



# The Spine

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE MIDWEST CACTUS AND SUCCULENT SOCIETY

Spring 2020  
(Published in March)

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## Stay Up to Date on Club Information

As mentioned several times throughout this newsletter, with the spread of the Coronavirus and everything being shut down, please regularly check the club Facebook page and website at [www.mwcss.com](http://www.mwcss.com) for the latest up-to-date information on club meetings and events (what has been cancelled/moved to a later date, still on, etc.). Also check forthcoming emails as well. Thank you for your patience and understanding during this unprecedented time.

## CANCELLED: 2020 Plant Show and Sale

Due to concerns of the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), the 2020 Plant Show and Sale, scheduled for April 4 and 5, has been cancelled.

An email was sent to all club members on March 12, 2020, with the following message. Note also that the regular March meeting was cancelled, and **the April and May meetings are cancelled as well** (May was cancelled due to a conflict with The Holden Arboretum Plant Sale). Please keep checking the club's website and Facebook page, as well as your email, for information on future club meetings. Thank you.

Dear members,

As we prepare for our Show and Sale it has become evident that the current situation with COVID-19 (Coronavirus) could have an impact on our attendance. Schools are closing, local officials are limiting large gatherings and sporting events are restricting audience attendance.

Keeping the safety of our members and the public who attend our show in mind, we think it best and have cancelled our April Show and Sale. At this time, CBG has no dates that will work for us to reschedule this year.

In addition, one of our many concerns was having our demographic of members in a group setting with the virus spread at an early stage. If this is the concern for the Show in two weeks, we believe it is even *more* of a concern for our Sunday meeting where we traditionally have a room packed with members for several hours. Therefore, the Executive Board has agreed to cancel our regular meeting this Sunday (03-15-20) on the grounds of immediate health concerns.

Stay healthy!

The Executive Board

P.S. The recent press conference by the Governor confirms this decision.

## NE Ohio Spring Events



### Cleveland Botanical Garden

Various seasonal events, however some have been cancelled due to the Coronavirus. See links below:

April

[https://cbgarden.org/visit/calendar/action~month/exact\\_date~1585713600/request\\_format~json/](https://cbgarden.org/visit/calendar/action~month/exact_date~1585713600/request_format~json/)

May

[https://cbgarden.org/visit/calendar/action~month/exact\\_date~1588305600/request\\_format~json/](https://cbgarden.org/visit/calendar/action~month/exact_date~1588305600/request_format~json/)

### Holden Arboretum

Various seasonal events, however some have been cancelled due to the Coronavirus. See links below:

April

[https://www.holdenarb.org/visit/calendar/action~month/exact\\_date~1585713600/request\\_format~json/](https://www.holdenarb.org/visit/calendar/action~month/exact_date~1585713600/request_format~json/)

May

[https://www.holdenarb.org/visit/calendar/action~month/exact\\_date~1588305600/request\\_format~json/](https://www.holdenarb.org/visit/calendar/action~month/exact_date~1588305600/request_format~json/)

## The Huntington: A Picturesque Trip

In January, when the aloes were in bloom, club members Mike and Christie Briggs visited The Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens (known as “The Huntington”) in San Marino, CA.



There are 16 gardens to view, but not surprisingly the desert garden was their favorite! According to Christie, “It’s a large garden, and the variety of cacti and succulents is amazing!” Below and on the following page are some photos that Mike and Christie would like to share with the club. Thank you both for sharing! If any club member is

planning to visit this area of California, be sure to make it a point to visit The Huntington. You won’t be disappointed!

**Photos credit:**  
Mike and  
Christie Briggs



# The Huntington: A Picturesque Trip (Con't.)



# A Guide to Blue Cacti

By Sean Diamond   Photos Credit: CactiGuide.com

As collectors and enthusiasts, we're always trying to find that one special plant that will really stand out when we show off our collections. Something that really catches the eye or brings visions of deserts and exotic lands. One such quality could be the presence of blue in the pigmentation of the plant's skin.

