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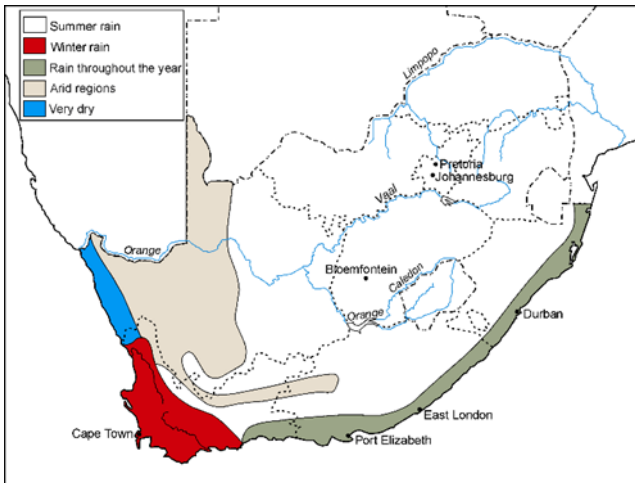


Dudleya brittonii

Cover picture: *Dudleya brittonii*. This, the almost pure white form is the more popular of the two available forms. The other form has bright green leaves. It is a Californian plant. *Dudleyas* were originally considered to belong to the *Echeveria* genus. They can grow to a height of two feet but that will take many years. They bear bright yellow flowers borne on reddish stems. The old dead leaves are persistent and should be left on the plant for as long as possible to mimic nature. Some water in winter is advisable.

When to water mesembs:

In the last newsletter I talked a lot about mesembs and the show. I mentioned that I had many different growing periods to cater for with the mesembs I grow. This is not something I have devised for myself but rather it is designed to coincide with the periods when water is available to the plants in habitat. Though mesembs can be found in many areas in south Africa and Namibia the greater majority of them are to be found on the western and southern areas of these lands.



This map shows where rain falls at different times and where it is very dry. For Namibia just visualise the blue area continuing parallel with the coast and for about the same distance inland all the way through the country and the rest will be beige, so it is a very dry country. All the more specialised mesembs that

can survive serious drought grow within the red, blue and beige areas. The white area of South Africa is not blessed with considerable rain, but it can receive more than the coloured areas especially the further east you travel.

The map on the next page (*produced by Heidi Hartmann*) shows when rain, or other moisture, can be expected. However, rainfall is expected over a limited timespan unlike how we experience rain through all four seasons. When reading this map please remember that the seasons are reversed from when we experience them. March and November on the map equate to September and May for us thus autumn and spring but over a very limited timespan. February is August for us. Summer over there is December, January and February. In my research which has covered many sites on the internet as well as reading books, talking to experienced growers in this country and generally gleaning what information I can, I have come to realise that these plants will respond to trying to grow them when they would grow in habitat even if they have been grown from seed. They have an inborn growing schedule in their genes and they will not respond to us trying to



re-educate them. Another thing we need to remember is that they do receive water by other means than rain. Fog is the main contributor but dew is also significant. There are hidden sources we know little about but there will certainly be some underground sources at times the same as happens in this country. One thing I have

learnt is that mesembs in pots in our greenhouses do need occasional water outside their prescribed growing times as the roots in pots are exposed to weather, sun especially, in ways that do not affect roots in the ground but I will talk more about that as necessary.

