrying some of the more interesting Euphorbia varieties. Even now I'm amazed at how far the breeding programs have brought them. Hardy Spurges are outstanding choices for the landscape and container plantings. With good drainage most will perform admirably in full sun or partial shade. There are a few Euphorbias such as *Euphorbia robbiae* which actually prefer deep shade and create excellent groundcovers. If the plants become unshapely, a hard pruning will result in a much denser, tightly branched, symmetrical plant and can be done any time of the year. Like all Euphorbias, these plants produce a white milky sap that can cause skin irritation so use caution when pruning.

While their ability to grow in the toughest conditions may be their most valuable feature, but the sheer number of new cultivars has been one of their most impressive attributes. It seems a new cultivar comes out every year with different colored leaves and bracts. To top it off, most of them are evergreen and hardy up to zone 6. Their milky sap make them unappetizing to deer and insects so expect few pest problems. The most important thing to remember about these plants is that they need tough love. Overwatering and over fertilizing will shorten their lifespan significantly. Given little care in the landscape or a container, they will reward you year round.

Here are a few varieties I've enjoyed...

***Euphorbia* 'Blackbird' ('Nothowlee')**

Notcuts Nursery in the UK introduced this sport of its popular and easy-to-grow *Euphorbia* 'Charam' (Redwing). The black-purple foliage adorns the compact stems, forming a tight 18" tall evergreen specimen. In early spring it produces large compact heads of bright yellow flowers held just above the foliage by the bright red stems.

***Euphorbia characias* 'Tasmanian Tiger'**

(*Euphorbia characias* ssp. *wulfenii* variegata)

This plant was a seedling discovered in Sally Johannsohn's garden in Hobart, Tasmania, in 1993. It is sometimes called *Euphorbia* 'Tassie Tiger'. Tasmanian Tiger has narrow foliage with distinct variegation of green centers with white/cream margins. Growing to 3 feet tall and then topped with broad heads of flowers in summer, that are of the typical chartreuse color but with the bracts also plainly margined with white.

***Euphorbia griffithii* ‘Fireglow’**

Vivid orange-fuchsia bracts appear in early summer. Its 3’ tall red stems and dark green leaves, emerge with a reddish tinge in spring. Plant does best in part shade.

***Euphorbia x martinii* ‘Ascot Rainbow’ (*Euphorbia characias* x *Euphorbia amygdaloides* ‘Rubra’)**

Discovered by David Glenn in Australia, its 20” tall, branching, evergreen stalks are adorned with narrow, glaucous leaves, each edged in an attractive yellow border. In cold weather, the upper leaves take on a red overlay, then in early spring the plants are covered in flower clusters consisting of showy green- and yellow-striped bracts, housing the tiny red flowers.

Euphorbia myrsinites

Low growing evergreen succulent from southern Europe to central Asia. Trailing in nature, it grows to 6 inches tall with its 1 foot long stems bearing clasping spirally arranged blunt blue-gray leaves. The stems, radiating from the center of the plant, rise up at the tips from which the terminally borne flowers emerge in late winter to early spring. The flowers and their subtending bracts are initially greenish-yellow flowers but deepen to a red hue by summer.

***Euphorbia polychroma* ‘Bonfire’**

Bonfire produces some of the best coloring of all the hardy euphorbias. Bonfire’s green foliage in spring rapidly changes to a deep burgundy red color that continues through fall.

***Euphorbia robbiae* (syn: *Euphorbia amygdaloides* var. *robbiae*)**

One of the finest euphorbias, this dark green euphorbia is slightly stoloniferous nature making it an ideal ground cover. This variety does best in shady sites. In very early spring, the chartreuse flowers unfurl in dramatic fashion, presenting 18” tall stalks of unique flowers that last for months. Check out the prospect park zoo or Battery Park for plantings.



Left: *Euphorbia* ‘Ascot Rainbow’ in flower at Madison Square Park
Right: *Euphorbia* ‘Blackbird’ at Madison Square Park

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