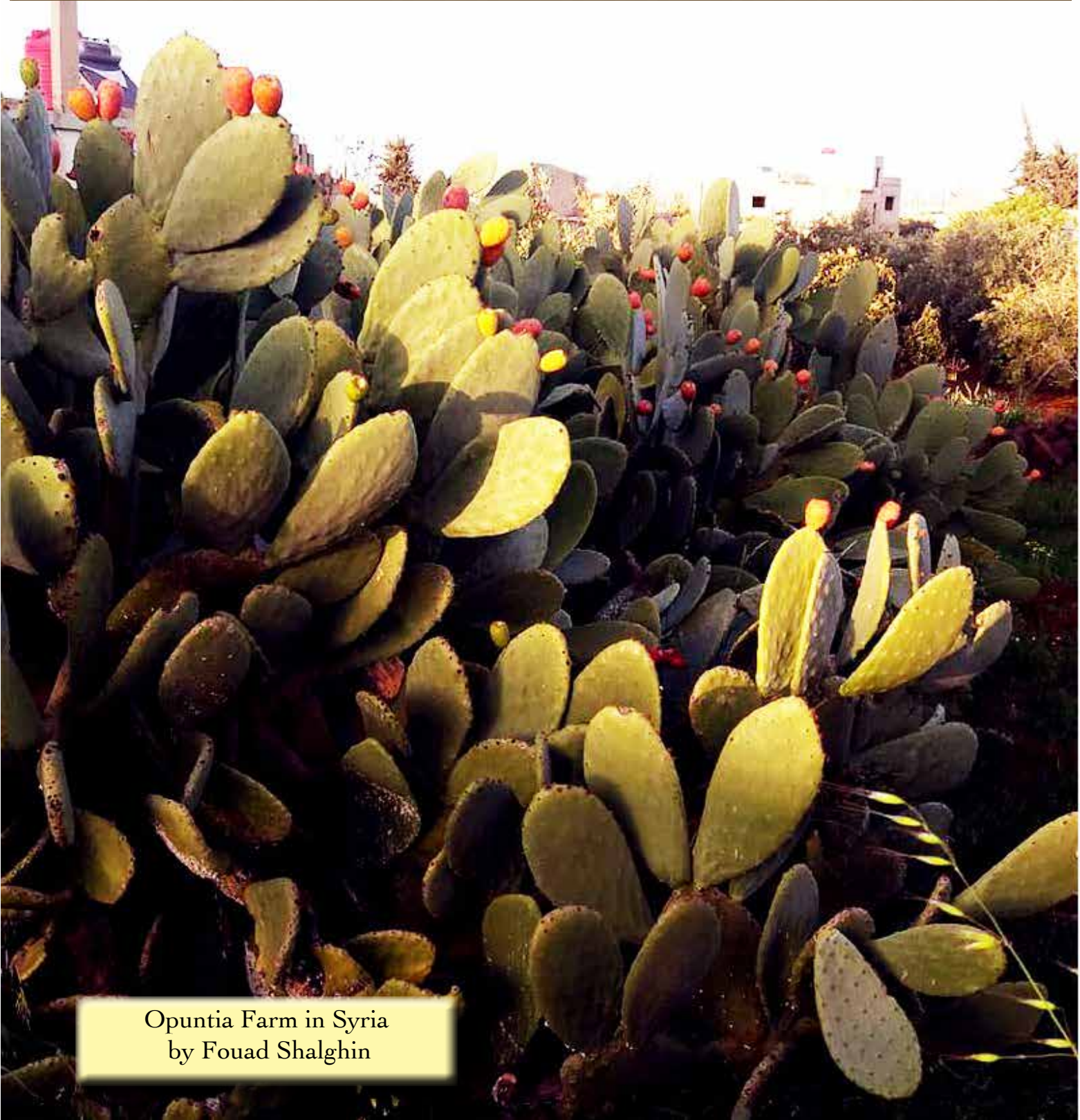


VOL. 57  
No. 3

MAY-JUNE 2020

# Kaktos Komments

*a bimonthly publication of the Houston Cactus and Succulent Society  
to promote the study of cacti and other succulents*



Opuntia Farm in Syria  
by Fouad Shalghin

**From the editor**

Karla Halpaap-Wood

I want to thank everybody who contributed to this issue of the KK, especially Chaden Yafi for her interesting article. My big thanks goes also to Irwin Lightstone from NTCSS for introducing me to Zoom meetings and being very helpful with practical advice.

