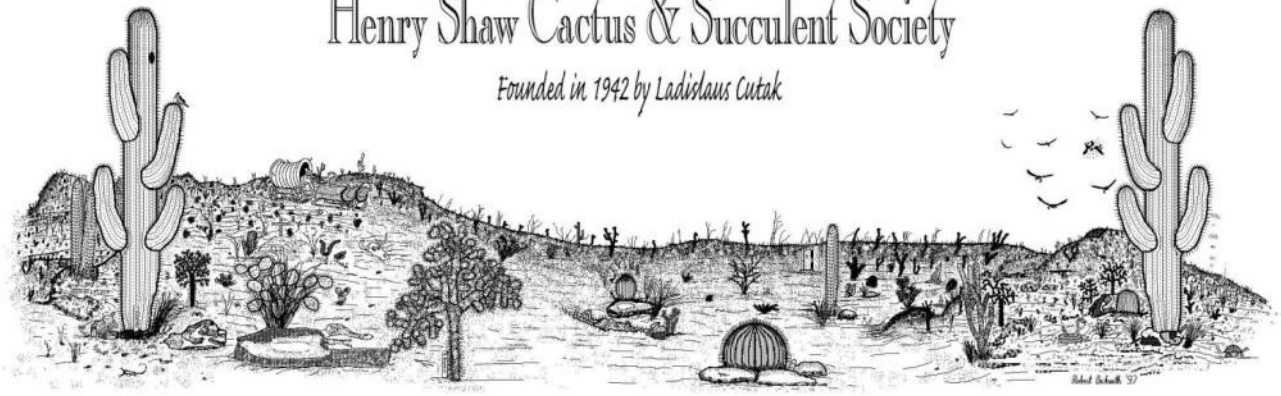


Henry Shaw Cactus & Succulent Society
Founded in 1942 by Ladislaus Cutak



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This Month's Program Growing Euphorbias and
Their Kin:



Spines,

Toxins

and

Charisma

Mission Statement: The purpose of the Henry Shaw Cactus & Succulent Society (HSCSS) is to promote and increase knowledge of the culture, propagation, and conservation of cacti and other succulent plants from arid regions around the world.

- The Henry Shaw Cactus & Succulent Society is an affiliate of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America
- All donations made to the Henry Shaw Cactus & Succulent Society, a non-profit organization, are tax deductible.

ABOUT THE HSCSS

President's Message

The January Program

Due to the cold weather, we had about 30 people, or about 50% of our usual attendance. It is never an easy decision whether to call a meeting or not, especially when the weather is somewhere in-between. Thanks to those who were able to make it.

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Cover: **Euphorbia schizacantha**
photo by Mike Hellmann

Several members, including Nikki Murdick, Susan Carpentier, Bob and Marge Williams and myself, presented a seed workshop. We had a PowerPoint presentation to guide us on what to do and detail what others used. We were fortunate that several people brought in items that they used as well as some seeds that had been growing from two weeks to several months. Thanks to those of you who added valuable information during the program. We appreciate our members sharing their knowledge.

Also, the club provided seeds, soil, and containers for members to try growing some seeds. Good luck! We would appreciate hearing how successful you are!

February Program

Our February program is on growing Euphorbias, including Monadeniums, Jatrophas, and Pedilanthus. I know that I have several of each type of plant and am interested in learning more about them. A separate article appears with all the pertinent information.

Updates

The HSCSS 2024 Show and Sale dates have been set. Also, the 2024 Regional Conference in Sante Fe dates have been set. The dates are at the end of this article. I hope that you can attend the show and sale as well as the regional conference. There is much to see in New Mexico and the surrounding area. Thus, I hope that you will be able to attend the conference.

In these uncertain times, please be safe!

Ralph Olliges, President, Henry Shaw Cactus and Succulent Society

2024 HSCSS Show and Sale, July 20-21, 2024. Setup, July 18-19, 2024.

2024 Mid-States Cactus and Succulent Conference, Santa Fe, New Mexico, July 26-28, 2024.

Growing Euphorbias and Their Kin: Spines, Toxins, and Charisma

By Mike Hellmann

Euphorbias and their related genera, including monadenium, jatropha, and pedilanthus, are some of the most exciting and popular plants in the world of horticulture. From lush to cryptic, poinsettias, many herbaceous annuals, perennials, as well as a plethora of succulents make up this extremely interesting plant family. All are categorized together by their three-chambered capsule fruit characteristic.

