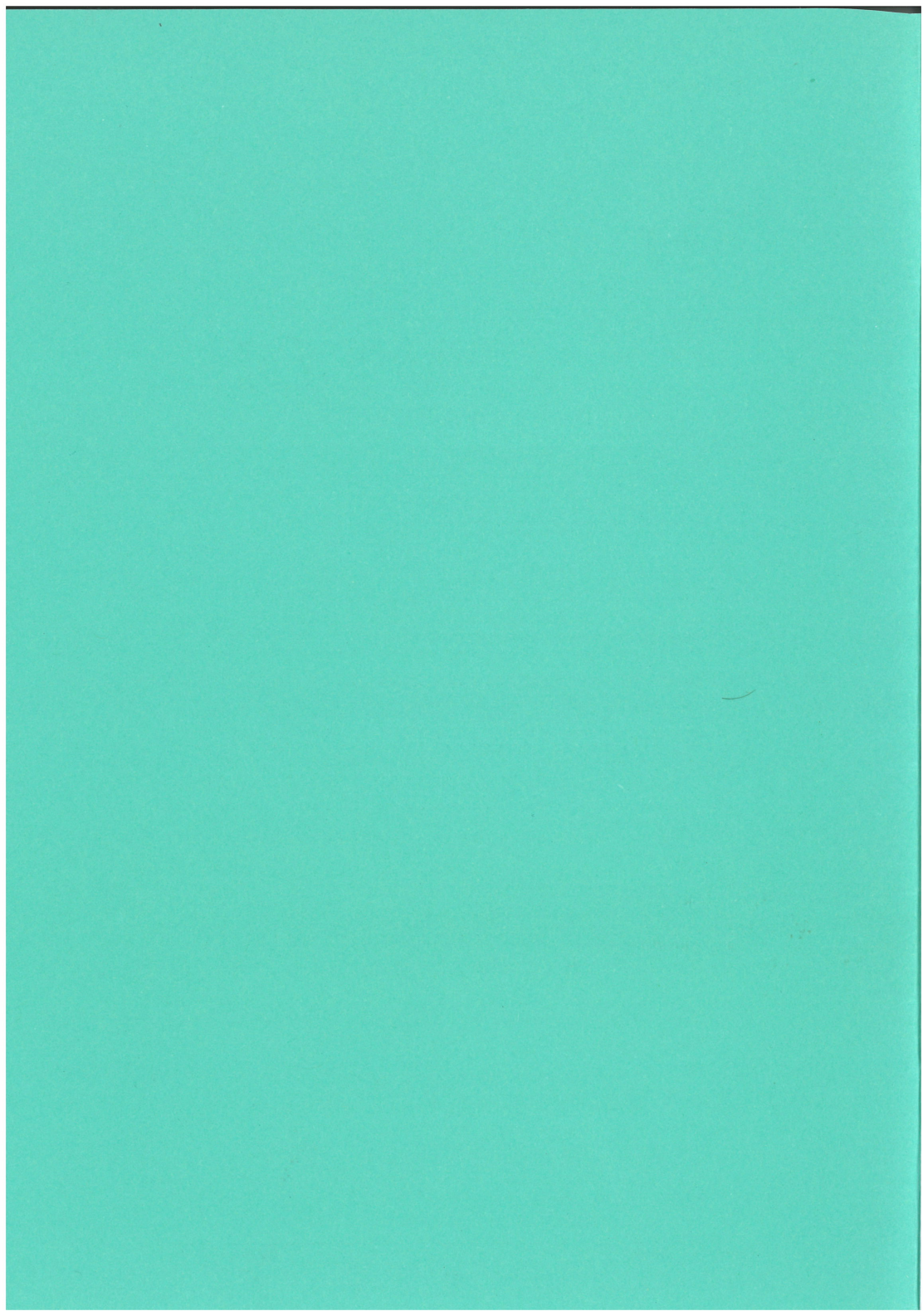




EPIFLORA

Volume 13 No. 3

September 2004





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President's Letter

Dear Fellow Epiphyte growers

The arrival of spring is so welcome especially this year after some very cold winter temperatures, especially during last month. This is the time of year when we are encouraged to start preparing our plants for flowering. Epiphyllum buds are evident now and for us we are beginning to water more frequently and are starting to use liquid fertiliser on the plants. Our hoyas have survived well thanks to a thermostatically controlled heater that has been activated on many nights of the winter. I'm now thinking about re-potting some of the plants and cleaning up others. There is no doubt that it is a busy time of year both for the care of epiphytes but also in the garden.