**MEMBERSHIP****KATHY FEWOX & JULY OLSON**

Due to coronavirus social distancing, both the March and April meetings at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center had to be cancelled. So was everything fun we had planned for this part of the year. Big Bend field trip, open gardens, Spring Sale, potting party — all gone with the pandemic. However, as disappointed as we all were, it had to be done. Nobody wants to become ill, or cause someone else to get sick.

On the bright side, the April membership meeting was held via Zoom. Twelve members took part. We did not have an official program but three plants of the month were presented, one from March when the meeting was cancelled and the two plants from April. Presentations were very nice and pictures and plants could be seen clearly.

Sadly, two members of the club recently lost loved ones. David Van Langen's father, Burk, passed away on April 28, only a few months after David's mother's death. After an eight-year-long illness, starting with cancer and most recently vascular dementia, Liliana Cracraft's mother Maria Angelica Treviño (Keka) passed away on March 2. Our thoughts and prayers are with David and Liliana.

Please send news of HCSS members or their families to [kathyfewox@gmail.com](mailto:kathyfewox@gmail.com) or [Saint.juniper@gmail.com](mailto:Saint.juniper@gmail.com)

**Calendar:**

<b>May 13, 2020</b>	HCSS board meeting via Zoom
<b>May 27, 2020</b>	7:30 pm Membership Meeting (probably via Zoom)
<b>June 24, 2020</b>	7:30 pm Membership Meeting at Metropolitan Multi-Service Center or Zoom
<b>July 1, 2020</b>	Deadline for submitting articles for the KK.

## President's message

Hello, intrepid cactophiles,

Obviously things aren't normal right now. I hope you and yours are safe and virus-free. These times are trying for all of us.

Out of this, we have had some positive developments. We had our first zoom meeting, which was very enjoyable. Not only did we get to have the cactus and succulent of the month, but we got to be in contact with other members who participated. It was great to see those smiling faces. Special thanks to Karla for taking on the setting up of this undertaking, and to Dave for being available to introduce the cacti and succulents. In addition to the fact that we got to have a zoom meeting, this is also a new tool for us to use in creative ways. I can especially see it as a way to cut down on travel time for board meetings. In addition, we have communicated with other clubs who are interested in sharing visits to member greenhouses and other events, which brings us closer to members across the state. Thanks, also, to Liliana and Wally for input about sharing programs provided by CSSA.

We will let you know very soon about our next meeting and our scheduled field trip to Tom Cardinal's. Bear with me as I hope to cancel as few events as possible while keeping us safe.

I know opinions are all over the map about precautions such as masks and social distancing, and about reopening. I must admit that as a person who has worked in health care for over 40 years, I find myself wanting to be cautious. I have worked weaning people from vents, coming out of comas, and recovering from devastating health care diagnoses. While I respect everyone's rights, I urge you to all stay safe and use common sense. We need to get this right the first time! Unfortunately I already have friends who have lost family members to this virus. I don't want to mourn the loss of any of our members.

That said, I'll get off my soap box and say that I miss the camaraderie of our meetings. Save your cuttings and offshoots so that we can have some blockbuster plant exchanges. Take pictures and share them on our facebook page. Don't forget to sign up for the cactus and succulent of the month, and to save your interesting show and tell plants. This WILL end at some point.

Oh, one last healthcare item. When you wear your masks, please be sure your nose is covered as well as your mouth. Your mouth probably protects others more than yourself as this covers your cough, but the nose probably protects you the most because it cuts down on inhalation of droplets which can infect you. I've been going a little crazy seeing people wearing their masks wrong, but I've restrained myself from giving mask-wearing lessons. Just a little personal issue.

Take care, and see you soon (I hope),  
Josie



**May Cactus of the Month**

by Karla Halpaap-Wood

**Tephrocactus articulatus****Family:** CACTACEAE**Genus:** Tephrocactus

(from Greek tephra, "ash", referring to the color of these plants')

**Species:** articulatus

With two variations:

Tephrocactus articulatus var. papyracanthus

Synonyms:

Opuntia glomerata f. papyracantha, Opuntia papyracantha, Tephrocactus papyracanthus hort.