This month we'll focus on some of the unique succulent plants that are found in this family. I would safely bet that, overall, euphorbias are probably the most popular, non-Cactaceae plants in our collections. Our kindred spirits always find us hunting for that new, elusive, awesome plant ... and, in this family, we find many!

As we know, many of the plants in the euphorbia group can be extremely toxic so it is imperative to always use caution when handling, especially when pruning or transplanting. The combination of toxins and spines allows them to exist in a hostile environment where grazing wildlife would otherwise gnaw them to the ground.

Many are easy to grow, and some are not. Why? Or why not? The key to understanding proper cultivation of these plants, as it is with all other genera, is to know and understand the habitat from which they originate. Is it equatorial like our summer climate? Or more Mediterranean with hot days but cool nights? Or somewhere in between? Absolutely awesome plants fall into all groups.

We'll address the general care for these plants, but I'd like to specifically discuss those that you'll be bringing in on Sunday as well. Again,



Euphorbia lactea cristata, owned by Bob and Marge Williams.

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the theme for each will begin with the habitat type that they're from but I hope to touch on which other plants from that region may also do well here or perhaps present similar challenges.

So, please bring one of your favorite euphorbias. Bringing in and sharing your plants will allow us to see the variety of color and forms that they have to offer. Most euphorbias have beautiful leaves, flowers (bracts) and stems. And as if those traits aren't enough, many have above-ground caudices, while others (geophytes) develop interesting underground roots that can be raised, thus adding to their sculptural appeal. And if that STILL isn't enough, we have variegated forms, crests, monstrose and other anomalies which can turn an otherwise drab or ubiquitous stem into an "out of this world" artistic form. Some also lend themselves to natural bonsai forms which can make things even more interesting. Yes, Dr. Suess would be proud...

If you can make it to Rolling Ridge Nursery's **Pre-Season Gardening Expo** on Saturday, February 10, 2024, between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., HSCSS will have a table there. Feel free to stop by and take an active part in inspiring new hobbyists. If you have a favorite plant that you'd like to share, please bring it with you.

The days are getting noticeably longer. While there is a long way to go until spring, our plants are paying attention.

As always, be sure to bring other plants to show, ask questions about or put up for adoption. I'm cautiously optimistic that the weather next Sunday will be better than it was at our January meeting so please take advantage of it!

As always, the more plants the better!



Euphorbia labatii, owned by Gerry Patton.



Euphorbia medusa hybrid, owned by Don Lesmeister.

Euphorbia francoisii

By Emily Hall

Euphorbia francoisii (fran-KOY-see-eye) is a caudex-forming dwarf species endemic to the southeast coast of Madagascar, where it grows along the seashore in subtropical and dry tropical forests or shrublands. It reaches only about six inches in height and grows evergreen leaves that appear as rosettes at the end of the branches. As the plant matures, it sends out stolons— creeping horizontal stems or runners that take root at points along their length to form new plants. In habitat, these stolons don't rise to form above-ground stems, so only the rosettes are visible, emerging as clusters directly from the ground.



E. francoisii in habitat near the coastal town of Ambinanibe in the southeast of Madagascar.

Source:

<https://inaturalist.nz/taxa/192232-Euphorbia-francoisii>

E. francoisii is allied with such well-known species as **E. decaryi**, **E. capsaintmariensis** and **E. cylindriflora**. It was described by Jacques Désiré Leandri in 1946 and named for E. Francois, owner of the farm near Fort Dauphin, Madagascar where the species is described from. Although popular and widely available in cultivation, its native populations are currently threatened by habitat loss.