Most people have heard of and even tried growing Lithops and Conophytum so I will just explain a little to help people who would like to grow them. Lithops have a very definite growing period and I prescribe a regime of watering from June to mid October. This definitely coincides with their growing pattern in habitat. A heavy spraying in late May will help them wake up. In habitat they receive plenty of sun in the resting period which helps with the drying up of the leaves from last year's growth whereas our winters are dark and dank so there are a few species that are very slow to lose those leaves in our preferred growing position, be it greenhouse, conservatory or windowsill. I would advise keeping Lithops just above freezing in the coldest of weather. There are plenty of species that experience frost overnight but the sun soon dispels the cold next morning, something we don't necessarily get regularly. If you have any which show a reluctance to shed their leaves don't water for a further month. Lithops have long roots and don't mind deepish pots but the soil you use must be very open by adding plenty of grit, perlite or cat litter (or a combination of them) I use a growing medium that is only 40% organic and 60% mineral. Conophytums are different. They grow from mid July or even into August through to the end of March or just into April. Thus they enjoy water in winter. Don't soak them thoroughly in December to February but give them a good sprinkling on sunny days when the greenhouse temperature rises nicely even on a cold outdoors day. They are shallow rooted so they don't need deep pots. Soil will be very similar to that for Lithops; in fact that is generally true across the spectrum of mesembs generally. The summer rest must be completely dry when many form sheaths over the leaves. Different species produce flowers at different times and a good representative collection can produce flowers continually through the whole growing season.

Now let's move on to lesser known mesembs. I am going to start with the plants that will grow during the "cactus season", that is March through to autumn. Many actually still need water even after you have stopped watering your cacti. I will mention a few of the easier to grow species



which you could grow from seed or find available at nurseries.

1 *Bergeranthus* grows from April to December. They can reach a reasonable size but it takes many years. They are reasonably easy to flower and to grow and can cope with low winter temperatures. I would advise avoiding below freezing for long periods.



2 Next I recommend *Faucaria*. This is another April to December grower which has several very attractive forms. Flowers are produced in late summer and autumn which are bright yellow in colour except for *F. candida* which has white flowers. The leaves have teeth along the edges and quite often have caruncles (warty protuberances) on the leaf surfaces which are very attractive. *Orthopterum* is very similar.



3 By now you will have seen my article about *Glottiphyllum* and I do recommend it as a suitable genus for trying as you learn how to grow mesembs. It is an April to November grower with a little less water in July and August being recommended. The flowers are mainly a bright glossy yellow and can be very large. Many forms clump but some are more upright in stature.



4 *Hereroa* are charming little plants that can flower easily. Their preferred growing period is March to October. They don't get large and are ideal for a beginner to try. They often form small clumps though some can form small bushes up to 8" high. Flowers open later in the day and plants can be expected to flower from June to August. Leaves are often finger shaped or occasionally more triangular.



5 *Nananthus* are March to October growers and form small clumps of Aloe like bodies. Habitat is from summer rainfall areas of South Africa. Many have interesting leaves which can be marked with dots or rougher caruncles. Flowers, which can occur throughout the summer months, are yellow to orange mainly with the occasional white variety. Keep above freezing in winter if possible. Flowers open around midday and close at dusk.



6 Another similar genus is *Rabeia* where the plants form small aloe-like clumps. Again the leaves, which are triangular in cross section, are marked with white or dark green dots. They come from similar habitats as the previous genus. They are spring and summer flowerers with the same midday to dusk flowering habit as *Nananthus*. Blooms are mainly yellow to orange.



7 *Rhinephyllum* is represented by the last two pictures on this page. It is a low growing, clumping genus that is easy to flower. Some have tuberous rootstocks as well. They do not exceed 4" in height. Flowers, yellow to white open from



dinnertime to late afternoon according to the species. Watering is advisable from April to November.



8 The next offering is Rhombophyllum. Treat it exactly the same as Rhinephyllum for watering and growing. They form small densely branched clumps bearing yellow flowers that can be tinged red on the reverse of the petals. Flowering is spring and early summer and the flower remains are persistent



9 Another easy plant to grow is Stomatium. The leaves on this genus are often edged with many soft teeth. Watering is March to December but it will accept moisture occasionally in winter. It is found growing over large areas of South Africa. Flowers, white and yellow are borne in early spring to early summer, opening from early afternoon until midnight. They are easy to grow from cuttings and benefit from regular renewal.



10 Tanquana is the next offering. The growing season is from late April to November. Watering, however, should be very sparing throughout the year as leaves will split readily if given too much water. The first watering is very gentle to wake the plant up and it probably only gets two full waterings a year with sprinkles from overhead in between. It will colour nicely in the sun. Flowering is autumn and they are highly perfumed. There are only three species.