Common Names: Paper Spine Cactus, Paper Spine Cholla Cactus.

Tephrocactus articulatus var. strobiliformis

Synonyms:

Opuntia strobiliformis, Tephrocactus strobiliformis

and a cultivar of it:

Tephrocactus diadematus f. inermis hort.

Common Names: Glochidless Spruce Cone Cholla, Glochidless Pine Cone Cactus

Cool looking pine-cone-like plant without spines and irritating glochids. The segments generally grow longer and narrower than the standard Tephrocactus articulatus.

**Origin and Habitat:** Western Argentina.**Description:** Segmented bushy succulent slowly growing up to up to 30 cm.

The 'inermis' form of this species is a nearly spineless form with no spines and without (or with very few) glochids on the new growth.

**Stems:** It develops in little pine-cone shaped segments that are loosely attached to each other and fall off easily, dull grey looking.**Spines:** This species is very variable as to whether it is spine-bearing or not. The spiny form (also known as "papyracanthus") have broad, raffia like, conspicuous, flattened spines which are not spines but thin ribbon like processes.**Flowers:** Blooms are either white or yellow. Fruit: 1 to 5 cm long fruit is brown.**Cultivation and Propagation:** It is easy to grow but usually does not get very tall as segments break off. It is cold resistant and hardy to -9°C. It needs full sun or the stems get thinner. The main growing period is spring. It might produce some new segments in the fall too. It needs good drainage. Keep dry in winter but tolerates long, wet, cold winters. Propagation is through segment cuttings, or occasionally seeds.

Propagation: Cuttings, it suckers profusely and is very easy to grow by just breaking off one of the 'cones' and sticking it in the ground.

**My experience:**

I have those cacti for at least 10 years, very slow growing. The paper spine grows bushy and stays low. The spineless variety grows new segments on top of the others, and I have broken off many by accident. Most years I kept them in the greenhouse even in the summer, but this year they are outside in full sun and get all the rain.



They have never bloomed for me.

### References

The New York Botanical Garden Illustrated Encyclopedia of Horticulture, Volume 10, by Thomas H. Everett ·1982, p.3311

Cactus and Succulent Journal, Vol. 79, No. 5, September-October 2007, p 228

[http://www.llifl.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/7346/Tephrocactus\\_articulatus\\_var.\\_papyracanthus](http://www.llifl.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/7346/Tephrocactus_articulatus_var._papyracanthus)

[http://www.llifl.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/19052/Tephrocactus\\_articulatus\\_var.\\_diadematus\\_f.\\_inermis](http://www.llifl.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/19052/Tephrocactus_articulatus_var._diadematus_f._inermis)



## May Succulent of the Month

Aditi Nabar



**NAME: *Haworthiopsis limifolia* var. *arcana***

**COMMON NAME(S):** Fairies Washboard, File-leaved Haworthia

I chose to write about *H. limifolia* for the foremost reason that it was my first succulent. I bought it in 2017 at Cornelius Nursery, back when I had no clue what it was. Through the first two years, it managed to survive inconsistent watering and periods of being forgotten for weeks and months at a time. Finally, in July of 2019, I re-discovered it on my windowsill, and my interest renewed. The roots were abysmal - had maybe one or two viable main roots. I potted it in a gritty mix recommended by Andrea in the Sucs For You! videos, and after 8 months of being on a watering schedule, the plant took off! The network of roots is so well-developed that