Between now and the next Epiflora we have an interesting range of programmes – Yvonne and Andrew Brunton will be enthusing us with a slide show of some of their epiphyllums – a time of temptation for those of us who are going on the Taranaki trip as we will be visiting the Brunton's Craigmyle Nursery. Then in October we will learn more about those fascinating Ceropegias – in terms of unusual flowers they do rate very highly. Andrew Flower will be returning in November to talk about Tillandsias – another group of unusual epiphytic plants and ones that I know many of our members grow.

It is still not too late to join those going to Taranaki on the third week-end of November. If you would like to learn more about this trip do let me know – it sounds great.

In the meantime happy growing and preparing for a long flowering season.

Kind regards

Jane Griffith

5th September 2004

The Programme for 2004

Meetings are at Johnsonville Union Church (Dr. Taylor Terrace) and start at 2.00 pm. Library books etc. are available at 1.30 pm.

Those on duty are responsible for preparing the room, assisting with tea and tidying the room at the end of the meeting and bringing a plant or other item for the raffle. If for any reason you are unable to do your allocated duty please arrange for someone else to do it.

September 11th

Epi slide show

On Duty: Phyllis & Bruce Purdie, Mary Hardgrave

October 9th

Ceropegias

On Duty: Virginia Stead, Alison Beeston

November 13th

Tillandsias.

On Duty: Penny Luckens, Marion Austin, Marion Struthers

December 11th

AGM and Christmas Function

News about People

It is with sadness that we report the recent death of **Els**, the wife of **Herman Kortink**. We extend sincere condolences and kind wishes to Herman and his family at this time.

Mid-winter meeting

*As usual this was a splendid occasion as **Alison Beeston** reports*

The June meeting was the society's mid-winter celebration and, after a splendid lunch, we were privileged to have as speaker Bethney McLennan, editor of the gardening pages for the

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Dominion Post. She shared with us her experiences interviewing people and visiting gardens as part of that job. She also shared some special books she had come across. We travelled with her visiting gardens and gardeners throughout New Zealand. Among those mentioned were Peter Beale and Trevor Griffiths, both specialising in old roses, Bea Baldwin whose plants grew because they didn't want to disappoint her, Donal Duthie, a former member of our society, Rob Lucas and John Dawson, Tony Brunton, known both for his acting career and his fern garden in Thorndon and three sisters, Nancy Tichborne, Mary Brown and Helen Leach whose books were available to browse through as was a book on Wisterias by Peter Valde.

Bethney also commented briefly on gardening programmes on TV and the tendency of some to concentrate on the rich-and-famous who buy in their gardens and employ gardeners to look after them. She also touched briefly on the spiritual side of gardening, reminding us that the true gardener is the one who at 90 plants an acorn. We were also reminded of the great work done by staff at the local botanical gardens and at Otari and also touched on was the breeding of plant predators, after a question from the floor about an Australian ladybird whose larvae eat mealy bugs, which had been mentioned in her article published that day. She also mentioned how much she had enjoyed the time she spent at Waikanae looking at and learning about the Griffiths' plants. Roy thanked her for the talk. The competition for an arrangement in a shoe or boot was won by Dianne O'Neill from a good selection of entries.

Care and Culture of Hoyas

*This was the topic set down for the July meeting - but given the cold temperatures that we have been subjected to - it really is not appropriate to do anything (apart from the smallest drop of water - and the occasional heartfelt prayer!) And certainly no-one would have wanted to have any plant of theirs worked on at the meeting. So **Jane Griffith** organised a quiz. On Hoyas. By the time it was over there had been vigorous discussion on all manner of care and cultural issues.*

Then we looked at some slides - including a few taken at the Liddle nursery in Far North Queensland. All in all - a most informative and interesting meeting.

Hatiora

Anne Goble subtitled this talk that she gave at the August meeting of the society "What's in a name?". As she went on to say the confusion has been contributed to by both taxonomists and those who insist on using "common names".