Plants are living things and react to sunlight and ultraviolet light in a similar fashion to animals. Instead of melanin, however, plant skin pigmentation is changed via a chemical called anthocyanin (antho-si-a-nin), which is a type of flavonoid with antioxidant effects. From my experience, I've found that blue varieties of cacti seem to enjoy the full blazing sun more than some of my other cacti. The full sun actually deepens their color, and this can be seen on some of my columnar cacti, where there are literal stripes of lighter and darker hues from when the plant was growing and dormant.

Another reason for a bluish/grayish color in plants is due to epicuticular wax; a waxy coating

found on the skin of many succulent plants, and is easily rubbed off.

Plants with this epicuticular wax are usually referred to as glaucous, which in Latin literally translates to "bluish or bluish-gray." Glaucous plants, as a result, will sometimes have the term in their species name.

In this article, I want to talk about some particularly special varieties of blue-shaded cacti and other succulent plants that could act as a reference to collectors who are trying to find more blue-colored plants. I don't own all of the species listed, but will make note of my personal experience growing them if I do. I'd like to start by listing *Pilosocereus pachycladus*, the first cactus that I ever owned and managed to keep alive. A native of Brazil, this is a handsome species of columnar cactus, and it is relatively common in cultivation. In climates where it can survive outdoors, it grows into a large, semi-arborescent plant. Not only does *P. pachycladus* have striking blue skin, it also has attractive golden-yellow spines that contrast nicely with the blue coloration. Indeed, many other members of the

*Pilosocereus* genus have blue skin with attractive spination (*albissimus*, *floccosus*, *fulvilanatus*, *magnificus*), but a second species within this genus is especially worth noting for not only its blue-green color, but also for its wooly spination.

*Pilosocereus leucocephalus* is a cactus found in Mexico and Central America, and former classifications for this plant put it in the genus *Cephalocereus*, and with good reason. The aforementioned genus is that of one of the famous "old man" cacti, and since *P. leucocephalus* grows wooly, white hairs from its areoles (which are the spine bearing structures on a cactus), it was thought that the two, along with other hairy "old man" cacti, were related. Upon looking closer, however, there are several distinct differences between the plants in the genus *Cephalocereus* and *Pilosocereus*, most notably the arrangement of areoles along the ribs of the plant, and the space between the ribs as well (*Pilosocereus* generally has wide, pronounced spacing between ribs). –Continued on next page.

# A Guide to Blue Cacti (Con't.)

By Sean Diamond

Many species of the genus *Browningia*, the “candelabra” cacti of the Chilean and Peruvian deserts and mountains, also have a very attractive blue color; notable species include *hertlingiana* and *viridis*. The genus *Cereus* as well, with the most common and readily available being the species *peruvianus*, which has an added aesthetic appeal if one is lucky enough to obtain one that is monstrose or crested.



**Above and left photos:** Examples of *Browningia*, found in the Chilean and Peruvian deserts and mountains.

Like the rest of the cactus family, blue-shaded cactus species are varied in their forms. All of the cacti mentioned so far are columnar in form, growing in vertical pillars and sometimes becoming arborescent, or “tree-like,” in size and shape. As attractive and rewarding as these large plants are, some growers are restricted to windowsills, small greenhouses or tolerant spouses and family members. The next few genera of cacti I will list are globose, or “rounded,” in shape. This includes the “barrel” and “pincushion” cacti, but do take care to avoid such colloquial nomenclature when possible; a “barrel” today could be a “pillar” tomorrow.

The genus *Ferocactus* consists of roughly 30 identified species, the “barrel” cacti. These popular and easily grown plants are famous for being the “desert traveler’s friend” and have been romanticized by Hollywood and folklore for their proclaimed usefulness. The reality that one must consider, however, is that many cacti, especially *Ferocactus*, grow in serpentine soil, which is high in alkaline content, like lime-



**Ferocactus (a.k.a. “Barrell” Cactus)**

stone. The consumption of the plant’s internal fluids may actually worsen the effects of dehydration due to the presence of harmful metals and minerals, so it is probably best to utilize *Ferocactus* as a lovely backdrop to one’s demise in the arid desert, rather than as relief from the consequences of one’s failure to remember a thermos on a desert hike. Within this genus, *Ferocactus glaucescens*, a cactus found in Hidalgo (a state in northeastern Mexico) distinguishes itself as being one of the more blue-colored species. Recalling what I had mentioned before, the species name *glaucescens* is a dead giveaway to this plant’s coloration, caused by the aforementioned epicuticular wax. This coloration is complimented nicely by the plant’s yellowish spines. —Continued on next page.