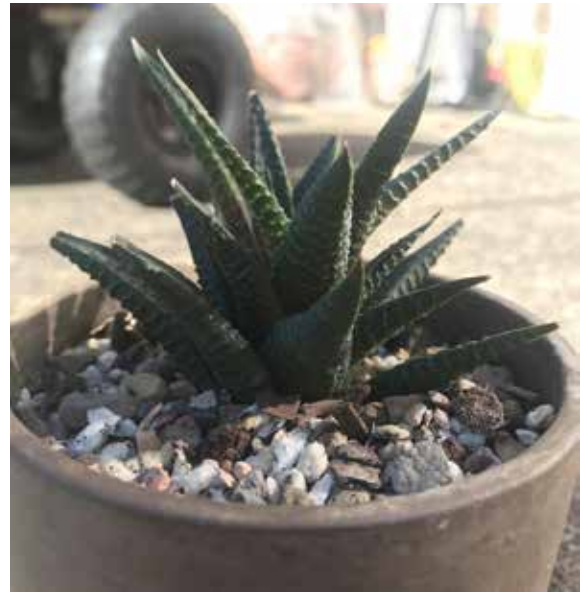
the plant does not budge in the pot. Over the last 10 months I've learned that *H. limifolia* likes its dry spells, and also LOVES having its roots flushed with water. I've also learned that *H. limifolia* enjoys bright light, but not direct sunlight.

*Haworthiopsis limifolia* var. *arcana*, *limifolia* meaning to file or to polish, is a low growing succulent known for its triangular, firm leaves. This plant originates in and around the KwaZulu-Natal region of South Africa, and is in the Aloeeae tribe, indicating it is a close relative to the Aloes. The plant has broad and sturdy rosettes made of firm, leathery leaves that have ridges of tubercles aligned laterally across the brownish-green leaf,

resembling a teeny washboard.

*H. limifolia* is unlike some other common haworthia in that it is not a prolific species. It may slowly put off offsets, yielding up to 20 rosettes in a cluster. In the KwaZulu-Natal region, *H. limifolia*'s natural climate consists of humid, hot summers and cold yet mild winters. When exposed to the seasonality of the outdoors, *H. limifolia* is a late fall flowering plant, producing small white and pink flowers at the end of long, thin white stalks, as is typical of plants within the genus.

In cultivation, *H. limifolia* var. *arcana* can survive in most well-draining soil, but will thrive in a granular, porous mixture that maximizes drainage. They are winter growers and can accommodate regular watering in the winter if exposed to the seasonality. *H. limifolia* is in dormancy in the summer months and should be watered sparingly.



References:

<https://www.gbif.org/species/2779758>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haworthiopsis\\_limifolia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haworthiopsis_limifolia)

[http://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/SUCCULENTS/Family/Aloaceae/21354/Haworthia\\_limifolia](http://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/SUCCULENTS/Family/Aloaceae/21354/Haworthia_limifolia)

<http://haworthia-gasteria.blogspot.com/2008/09/haworthia-attenuata.html>



## June Cactus of the Month

Josie Watts

### **Mammillaria longimamma.**

Family: Cactaceae  
Genus: Mammillaria  
Species: longimamma

AKA: dolichothele longimamma, mammillaria uberformis

Common names: Nipple cactus, finger cactus.

Origin: This plant originates in Guanajuato, Hidalgo and Queretaria, Mexico, and in Texas. I was unable to determine where in Texas it grows. It grows at an altitude of 1,000 to 2,400 meters above sea level.

Description: The plant is at first solitary, then forming dense clusters. It's height is under 6 inches. The tubercles are long and sparsely wooly. There are 8-10 radial spines, 12 to 20mm long, white, yellowish, or brown in color and approximately .5 cm wide. The flowers are bright yellow, 6 cm in diameter.

Propagation: It is propagated by seeds, offsets, and tubercles. It is possible to remove tubercles, dry them for a day or two, then plant them, although I have not attempted this. The fruit was mentioned only in [www.cactofili.org](http://www.cactofili.org), where it states that the fruit is not well known, stating the only reference to propagation from seed was in a private collection in Italy back in the 1800's. They state it is very rarely seen. My plants have not produced any fruits.

Growing conditions: The plant needs moderate water in summer and no water in winter. It can tolerate partial shade to sun. Although it states it grows in zones 9-11, no specific temperatures were given. The only reference to cold tolerance stated it must be protected from frost. It has a large tap root and should be kept in a deep pot with well-draining substrate. One article warned that it was prone to root rot due to the size of the tap root.

My experience with this plant has been very positive. I've had two plants since 2017 and both are thriving. The smaller one has produced an offshoot and the larger one is in the process of doing so. The blooms are large for a mammillaria, and very pleasing. It isn't very fussy and is easy to keep happy.