Hatiora are known under various names - *Rhipsalidopsis*, spring cacti in New Zealand, Easter cacti in the Northern Hemisphere, and sometimes chain cacti.

There is much confusion when the question of identification arises. This is hardly surprising when the plants have many common names attached to them in various parts of the world. It doesn't help when the taxonomists decide to rename them.

Dr. Rob Wallace, speaking at the 27th Huntington Symposium of the International Organisation for the Study of Succulent Plants, reported on his DNA studies on the Rhipsalideae. Using Barthlott & Taylor's system of dividing this group into *Rhipsalis*, *Lepismium* and *Hatiora*, Dr. Wallace found that the *Rhipsalis* plants that he tested all fitted into one DNA pattern. Of the *Lepismium* that he tested, he found that there were two separate DNA groups with *Hatiora* in between. DNA studies will be a valuable asset in identifying plants and a valuable tool to find out if a plant is a species or a hybrid.

Myron Kimmach lists about 75 species of *Rhipsalis* and that includes species that were formerly listed as *Hatiora* and *Rhipsalidopsis*. The list is in the species section of the ESA Directory of Hybrids¹ which some of you may have access to. Most taxonomists are trying to lump as many genera as possible into one genus, but Barthlott & Taylor still retain and use the names *Lepismium* and *Hatiora*.

If any of you collect *Rhipsalis*, there are good descriptions of many of them in the Epi-grams of July and October 1997. The Epi-gram of March 1995 contains a wonderful description of most of the common species.

Rhipsalis have been big business in the Netherlands since 1985. If interested in what is available in Europe, look at the very good website www.thoruplund.dk/thor.gb.html. They produce *Schlumbergeras*, *Rhipsalidopsis* and *Campanula*. It is worthwhile looking up the culture sheets for the Thor *Schlumbergeras* which they call November cacti. The culture sheets

¹ Our society library has a copy



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on the *Rhipsalidopsis* are basically the same.

Hatiora is the feminine generic name originally Hariota for Thomas Hariot, a 16th century botanist. It was changed by Britton to *Hatiora* in 1915. If you have not already re-labelled your *Rhipsalidopsis* to *Hatiora*, you should now do so. During this talk, I shall refer to them under both the old names because I find it all very confusing.

What is Hatiora?

Hatiora is a genus of epiphytic cacti which come from South America, mainly from Brazil, and are generally more hardy than *Schlumbergeras*. It is a small genus of interesting perennial, spineless epiphytes with club-shaped short joints or crenate segments. These are rounded or flat, about 1 cm long, one segment developing from another. Each cylindrical stem is swollen at one end.

The flowers vary in size from 5mm to over 2.5 cm for the *Rhipsalidopsis* hybrids. They like a rather light and well drained soil and can rot if kept cold and soaked. They can also die by lack of water, so their soil should never be too dry. When the air is dry, they appreciate regular misting. .

The flat stemmed variety, *Rhipsalidopsis*, carry minute areoles in the notches and an elongated areole on the end from which flowers and later new segments (or branches) emerge. Flowers have little or no tube and consist of about 12 to 18 narrow petals with several shorter sepals at the back in a daisy-like form. Unlike *Schlumbergera*, these flowers open during the day and close again at night.

There are numerous sizes and colours from the miniature "Spring Beauty" with segments and flowers both about 2cm long, to the common *R. gaertneri* with segments about 5cm long and scarlet flowers about 5cm in diameter. In between, are a range of hybrids in all shades of pink, yellow, orange, lavender and cerise. There is a bi-colour called R. "Rainbow" which is cerise and scarlet with a hint of orange.

The trumpet or bell-shaped flowers are small and come from the tips of the segments. Brownish bristles are also carried by the areoles. These bristles are perhaps the easiest means

Horticultural Footwear - some of the competition entries at our June meeting.

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by which to differentiate between the crenate segmented *Schlumbergera* and the *Rhipsalidopsis* when not in bloom. The plants form small bushes. The genus *Pseudozygocactus* is currently considered synonymous.

Rhipsalidopsis take high light levels fairly well, although they are inclined to turn red if the light levels are too high. They tolerate very low light conditions but flower production may not be good under extreme low light. On the other hand plants in very bright conditions will often flower extremely well even though the stem segments look somewhat stressed. If light levels are low, then larger, more tender very green segments will be produced. The plant looks healthier but doesn't flower as well.