One of the most fascinating features of this species is that it can grow a myriad of leaf colors and shapes. In fact, **E. francoisii** sports some of the most variable leaves in the plant kingdom. The colors can be anything from pale green to a dark green that is nearly black, pale pink to deep eggplant, yellow to white, variegated or multicolored, sometimes heavily veined, and sometimes with silver undersides. The colors also change through the seasons. Up to 3.2 inches long and 1.2 inches wide, leaf shapes may be oblong, lanceolate, spade-shaped, deltoid, or lyre-shaped. Breeders continue to develop new leaf color patterns and leaf shapes in **E. francoisii** through selective breeding. Maple leaf shapes, ivy, and duck foot shapes are now also available in addition to the naturally occurring shapes. Not only can different plants have a wide variety of shapes/colors to their leaves, but a single plant can have leaves with multiple, different colors and/or shapes. No two plants have the exact same leaf shape/color

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combinations, and even clones can have different leaves than their parents. The variety within the species is nearly boundless.



Amazingly, these plants are all **E. francoisii**. If you're viewing this article in the black and white printed journal, be sure to check the digital version to enjoy the wide variety in colors in these plants.

Source: <https://www.littleoneplantnursery.com/shop?Category=Seeds>

The ability to create such diverse leaves comes from the fact that **E. francoisii** are hexaploids, which means their genomes consist of six complete sets of chromosomes where only one is necessary, greatly increasing genetic biodiversity of the species. Because of this, breeders have created a dazzling array of cultivars. Mr. Santiporn Sangchai of Thailand is particularly renowned for his extensive work with creating new cultivars. **E. francoisii** can also be hybridized with other Euphorbias, most notably **E. tulearensis**, another Madagascan dwarf Euphorbia, which lends its tightly waved leaf edges to **E. francoisii** hybrids.

With such spectacular leaf variation, it's easy to overlook this plant's small, simply shaped flowers, but here too breeders have improved upon its natural shade of pale greenish-yellow to pinkish. Now the flowers may appear in vibrant red-pink, orange, nearly neon green, ombre-effects that fade from green into pink, and variegated flowers that alternate pale pink and chartreuse. **E. Francoisii** bloom from late [spring](#) to early [summer](#).



From deep pink-red to delicate yellow-pinks to vibrant kelly green, **E. francoisii** flowers are not diverse in shape like the leaves, but they still offer an impressive variety of colors.

Sources:

https://www.reddit.com/r/succulents/comments/b3gt0r/these_beautiful_cyathiaflowers_on_my_euphorbia/

<https://worldofsucculents.com/euphorbia-francoisii/>

<https://planetdesert.com/products/euphorbia-francoisii>

<https://artisanplants.com/products/euphorbia-francoisii-157?variant=40110009942093>

As if the dazzling array of leaves and delicately colored flowers wasn't enough, **E. francoisii** can also grow a caudex up to a little over an inch in diameter. The caudex begins as a tuberous, napiform root. When the plant matures, these roots can be raised above the soil line to create a decorative, bonsai effect. The longer you wait to raise the caudex, the better (minimum 8-12 years suggested), as it will grow no larger once exposed. In seed raised plants, the caudex tends to be rounder and solitary or to have only a few branches. However, in plants which have been raised from cuttings, the roots are thinner and more heavily branched, eventually producing a tangled mass of many roots.

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Adding to the bonsai effect, **E. francoisii** in cultivation do grow branches above ground that can be erect, sprawling, or procumbent. The branches twist gracefully in random shapes, making each plant a unique living sculpture.



A trifecta of elegance: brilliant leaf colors and shapes, delicately hued flowers, and sculptural branches rising from shapely caudexes in these **E. francoisii** specimens.

Sources:

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E. francoisii prefers full sun to light shade and temperatures from 60-90 F, making it a likely candidate for an indoor windowsill plant in our Midwestern climate, although it would also do well outside during the milder portions of our summer. Sources disagree on whether this species is highly drought tolerant or not; however, most sources agree with the standard succulent watering regime of waiting for the soil to dry almost completely, then watering thoroughly. Similarly, sources agree with the usual succulent advice to water less in winter and to avoid standing water at all times as the roots are prone to fungal rot.

I thank HSCSS for introducing me to this delightful succulent through the Plant of the Month attendance prize. When I first began collecting, Euphorbias were simply 'not my thing,' but now this plant has become a treasured part of my collection. Thank you also to Kevin Romine for repotting from the nursery plastic to a lovely terracotta pot!



