
THE XEROPHILE

"The object and purpose of the Society shall be exclusively for the study, appreciation, propagation and promotion of cacti and succulents among growers and collectors; the conservation and cultivation of native cacti and succulents, the exhibition of said materials whenever and wherever possible"

June 2017

MONTHLY MEETING SPEAKERS COMING UP.....

16 June-- Kelly Griffin -- Agaves or Aloes in Habitat

18 August -- Marcia Tatroe -- (Denver) Hardy Rock Gardens

20 October Open

17 November-- Doug Dawson (Phoenix) The Genus Lithops

**NOTE: No meetings are scheduled for July, September, and December,
as other club activities occur in these months.**

President's Letter

Carl Hime, President

Dear C & S Lovers,

I am sorry that some of you missed the Steve Lovecky presentation on the Cacti of Central Texas. It was both very informative and entertaining. I was really amazed at the common species between Central Texas and New Mexico. Steve is a super speaker. We want to thank Woody for bringing him to us and look forward to the other speakers Woody has lined up. As an aside, Woody mentioned that the Santa Fe Cactus Club's Spring Sale has been rescheduled to a later date in June because of the 12" snow they had the day of the sale earlier. The date will be on our website and in this Newsletter. And I need to add, this may have been something Ellen did not anticipate, but I know her and she will find the date for us.

And as a tribute to Pia, there are no major changes in the Sales Report.

The last item, we are receiving donations of plants from all over the state, many of which are too big for me to handle. Please have a way to load them in my truck if you have a really big plant. Also we need people to give them to. For example, would anyone like a 100 plus 1b Echinocactus grusonii that is 24" in diameter. I have one in a pot and one that escaped the pot and is now lying in my driveway under a trailer.

I am going to break off now and let you get back to doing what you like to do on a Summer weekend afternoon. I do not know about you, but the warmer weather means work outside for me whether I feel like it or not.

Don't miss the Cactus Sale coming up at the Santa Fe Cactus and Succulent Society!