Australia has bred some hybrids with the name "Rippeys" which they claim are doubles but actually they have only a few more petals than the older varieties.

Cultivation

Hattiora are propagated easily by cuttings that root wherever they touch the ground. Cultivation by seed is possible but it is usually done by taking cuttings in spring or summer. Twist a couple of segments from a plant, the same as with *Schlumbergera*, and place them in free draining compost in a warm spot.

Cuttings taken in the spring time will grow rapidly throughout summer and a good sized flowering plant should be yours by the following spring. They are so floriferous that even a single rooted joint will produce two or three flowers. They are easy to grow but may shed stem segments for no apparent reason.

Maintenance

It is important to water from January through April. Epiphytes growing in their natural environment have unrestricted roots, which are exposed to every passing shower and quickly dry.

In containers, the roots are forced into a ball which may limit the plants ability to absorb water or cause them to rot, depending on the type of growing mix. A free-draining mix is absolutely essential and given this copious amounts of water will benefit them during hot weather conditions. If plants have dried out completely immerse them in a bucket of water until bubbles stop rising.

After flowering

The main flowering time is late October to early December but the mad weather patterns have caused ours to flower much earlier than this. Every flower will produce a seed pod so, unless

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you wish to propagate, it is best to twist these capsules off as flowering finishes to allow the plant to maximise growth.

When flowering is finished you can repot your plants providing they are okay but do not overpot. New mix helps plants to recover after abundant flowering. They can even be carefully repotted while in bud. *Rhipsalidopsis* should not be potted up too soon or too much. They like crowded roots. If too wet, they will drop segments. If they shrivel you have root problems. When potting them crowd them into 8 cm pots.

Moving plants up to a larger pot before they are ready to be moved is a big mistake. If they are doing well don't hurry to move them up to the next size pot. If you have done so in mid-summer and they are not looking too healthy put them back into a smaller pot immediately. Start a lot of cuttings of plants that you really like because very often your main plant will eventually go bad. It isn't something you have done wrong, "it is the nature of the beast." *Rhipsalidopsis* give such beautiful blooms but they can be fairly frustrating.

The usual arrangement for hanging baskets is to space three cuttings equally around the edge of a pot. A better arrangement for a very full looking plant is to place three cuttings side by side in the middle of the pot.

They are half hardy to frost tender and require temperatures over 5 degrees Centigrade. They can be brought into the house when the weather gets cold. Just keep them damp in summer allowing them to become almost dry between waterings. Water only & little in winter.

There can be a risk of root loss during and shortly after the flowering period simply because the heavy flower load puts enormous stress on the plant. Water loss is greatly increased because of the large petal surface area, which is not so well protected against water loss as the stems.

If root problems do occur the water loss from the flowers can be so great that the plant can be lost unless speedy remedial action is taken. The best solution is to remove all the flowers and break up the plant to root the segments as new cuttings. Sometimes it is possible to reroot the whole plant by cutting off the roots and cutting back the main stem until healthy unaffected tissue shows.

Dip the cut surfaces in rooting hormone powder to prevent further rotting and place the "whole plant cutting" in standard cutting compost. Keep it moist and spray it from overhead frequently with water until rooting occurs.

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Rooting of a mature plant often takes a long time though and usually better plants are obtained by breaking off younger segments and rooting these rather than trying to save the old plant. If the plants are repotted when still in bud the fresh compost encourages new roots and the problem is greatly reduced.

If you have only a few cuttings put them on a piece of wet cotton in the bottom of a plastic margarine container. One segment is sufficient. Place the covered carton on a window sill or in a well-lit place. The joints will quickly put out roots.

Potting mix

Use an open mix similar to that used for growing epiphyllums. The addition of pumice or perlite is recommended by some growers whilst others add granulated charcoal to their standard epiphyllum mix. Charcoal discourages harmful micro-organisms and root mealybugs. It is important that the soil mix remains moist. It must not be allowed to dry out or to become too soggy.

Fungal attack

Fungus Glomerella cingulata

The first signs of infection are small brown spots which usually appear on the underside of the cladode or flat segment of a plant. The brown spots spread rapidly to form a scarred appearance. If conditions continue to be humid masses of pink spores are formed. These spores can be wind carried or water splashed to infect other segments on plants nearby. If left unchecked the plant becomes debilitated and weak then begins to shed and drop the infected segments. If the contamination continues, the plant will soon reduce to a main stem stump which will also eventually die.