This specimen was the October 2023 Plant of the Month. Pictures don't capture the intriguing details of its intricate branching.

Source: Author's collection

Works consulted

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ELIZABETH

In an earlier article, I mentioned that my childhood movie theater featured two movies and a serial or cartoon sandwiched inbetween. The problem was that during the school week one of the parents would pick us up during the middle of the second movie so we could get ready for school the next day. Many of these movies are now shown on the cable channel TCM (Turner Classic Movies), giving me a chance to see what I missed all those years ago. Recently the Marx Brothers movie "At The Circus" came on. As I watched, I found myself drifting off, thinking of being seven again when the "Hagen Bros. Circus" came to town as did other small circuses, eventually being absorbed by the Ringling Bros conglomerate in the early '60s. They would drive caravan style from one town to another with their crew, a few animals, find a place to pitch their big top and sideshow tents, do their show, and move on. Pretty tough life for man and beast. The cool part was they were small and intimate. At the end of the show the ringleader would announce to the kids they could meet the show animals up close for a small fee.....of course. Everything costs at the circus, even the memories.

After nearly 70 years, I still remember meeting Elizabeth their elephant with her thick wrinkled skin soft to the touch and a gentle demeanor despite having endured the rigors of being a prisoner. Acceptance of her fate in life without change showed. You could see it in her eyes. We touched each other. The encounter was memorable, at least for me it was, but I'm pretty sure for her I was just another kid in another town with sticky cotton candy hands invading her space. Elizabeth could have been Dumbo's mom ya know!!!!?

After a few years, the only show around was Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey Circus. Having only experienced the Hagen Bros Circus, I begged Doris to take me to the "Greatest Show on Earth." It was sensory overload. All three rings performing at the same time made it impossible to see it all.....that was the point. Presented that way it created the thought of having missed something, compelling you to return. W. C. Fields summed it up in a circus movie saying, "Never give a sucker an even break!" I got the message. During intermission the audience was given ample time to visit the restroom, buy food and curios, including a live chameleon with a red string tied around its neck and a gold safety pin on the other so you could take it home attached to your shirt. Doris dropped me off at home after the show without coming inside (odd). Mom shook her head

like Doris (sisters), Dad built a small cage of scrap wood and screen, I fed it grass and a carrot and within a few days it was a shriveled mummy. Later I learned I was sold an Anole lizard native to the U.S. that eats mostly insects. Had we known this we would have let the little “bugger” go. It would have lived quite well on its own enjoying his life free from its captors.....unlike poor Elizabeth.

After graduating college, I opened a small coffee, tea, and herb shop. One day, a friendly old gent walked in and introduced himself as Brandy. He was selling circus posters and memorabilia he picked up as a Ringling Bros circus clown. He became known around the neighborhood for telling tales of his circus days and selling his wares. It became apparent he was story rich but cash poor. Soon after selling out, he would leave, finding a new town to repeat the process with another cache of stuff to sell with his colorful tales. He made money, we got memories. Fair exchange. He was a sweet old soul with a restless spirit and If there's a clown heaven he's there.....maybe with Elizabeth. Well, my personal wish anyway.

After drifting back to the movie “At the Circus,” Groucho started singing “Lydia the Tattooed Lady.” It goes....Oh Lydia, oh Lydia, say have you met Lydia? / Oh Lydia, the Tattooed Lady / She has eyes that folks adore so / And a torso even more so / Lydia oh Lydia that encyclopedia / Oh Lydia the Queen of Tattoo / On her back is the battle of Waterloo / Beside it the wreck of the Hesperus too / And proudly above waves the red, white, and blue / You can learn a lot from Lydia / La La La.....La La La / For two bits she will do a mazurka in jazz / With a view of Niagara that nobody has / And on a clear day you can see Alcatraz / You can learn a lot from Lydia.....He said Lydia / I said Lydia / We said Lydia.....La La!

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 **Member Forum**

You will then be sent to the Forum and its registration page. Registration is painless and only takes a minute. After you are approved as a member in good standing, you have access to the entire Forum, and remember it is just for us so you are among friends. Chat with other members about plants, or sell and swap them. It's all there 24/7.