June 24, 2017 10AM to 4:00PM

David Salman's Nursery on Rufina

Plants, pottery and supplies will be available for sale

~~~~~  
Have you paid your dues?

Dues are payable by check or cash at the monthly meeting or by mail.

Make checks payable to CSSNM. They are \$10.00 per year.

See membership application on page 5 for the mailing address.

.....

## **DR. CURT SWIFT OFFERED MANY “PEARLS” ON SOILS & WATER**

### **Guest speaker at the April Chinle Chapter meeting**

Thanks to Janel Hassel, Editor of Succulent Morsels, News of the Chinle Cactus and Succulent Society, Grand Junction, CO. for this article!

Keep your plants in a pot for as long as possible to reduce trauma to roots and exposure to infected soil.

The sand you use to amend your soils should be silica sand, 2mm or larger, with the fines washed out. This sand will be round in shape as opposed to sandstone and other types of sand, which are irregular in shape, with points which tend to break down to cause compaction.

Planting in a well-drained soil and not over watering is the key to success!

The Art of Watering:

Leave 1/2” or so space at the top of the pot to allow water to soak in and not run down the seam between the pot and soil.

Thoroughly water—which means soaking the pot from top to bottom, then setting aside for the pot to drain out, and ultimately the soil to dry out before the next watering.

How often to water depends on the type of plant, the soil it is in, and the season of the year. During the months of dormancy in the fall and winter, most cacti will not require any watering (unless they begin to droop). When spring comes, and the plant comes out of dormancy, then more frequent, thorough watering is needed.

Test the drainage of your pots and outdoor planting sites: Outdoors, dig a hole 12-18 inches deep, and fill with water. It should drain in 10 minutes or less. If not, the soil needs amendment to improve drainage.

When transplanting, note that often the soil in the center of the root ball is compacted. It should be broken up to improve drainage, and may even require rinsing off the root ball.

Don't reuse potted soil unless you pasteurize it. This means moistening the soil and heating it in an oven at 180 degrees for 30 minutes.

As the hours of sunlight increase, increase your watering schedule and fertilizer. Cacti do best using a 1-7-6 fertilizer, applied every 2 wks. Avoid too much phosphorous on your cacti.

Fungus gnats grow in soil that has not been drained. They spread disease and can infect your other plants. Don't leave water standing in plant trays after watering.

# It's OK to Kill Plants

By Kenton Seth, Paintbrush Gardens, LLC  
[www.paintbushgardens.com](http://www.paintbushgardens.com)

The best growers of cacti and succulents have killed the most numbers of plants. So if you want to be an amazingly successful plant grower, get to work killing some. In the grand scheme of things, there is no other way to know the absolute limits of what a plant can handle until you've crossed that line and find yourself with a deflated spiny balloon instead of a plant in your flowerpot.

## Why do plants die?

Know that Momma nature kills most of her plants before they reach maturity. "Survival of the fittest" means "Death to everyone else." Plants less suited to their natural setting get killed off, and those more suited live on. And to keep that balance, generally, in nature the majority are killed and the blooming beautiful plants we see hiking are the minority which have survived up to that point. The factors which can kill a plant are many: water, temperature, soil, light, air movement, attackers from bacteria to deer, and others.

**Think of it this way:** a plant has a certain amount of stress it can, in fact, handle and be just fine. On the invisible gauge of plant health, between that thin green wedge of "Thriving!" and that red zone labeled: "Death!" there is a very wide wedge of "stressed but fine." Plants in nature spend most of their time here. And among the different stresses a plant can have, it's often not one, but a combination which stress a plant. Sometimes it is just one stress – death by salt poisoning because the dog peed on it. Sometimes it's a combination death—the plant was weakened, say, by drought stress for too long when it suddenly received no light: case in which two things killed the plant. Knowledge from friends or a good book can provide the specific ways that plants "communicate" exactly which stress is nagging them to death. A little bit of learning empowers a grower of plants at home to a fast-track of improvement. Perhaps one of the most common stresses among cacti is etiolation – a fancy word for the plant stretching for light because there is not enough. This is what turns formerly cute little balls of cacti into awkward footballs and Hershey's Kiss-shaped things. As the home care givers, we are the architects of the plant's environment. If they die, we have the choice to see it two (and a half) ways: (A) We don't understand the plant's needs and didn't give it those, or, (get ready for a paradigm shift here) (B) That plant was not suited to how we tend to provide for our plants, and for fun, (B.2) (which is more common among expert or long-time growers of plants) We knew the plant's needs but did not provide them. As in "Oops, I left that tropical cactus outside in October when the first frost happened," or, my favorite "Aw dang, I went on holiday and forgot to tell my roommate not to water the cactus when he waters the rest of the houseplants." One giant trick to growing new plants, and especially cacti, is to understand where they come from. They are equipped for that place but we can fool them into being happy in our homes. For instance, the famous living stone cacti, from Africa, like to be cool and extremely sunny and lightly watered in winter, but almost no water in summer. Because that's what it's like in their corner of Africa. Water in summer tends to be their death in most of our hands: they essentially drown while asleep.

## Autopsy for Education

Look at those dead plants and see what they can say from the grave. This is where "reading" your plant's stresses gets extreme. A rotten base, turning brown, or smelly? Plant fell over? Or, lots of yellowing lower leaves of succulents? Probably overwatering. White change of color, especially

facing the sun? Sunburn – probably moved into strong sunlight too fast to adapt. It's ironic how plants from the hottest, sunniest places on earth are still capable of sunburn if they've been in the dark for long and then moved quickly to the sun. Shriveling up/shrinking, or a hard skin surface forming? Probably under watering. Cacti still like water, just much less. The top of a barrel/ball cacti turning into a point and getting tall? Or, new growth is thin and pale? Etiolation: too little light. White fuzzy cotton in the nooks and cracks of the plant? Mealybug attack. Suddenly turned into a heap of dark green jelly when the nights were cold? Perhaps a tender plant has literally frozen. Bright yellow tips of leaves which quickly die off. Perhaps over fertilizing, in essence salt poisoning. Different varieties are prone to different problems, and can exhibit them a bit differently. Some more uncommon and subtle stresses, like water pH issues or soil nutrient deficiencies may be harder to identify.

This is where using the brain-borne mega-library of expertise from members of cacti clubs in person or online is an unmatched resource for help.

### **What do you do with what you learn?**

Dead plants may tell you what was missing or excessive, so now you have choices of action.

### **Change your habits**

Getting into a habit of, say, watering your potted cactus outdoors every Sunday, or watering your in-ground cactus garden once a month – maybe, every time the utility bill comes. This might be the breakthrough to sudden success with your plants.

### **Change the place**

Maybe that cactus is stretching in the north window. Time to move it to the south window. Maybe the cactus is getting a little too wet when you water everything else, so you can change the potting mix to drain better with more lava-rock or perlite. Perhaps it's time to....

### **Give up**

This is legitimate. Sometimes no matter how hard you try, your lifestyle or home is not good for that plant. Or, the hassle to get it done is not worth the return. Living stones, African violets and ferns are not meant for me, for instance, because of poor winter light, traveling in summer, and being gone for more than 3 days, respectively. So I've quit the suffering and quit trying plants which barely survive (which often means barely die) in my care. I'm not giving up summer vacations for ferns, as much as they call me like dancing sirens. In fact, travel led me to embrace cacti. [Not literally, of course.] Along these same lines, I've finally given up on growing most plants that are adapted to acid soils, the wet Himalayas, and the cool-loving coastal succulents. And I'm not sad about it – I've embraced South American cacti and agaves because of their ease and the amazing variety they provide.

### **Concluding the death talk**

It is for their known ease of care that cacti and succulents become a hobby for many folks, especially those who hate fickle, picky, prissy plants that want constant coddling. Cacti and succulents might need less, but they still need. And their needs are different. And any plant is easy in the right place, and any place is easy to grow a plant in if the right one is picked. So go out today, buy a plant and be okay with killing it. Then enjoy it when it surprises you and lives.

# MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel No.: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

How do you grow? Greenhouse \_\_\_ Yard \_\_\_ Window \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_ Favorite genera:

\_\_\_\_\_ Suggestions for a program: \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer to give a program? \_\_\_\_\_ Volunteer for: Officer: \_\_\_\_\_ Co-Chair an Event:

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you: Buy plants locally \_\_\_ Mail order \_\_\_ Raise from seed \_\_\_ Buy at our sale \_\_\_

For current information about the Society, including our email address, go to the Society's website

<http://www.new-mexico.cactus-society.org>

Complete this application and send it to the address below with your check for \$10.00 made out to the CSSNM.

For more information, contact:

**CACTUS and SUCCULENT SOCIETY of NEW MEXICO**  
P.O. Box 21357 Albuquerque, New Mexico 87154-1357

## SOCIETY OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

President  
Vice President  
Recording Secretary  
Treasurer  
Program Chairman  
Webmaster  
Garden Master  
Librarian  
Garden Council Representatives

CSS America Representative  
Spring Show  
Spring Sale  
Botanical Garden Show  
Newsletter Editor

Carl Hime  
Margaret Todd  
Carol Fischer  
Pia Louchios  
Steve Brack  
Ralph Peters  
Scott Jackson  
Judith Bernstein  
CV Porter  
Steve Brack  
Ralph Peters  
Daniel Finley  
Martha Parker  
Margaret Todd  
Ellen Taylor