Fungus Glomerella cingulata can live for a very long time on infected material so removal and disposal of the fallen segments is imperative. Also it is important to remove any weeds that may help to reintroduce the fungus.

Keep a clean house environment and use an anti-fungal product such as Bravo. Systemic fungicides and insecticides are applied to render plant tissues toxic to fungi or insects. Their effects are longer lasting than those of contact products.

Some chemicals can and are injurious to humans and care must be taken at all times. It is particularly important to take safety precautions when using and measuring chemicals or concentrates. Follow label instructions and measure accurately. Wear protective clothing and do not inhale the product. Don't spray on a windy day and don't eat while using or handling

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any products. Wash thoroughly after depositing chemicals in a safe place. Always use up completely any made up product.

Sexual reproduction

Most spring cacti are self-sterile. Though some are self-fertile most only set seed with pollen from a different cultivar. It has been found that flowers of self-sterile cultivars stay open longer than those of the self-fertile cultivars. This can be for as long as eleven days.

The structure of the flowers is the likely reason for the difference. In "Evita" for instance, the stigma lobes are in contact with the anthers as soon as the flowers open, so in the self-fertile variant, this means that pollination can take place as soon as the pollen is ripe. The flowers will then soon wilt and wither.

On the other hand the stigma lobes of "Purple Pride" are some way from the anthers when the flower first opens. They bend back later becoming closer or eventually making contact. So self-pollination takes place several days after the flowers open in this variant. By then the flowers wouldn't last more than another eight days whether or not pollination has taken place.

It seems that the flowers of spring cacti, following pollination and seed set, degenerate faster than if they had not been pollinated. Plants use valuable resources not just in producing flowers but also in maintaining them once they are fully formed. It therefore makes sense for them not to keep their flowers longer than necessary once seed is set. In some other plants the reaction (which may include dropping their petals) takes place fairly quickly. In the case of spring cacti, it takes rather longer, for which we should all be thankful.

Do you keep track of when your plants bloom? Barthlott and friends in Germany have done so and I find the comparison with ours quite amazing. The *Hatiora* listed below are some of the more common ones available and I shall give the German flowering times where available.

Hatiora rosea

This species is distributed in Brazil from the state of Rio de Janeiro southwards to Rio Grande do Sul. It is a typical element of the Atlantic *Araucaria* cloud-forests. It seems to be rare in its natural habitat. In recent times the plants have always been found growing on vertical tree trunks where the roots were covered by a thin moss layer. They grow in very shady locations only. The cool climate of the area is characterised by a high humidity due to frequent rain and fog.

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Mean temperatures in summer are around 19.8 degrees centigrade; in winter around 9.5 degrees centigrade, with average extremes going to 25 degrees and 5.7. They may even fall below zero, except during the summer months of January and February. But in the depths of the few remaining forests (of which 99% have been destroyed) the cool climate is more balanced without extremes, and here lives *Hatiora rosea*. It has a rather shrubby habit, often slightly pendent. The smaller stem segments are dark green or slightly reddish with few bristly hairs. The rose pink flowers appear from upper joints in late spring to 4cm wide.

R. Rosea did wonderfully for us in the conservatory in Alicetown and bloomed for several months at a time. It has barely survived in the rugged outdoors which is all we have to offer in Waikanae. We no longer have indoor facilities for our plants. The German study gives a likely blooming period of one month during March.

Hatiora gaertneri

This has formerly been called both *Schlumbergera* and *Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*, the familiar spring cactus, a native of Brazil. It has more or less oval stem segments and small areoles with few bristly hairs. The 4-5cm long flowers are bright scarlet and grow from the tips of the segments. The *H. gaertneri* hybrids are much more hardy than the hybrids that favour *H. Rosea*. Both these were formerly called *Rhipsalidopsis*.

Hatiora salicornioides

This is commonly called “drunkard's dream” because of the small bottle-shaped segments. It is a forest plant. The bottle-shaped joints of this epiphyte form hanging stems more than 16cm long. Its natural habitat is also Brazil.