11 Titanopsis are very attractive plants with warty, spoon shaped leaves. They spend much of the year in growth and will accept water from April to January, obviously in lesser amounts during autumn but dry in winter. Flowers are very distinctive. Small clumps of clustered rosettes are formed slowly. Reduce watering slightly during the height of summer when they will rest a little. Some flower in winter others in late spring according to their habitat.

These are a few to try as a starter. Others, less easy to find to buy include the following genera:

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| Chasmatophyllum – April to November | Cylindrophyllum – March to October |
| Ebracteola – April to October | Malephora – May to October |
| Mestoklema – April to December | Psammophora – may to October (not easy) |
| Schlechteranthus – May to October | Stoeberia - May to October |

I have left two genera till last, namely Delosperma and Lampranthus. Both are very easy to grow and flower readily with many different coloured flowers. Both genera are capable of growing into shrublets but can be pruned and bonsaied to keep them in check. Of the two Delosperma provides the more satisfying plants to grow and there are 163 species to choose from. Lampranthus has 227 species.

The other group I will talk about in this issue covers those plants that require water all year long. It is not a big group and most genera are well known. However, care must be taken in winter because our damp and cold weather is not to the liking of most mesembs. They glory in whatever poor winter sunshine can be found and they should be kept in the sunniest spots possible.



1 Carruanthus are easy plants to grow and will form quite large clusters in time. Most species have largish, triangular in form, leaves that have many soft teeth along their edges. Flowers, usually yellow, are formed on long stems. Only two



species are accepted in literature, *C. peersii* and *C. ringens*, the former flowering from spring to early summer and the latter in late winter. You will also meet the name *C. caninus*. Leaves are highly succulent. The plants rarely exceed 4" in height and flower stalks can also reach 4" in length.



2 The next offering, *Jensenobotrya*, is rarely seen in collections but John Gregory has grown and sold it at meetings. It becomes untidy and needs pruning occasionally. Growing on the Namibian coast it is used to fogs and cold saline conditions caused by the cold sea current. It enjoys being misted regularly. Flowers are white.



3. *Marlothistella* is another monotypic genus. Leaf form is variable from short and stoutish to long and limp. In time it forms a tuberous root that can be lifted above soil level making it a caudiciform plant. It does not enjoy being left dry for too long. Flowering is in winter and flowers open early and stay open all day.



4. *Machairophyllum* range from robust to dwarf plants with either a compact or branching habit. They inhabit the Little Karoo. Flowering is nocturnal in the main though some will open in the late afternoon to catch the early night time pollinators. Flowers are various shades of yellow to orange and have long stems. They are not hard to grow. However it is hard to find material of the ten species to grow.



5. This picture shows a plant of *Neohenricia* that is little more than a two year old plant. The leaf ends are strongly marked, warty like coral or with tiny raised spikes. It is a compact creeping succulent that will root down at leaf nodes allowing it to form a creeping mat. Two species exist and they are worth growing. Tiny cream flowers have a strong lemony scent and are nocturnal occurring over a long period during the summer.



6. *Oscularia* is not a favourite among growers as it can form a shrub but it is very easy to grow and propagate. It has many small flowers, white to pink, which are diurnal and open for the whole day. When flower buds form it can be a thirsty plant but be careful in winter. It will experience cold nights in habitat winters. Plant stems can be colourful with both red and brown ones contrasting with the blue green leaves.



Various *Ruschia* sp

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Ruschia is a very large genus of mainly shrubby plants which I find interesting. Like all the year round growers they are easy to grow from seed and to propagate from cuttings. They can be found growing in most of the southern half of South Africa. Flowers are mainly pink to purple with occasional species being white. Flowering can be at any time of the year according to conditions but the peak periods are spring and autumn. In habitat rainfall is highly variable according to where they grow but as the majority grow in drier south western regions they experience only 4-6" of rain whereas those in the wettest areas can receive eight times that amount.