# A Guide to Blue Cacti (Con't.)

By Sean Diamond

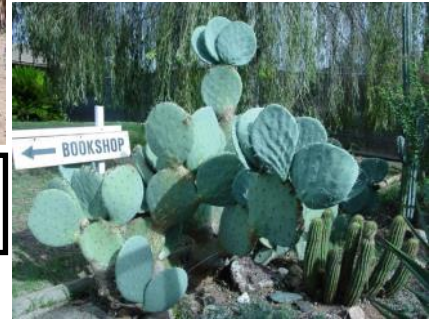
Another variety of “blue barrel” can be found in the genus *Melocactus*. These plants are found in the arid regions of the Americas, but they are also found in the Caribbean as well. *Melocactus* is common in cultivation not only for their impressive blue coloration, but also for their magnificent cephalia, or “flowering zones.” These structures are unique to cacti and only form when the plant has reached a mature age. It is from here that the plant puts out flowers and subsequent fruit. *Melocactus* are unique because the cephalia continues to grow instead of the plant’s original succulent structure. These fuzzy brown cephalia are also why *Melocactus* can have the nickname “Turks cap.”



**Melocactus**



**Opuntias: Top photo: Santa-Rita;  
Right photo: Robusta**



Lastly, I would be foolish if I failed to mention some of the most dramatically colored cacti, the genus *Opuntia*. Commonly known as “Prickly pears,” *Opuntia* are not columnar nor barrel shaped, but rather these plants are flattened pad structures known as cladodes. These plants are unique amongst the cacti for this reason, as well as the fact that they not only arm themselves with spines, but also with tiny, barbed spines called glochids, which are easily embedded in the skin and can be quite irritating. There are many different species of *Opuntia* that exhibit a blue color, mainly because the species hybridizes so readily, but for the sake of brevity, I will focus on two: *santa-rita* and *robusta*.

The first, *santa-rita*, is arguably one of the most attractive of the prickly pears, not only for its uniform, almost circular pads and bluish color, but also for its striking purple and magenta shades that the plant turns when exposed to strong sunlight. The second species, *robusta*, is not only a gorgeous blue, but is also quite literally robust in its form, with large, thick, pads that are almost always perfectly circular. Both of these cacti are native to Mexico, and overwinter surprisingly well for prickly pears.

All of the cacti I have mentioned are fairly common, and the same can be said ten-fold for blue-shaded succulents outside of the cactus family. –Continued on next page.

# A Guide to Blue Cacti (Con't.)

By Sean Diamond

*Echeveria, Sedum* and *Crassula* all have species that come in a wide range of blues and blue-greens. One succulent plant I will go into specific detail about is *Senecio serpens*, the “blue chalk” succulent. This plant, hailing from South Africa, is very common and popular in captivity, and is easily the best example of just how glaucous and blue a plant can get.



Senecio Serpens

All of the plants mentioned in this article are easily obtained in retail stores or through cuttings from a friendly fellow member. If blue cacti and succulents interest you, reach out to a fellow grower and see how they use blue plants to beat the winter blues.

**Editor's Note:** Thank you Sean for your article contribution. If any club member has an informative article such as this to share with fellow club members, please send via email to [Melissa415@hotmail.com](mailto:Melissa415@hotmail.com).

## CBG Affiliate Day Cancelled

Cleveland Botanical Garden (CBG) Affiliate Day, which was scheduled for April 23, has been cancelled. Please check the CBG website (click on the Affiliate bulletin board link) for future affiliate day information. Also see club member Kathy Smith if interested in general affiliate club information.

## CBG Children's Garden Information

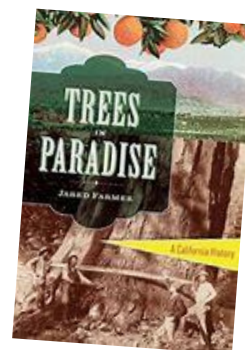
This year's theme for the CBG Children's Garden containers is "Under the Sea." If interested in helping to create a container to represent the MWCSS club, please contact club member Kathy Smith in person or at [kesmith913@gmail.com](mailto:kesmith913@gmail.com). This is a fun event to benefit children's education, as well as get to know fellow club members better!