In summer the small yellowish orange centimetre long flowers are borne at the end of the stems. It requires some humidity and will not tolerate intense heat or frost. It is floriferous and is easily grown from cuttings or from seed. The German flowering period is given as three months, from January to March.

Hatiora salicornioides forma cylindrica

This has upright fairly thick stems and rather sparse growth. It is particularly attractive presented as a bonsai desert tree in a bonsai pot with sand as a top dressing. Presentation is all important. The German flowering period is given as February, March and April.

Hatiora bambusoides

The main difference from *H. salicornioides* (Drunkard's Dream) is the shape of the joints which are club-shaped. It has orange flowers.

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Hatiora epiphylloides

This is the *Pseudozygocactus epiphylloides*. It has segments arranged similarly to *Rhipsalidopsis*, with tiny areoles on the margins of the flat fleshy joints. Small yellowish flowers, about 1 cm long, appear from the uppermost joints. The variety *H. bradei* differs in the shape of the segments, which are flat, shorter, narrow at the base and widening upwards to form almost a slender triangular joint. This is ideally grown as a grafted plant on *Selenicereus*. The month of April is the flowering period in Germany.

Hatiora herminiae

Hatiora herminiae has cylindrical segments in whorls, each segment hardly exceeding 1 cm in length. The deeply spreading petals of the 2cm wide flowers are deep pink. This is a comparatively new discovery and it is still quite rare in cultivation but the Germans give it a three month blooming period, January through to March.

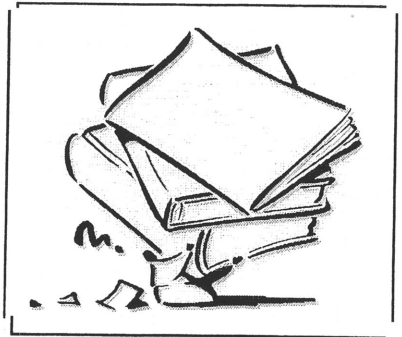
Most of the newer *Rhipsalidopsis* hybrids have a very upright growth which is much more popular with the commercial growers. If you ever go to the USA, I understand that Rainbow Gardens in the month of May is a must to see.

Further Reading

Our Society receives journals from a number of other societies with similar interests. These journals are all available from our library. In the last couple of months a number of interesting items have been published. Here are some snippets that you might find interesting. (Of course you really should go and read the articles for yourself!)

You think you have problems with snails.... in the August edition of **Epi News** (published by the SDES) was a comment about the problems they were having with epi's at the Wild Animal Park - the local mule deer like to eat them!

As we reach the time when we start to apply fertiliser - you could do worse than read the article by J Carr in volume 14 no 16 of **EpiGram** (published by the Epiphytic Cacti and Hoya Society of Australia) which sets out very clearly the elements of a well-balanced fertiliser programme (and the principles behind it).



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Have you got a plant of *Nopalxochia phyllanthoides* - and do you think it is the same as "Deutsche Kaiserin"? In the July issue of **Epi-Gram** (South Bay Epiphyllum Society this time) Dick Kohlschreiber traces some of the ancestry of these plants - and no - they are not the same!

And later in the same newsletter Dick discusses sympathetically some of the points made by Grant Bayley in an article published in **Epiflora** in December 2003. While Dick does have some reservations he concludes " I know the taxonomist will have all kinds of objections to this grouping but I think it's worth considering"

Now is the time

What you should be doing right now depends not a little on exactly where you live. Here are some suggestions for the Wellington growers. If you live in Albany or Ashburton you may need to adjust things a little. Although spring is supposed to be just about here - we have been subjected to a long run of cold nights - with temperatures going down to zero at times however some days have been quite warm - so you can find plants getting dehydrated.

Epicacti - late pruning is possible - but don't cut off too many buds. Start watering again (in the mornings) and fertilise lightly

Hoya Picta

This hoya does not flower as readily as , say, *H. Carnosa* - but it is not a shy bloomer if given plenty of light. Keep it well watered and fertilised and it will reward you as one of your nicest hoyas.

Hoya Cumingiana

This hoya comes from the Philippines.. It is not a vine - rather it has a bushy type of growth. Hang this one high up to get a full view of the flowers when it blooms.