I have left out two genera, Mossia and Scopelogenia as they are not often found for sale. Hopefully this article will be useful to those wishing to try something different. In the next article I will talk about some of the more demanding genera which have different growing schedules.

By Peter Bint

Repotting my plants *by Chris Leather*

Many of my plants have been stuck in the same pot for longer than they should have. So last year I decided to start a repotting campaign. The intention was to repot everything in the greenhouse into a standard mix. I did most of the Rebutias and about a third of the Gymnocalyciums. I made a start, but for one thing or another it didn't get finished, partly because I couldn't get my favourite granite grit.

This year I have in stock more pink granite grit than I can possibly use and I've decided to set myself a few targets. Rather than going mad and trying to do everything all at once I have decided to do one black tray per weekend. My aim is to have finished the left-hand side of the greenhouse by the Easter weekend.

I've brought the plants in on the Saturday morning and depotted them and then repotted them into dry compost on the Sunday morning. So far it is working quite well. The amounts of plants aren't over-facing and I am able to do other things for the rest of the weekend. Bringing everything indoors allows me to spend time listing them on a "stock check" sheet and this is then checked against the computer list. Hopefully any errors in listing will come to light and I'll know at the end of the campaign exactly what is in the green house.

I've already done the Notocactus and Mammillaria trays and am currently looking at the Echinocereus tray and the trays with all the Astrophytums and the Ariocarpus in them. I suppose I've been a bit concerned what exactly I'll find under the soil. I know last year when I unpotted the Gymnocalyciums some of them had very poor roots. Most did recover, but several were too far gone. My old mix was 50:50 J12 and grit and by far these have been the nicest to unpot. The soil has simply fallen away from the roots and with a good shake and rubbing with the fingers nearly all of it has fallen into the rubbish bag.

By far the worst has been where a plant is in what appears to be in a rock-hard ball of peat. The roots seem to be completely entombed and either the whole thing remains solid and unbreakable, or the root ball and soil breaks off leaving very little root behind. I know in previous attempts to wash the peat off it can just be as bad then too. Several plants (thankfully not many) have clearly been sulking and it hasn't been a surprise to find they have, in most cases, lost their roots and/or have a serious mealy bug infestation below ground. Overall most plants seem to be fairly pest free.

The other point that has been highlighted to me is if a plant is in a mixture of two composts, for instance where a peat ball has been plonked in a pot and filled with J12 and cat litter, very often the roots haven't grown into the J12/cat litter mix. Obviously they are then not getting as much water as their neighbours, and also if they are being watered with a systemic insecticide the liquid probably isn't getting right into the middle of the root ball (which is where the mealies will be hiding.....).

The roots I have found seem to be either up near the top of the pot, so may not be getting as much water as they should (i.e. they have been above the "water table") or they have been wrapped many times around in a square at the bottom of the pot and obviously getting more than their fair share of water. I don't have many tap-rooted plants, but there was one plant that was in a 6cm pot and the tap root was nearly filling it – there was barely any soil in the pot at all. The amount of soil compaction has also surprised me. Some pots have been only half full of soil when I've tipped them out – the 2¾" pots have had only about 1½" of soil in the bottom.

Now plants are grouped by genera and I am considering putting the same sized pots in the same black tray. I am thinking I may be able to control the watering better and probably display the plants in a more orderly fashion. Hopefully by repotting straight away everything that comes in to the collection and having everything (eventually) in the same compost mix I should be able to keep things growing properly and maybe, just maybe, relatively pest free. I may have this wrong but my understanding of my mix will be that when water is added the cat litter will become wet first and help with capillary action to moisten the compost around it, allowing more of it to become damp than perhaps previously was the case. Once the excess water has been removed from under the pots and they start to dry out then the cat litter will soak up any excess wetness and remain wet until every thing else is dry in the pot, thus acting as a slow release water store.

If anyone wants to help repotting my Opuntias please let me know!