## Book Nook

During February's regular club meeting, club member Sean Diamond suggested the book "Trees in Paradise: A California History" by Jared Farmer as a must read.

This book outlines the following four main iconic trees of California: Redwoods, Eucalypts, Citrus and Palms. Their history within the state is described fully within the book, as well as how they tie in with activities of Californians. Environmental, economic and conservation insights are touched upon as well. This is an excellent read for all, especially for those club members who love palm trees!



## 2019 December Christmas Party Recap

For the third year, club members enjoyed the holiday festivities at Harry's Steakhouse in Independence, OH. The luncheon party/meeting was held in the upstairs meeting room. Club Vice President Bill Hendricks presented an educational program titled "The 2019 Chelsea Flower Show—London," with wonderfully scenic photos. Afterward, club members enjoyed a delicious buffet lunch. To cap off the holiday festivities, those who chose to participate in the always-anticipated club plant exchange had much fun and walked away with some great plants. Thank you to all who helped put together this fun day. See photos below and on the following pages:



12.15.2019  
*Harry's  
Steakhouse*





## 2019 December Christmas Party Recap (Con't.)



*Plant Gift Exchange Table*



## 2019 December Christmas Party Recap (Con't.)



*Club Vice  
President Bill  
Hendricks  
presenting on  
"The 2019  
Chelsea  
Flower  
Show—  
London."*

# From the President's Desk

Our schedules and day-to-day lives have been turned on their heads. There is no need to cover what has been happening, but to ask your patience as we deal with the cancellations of our show and meetings. The problem is both the member health/virus mitigation measures that currently keep us from meeting in a group as well as the closure of our regular and potential meeting spaces. Our best plan right now is to watch the Facebook page for the most-current updates. As I write this, Holden and CBG have closed their facilities through April and the libraries are unavailable for scheduling, so please watch Facebook and your email for important updates.



Tim Malinich  
MWCSS Club President

## Collection Conundrum

My wife likes to tell me that obsessive collecting is a disease. She usually reminds me of that while I am bringing my collection indoors as temperatures fall. As I scrambled to get the seed starting presentation ready last month it suddenly hit me that I have at least a dozen trays of seedling pots, each holding a dozen pots of seedlings—over 144 pots of seedlings in all. Not bad if your Mr. Hendricks, but my greenhouse is only six foot by eight foot!

It is easy to get carried away with our collections. Even a trip to Lowe's feeds the temptation to bring home just one more rare find. But professionally, as long as it is organized and has a purpose, no problem, right? That's my point of view. As I've reached capacity in both time and space, I keep reminding myself of three collecting parameters: focus, cost and size.

## Focus

Focus on what brings the most meaning to your collection. The more you learn about your plants the more you may "see" that your collection does have a focus. You may be collecting *Opuntias*, *Senecio*, *Sedum*, *Mammillaria*; you may prefer cacti from South America, succulents from Africa, caudiciform plants. Again, the more you learn about your plants the more you may be able to resist the impulse purchase—it may not fit into your collection's theme.

## Cost

Cost does not have to be money. Seed is relatively inexpensive and as I mentioned earlier you can find decent specimens at the big box stores. But, our collections cost us time, a rare commodity that we don't often see the value of. You may know that I am not a big social media person. Yes, I have FB and Instagram, but in my view every 30 minutes I spend on social media is 30 minutes I don't have to work on my cacti...every 30 minutes I work on my cacti is 30 minutes I don't have to hammer at my forge, and so on. Reflect on the reward you get from each part of your collection as well as the time it costs you.

## Size

Size does matter. Your ultimate collection is defined by the space you have available. This may limit the height or spread of plants you can grow as well as the number. I have an interest in *Gymnocalycium* for their flowers and forms but also because they are still small when mature. They will fit under my lights and I can collect quite a few in the small space I have available. Another size limitation is also weight. Our younger club members may have no problem hefting those 30 pound specimens but even they will have to reconsider the mature weight of some specimens over time.

This brings me back to my seedling issue. Most of them are *Gymnos* and other South American cacti, the focus of my collection. They were relatively inexpensive to start but will cost more in time as they grow and need transplanted. And as far as my wife's opinion on excessive collecting...at least the seedlings are less than a centimeter tall, she may not notice them.