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Hoyas - *as the days warm up water a little - particularly if your plants are protected from the night-time temperatures. Soon you may start taking cuttings (particularly if you have a heated pad to put the pots of cuttings on). Start checking for mealy bugs and other pests (if you ever stopped)*

Schlumbergeras - *a good time to repot using a slow-release fertiliser in the mix. Water very carefully when dry.*

Rhipsalis - *water regularly as rhipsalis come into flower. A little fertiliser will assist the plants.*

Aporophyllums - *buds should be just appearing. Start watering a little and provide a little fertiliser. Increase the amount of water you give as days and nights get warmer.*

Ceropegias - *not a lot to do yet, but you should probably begin watering your plants soon if not now. When it gets warmer you can start to take cuttings.*

Odd Cuttings and Seeds

Natural remedies

Here are a couple more ideas that may appeal:

First a comment from an orchid site “Cinnamon is a natural fungicide. Most people use cinnamon when repotting to prevent rot in roots which are broken or cut. To use it - take regular baking cinnamon and lightly dust it over the roots which have been wetted. If you don’t wet the cut or injured root first - then the cinnamon won’t stick. Some people prefer to use peroxide or a little alcohol rather than water. The imperative word here is “dust” as too much cinnamon can inhibit root growth. Using cinnamon on unaffected roots is probably not a good idea.”

And .. “Listerine is a readily available home remedy which may be used on orchids. The original (gold coloured) Listerine has anti-fungal, and probably anti-bacterial qualities. The high alcohol content makes it also effective against bugs. Since it is

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fairly weak, it is largely used by the growers on this site as a preventative, particularly when potting, or as something to use in a pinch until you can get something better. It is used full strength as a spray on, and should not be used for prolonged periods because the alcohol may have drying effects on your plants. Using it for 2 - 3 days consecutively is not a problem.

Why Imidacloprid works...

Imidacloprid is particularly interesting as it is neither an organophosphate nor a carbamate and has a slightly different mechanism of action. It is a chloro-nicotinyl insecticide which acts on nicotinerigic neural pathways. These pathways are more common in insects than in warm blooded animals (exotherms), making it more toxic to insects than to mammals² and birds. As blockage of the nicotinerigic pathways results in a build up of acetylcholine, the end result of both this and more traditional organophosphates and carbamates is similar³

Composting Epi stems

OK - the smart answer is you can't. If you just put your epi prunings in the compost bin they will stay unrotted for ever! The answer for some of us is to throw them in a sack and take them to the greenwaste dump. For those who do not have that option - a suggestion made at the epi work-shop earlier this year may be of interest. "Put the prunings in a black plastic bag and leave it in the sun". Yes it does work - but it does take a while.

² It is actually used in "Advantage" the flea and tick remedy for pets.

³ For further reading - see <http://ethnobotany.yage.net/pestcon.html>

Things are not what they were

Bone meal was one of the fertilisers our parents used - it was good for them - and it is still just as good? - well may be not. This comment appeared in a discussion group recently "Modern bone meal sold in nurseries is basically useless. Bone meal was originally uncleaned bones with blood, gristle, marrow, etc. and was a wonderful fertiliser. Today's bone meal is composed of nothing but completely sterilised bones ground up and bagged. Any general purpose fertiliser with trace elements is far superior." Still - organic gardeners love it, but I don't think you get much bang for your buck. Fertiliser is a lot cheaper for the same amount of nutrient. I doubt if it does much harm though.

The ESA website is changing names...

For reasons we won't go into the ESA is changing its web name. The old address will not work and the new site is not yet available but will be available shortly. For those wanting to pay the ESA money though - this can still be done through the "Kagi" secure payment website. Full details are in the latest edition of the "**Bulletin**"

Back numbers of "Epiflora"

The first edition of *Epiflora* appeared in March 1992. We have limited stocks of backnumbers for most issues from Volume 2 (March 1993) onwards. Ask the editor for details.

Future Publication Dates..

EPIFLORA is published quarterly by the Wellington Epiphyllum and Hoya Society.

Comments and contributions are most welcome. The society aims to encourage discussion and debate; opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the society. It is the policy of the society to publish corrections of fact but not to comment on matters of opinion expressed in other publications. All material in Epiflora may be reprinted by non-profit organisations provided that proper credit is given to WEHS, Epiflora and the author.

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