# 2020 Quarterly Calendar of Events



## March

- March 15—Regular club meeting at CBG **has been CANCELLED** due to precautionary measures surrounding the spread of the Coronavirus.

## April

- April 4 & 5 — Show and sale at the Cleveland Botanical **has been CANCELLED** due to precautionary measures surrounding the spread of the Coronavirus. Please see page one of this newsletter for greater detail.
- April 26—Regular club meeting **has been CANCELLED** due to precautionary measures surrounding the spread of the Coronavirus.

## May

- May 17—Regular club meeting **has been CANCELLED** due to a conflict with The Holden Arboretum Plant Sale.

## June

- June 3—Regular club meeting at 1 p.m. at club member Kim Stehli's house. Please look for an upcoming email regarding meeting specifics (address, directions, program and plant of the month). Please remember to bring a snack to share!

## General Club Meeting Information

The MWCSS generally meets the third Sunday of each month at 1 p.m. at the Cleveland Botanical Garden (CBG) in the Smith Classroom (unless otherwise noted.) For exact monthly meeting information, please see Kathy Smith's email she sends out monthly.

### CBG Address

11030 East Blvd.  
Cleveland, OH 44106

Please see page one for directions to CBG.

## *Thank You...*

*A great big thank you is extended to **Karen Snell**, who served as club secretary since 2004. Her hard work and dedication to the club has been felt and recognized by all.*

*It was announced during the January 2020 meeting that she will no longer be involved in this role, and the club is currently seeking to fill this position. Please see abbreviated position description to the left.*

*Again, thank you Karen for all your time and dedication to help make the great club we know today.*

## Wanted: Club Secretary

The MWCSS club is in need of a new secretary. Various secretarial duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Taking meeting minute notes
- Typing up meeting minutes and emailing them to all club members
- Scheduling/booking meeting rooms (mostly at Cleveland Botanical Garden)
- Booking Christmas event/organizing menu
- Coordinating various items for the yearly show and sale
- Other

If interested in this position and would like to help out our club, please see Tim Malinich or Bill Hendricks during a regular club meeting. Tim can also be reached at [timj@hearthstonefarm.net](mailto:timj@hearthstonefarm.net) and Bill at [bhendricks@klynnurseries.com](mailto:bhendricks@klynnurseries.com). A complete listing of job functions is forthcoming.

## GOING GREEN

It was decided during the February meeting that moving forward, all club communications (including the newsletter and monthly meeting reminders) will be sent via email and that no more hard copies will be mailed via U.S. mail.

This is just a small way that the club is doing its part to make the planet more “green” for future sustainability. 🌱



## 2020 Mid-States Conference

The Mid-States Conference will be held June 11-14 in Kansas City, MO. Discussions on this will take place at upcoming regular club meetings.

## Newsletter Content Needed

Do you have an interesting cactus or succulent plant that you would like featured in our club’s newsletter? Or perhaps you’d like to write an article on a plant topic of your choice? The Spine is our club’s forum for this. Please contact the editor at [Melissa415@hotmail.com](mailto:Melissa415@hotmail.com). Photos are always encouraged.

### MWCSS Mission:

**Cactus and succulent collectors and hobbyists helping each other succeed.**

### New Membership Information:

Please contact Kathy at [kesmith913@gmail.com](mailto:kesmith913@gmail.com) for new membership information.

### Other Club Resources:

[www.mwcoss.com](http://www.mwcoss.com)—Fresh content is always needed for the club’s website.

Please email Tim at [timj@hearthstonefarm.net](mailto:timj@hearthstonefarm.net).

<https://www.facebook.com/mwcoss/>—Fresh content is always needed for the club’s Facebook page. Please email Kathy at [kesmith913@gmail.com](mailto:kesmith913@gmail.com).

### MWCSS Club Officers:

Tim Malinich—Club president/  
webmaster

Bill Hendricks—Club vice president

Kathy Smith—Club secretary  
(interim); Club publicity (Facebook  
page)/CBG affiliate

Tammie Host—Club treasurer

Melissa Mezgec—Club newsletter  
writer/editor/designer