References: Dave's Desert website. The Encyclopedia of Cactus website. Onlycactuses.com. [www.cactofili.org](http://www.cactofili.org).





---

Please join us at HCSS facebook group  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1049635895242129/>



## June Succulent of the Month

Bruce Moffett

### Agave Weber

Agave Weber is one of my favorite agaves to grow outside in Houston. It requires little care, easily handles almost all the weather we have and makes a beautiful display plant. It grows to about 5' to 6' tall and wide so it does take a lot of space. The leaves are about 3" to 4' long with a blueish green color and a sharp terminal spine. They are about 6" wide and have fine teeth on the edges but not spines. The rosette forms a cauldron shape.

It grows in full sun or light shade but looks the best when grown in full sun. It can take temperatures down to about 20 F but may suffer some leaf damage. As long as it is grown in well-draining soil it can handle Houston wet or dry. If it gets too dry the leaves may turn yellow. It produces lots of pups. My beds are made with about a foot high pavestone walls. I often have pups that actually go under the wall and come up in the yard.

The Agave Weber blooms in about 8 to 10 years. The bloom stalk grows to 20' to 25' in about two weeks and is 6" thick at the base. It produces yellow flowers on the end of braches. I have had 4 bloom over the years and currently have one blooming right in front of our house.

It is also known as Weber's Century Plant and Agave Weberi. There seems to be little information on where Agave Weber had its original range other than to say Texas and northern Mexico. According to Mary and Gary Irish there is no known native growth of the plant but it is common in plantings all over southwest US and Mexico.



## THE CSSA SEED DEPOT

by LILIANA CRACRAFT

The CSSA Seed Depot was started by the late Peg Spaete in 1987 as a venue to provide cactus and succulent seeds for its members. Their prices, compared to many others in the market, are quite reasonable, including the shipping cost.

To date, the Depot has seeds from 270 different plants including Aloes (11 species), Agaves (6 species), Yuccas (3 species), Lithops (21 species), and many species of cacti, such as those in the genus Ariocarpus, Astrophytum, Echinocactus, Echinocereus, Echinopsis, Escobaria, Ferocactus, Turrbinicactus, Parodia, Mammillaria, Melocactus, Rebutia, Thelocactus and more.

In 1995, Sue Haffner from the Fresno Cactus & Succulents Society became the director of the depot and continues to manage it to this day. She is currently seeking new donors to increase the number of species offered through CSSA (spring 2020 issue of the Cactus & Succulent Journal). The depot welcomes any cactus or succulent seeds, even in small quantities. Then they are able to offer this great service to members.

Here are the guidelines if you would like to donate seeds:

Many cactus seeds stay good for years. Some actually need to 'age' a bit before they give good germination. Mesemb seeds stay viable for decades. On the other hand, Astrophytum and Frailea seeds are good for only 1-3 years.

1. Seeds must be cleaned and identified.
2. Seeds must be placed in sealed envelopes or small plastic bags.
3. Please use small padded envelopes or boxes to mail your seeds. Bubble wrap or another type of padding is always needed because the seeds can be pulverized by postal machines.
4. Mail your seeds to:  
CSSA Seed Depot  
3015 Timmy Ave.  
Clovis, CA 93612-4849
5. For additional questions, please contact Sue at [sueh@mail.fresnostate.edu](mailto:sueh@mail.fresnostate.edu)

If you would like to purchase seeds, and are a CSSA member, visit the depot on the CSSA website at: [www.cssa.myshopify.com/collections/seed-depot](http://www.cssa.myshopify.com/collections/seed-depot)

Prices for each packet are \$1.25, and postage is \$5.00. Generally 20-25 seeds are included, unless the list on-line specifies otherwise. As a general rule, only one packet per species is sold per order, but some varieties are available in larger quantities. Please note that seeds from cultivars (clearly identified on the list) will not produce plants which are true-to-type.



Melocactus curvispinum

If you wish to order by mail, contact the director to get the latest list of species available. Mail your order to the address listed above, and include a check or money order payable to the CSSA Seed Depot.

Writing this article really motivated me to donate most of my cactus seeds! I hope you can donate some seeds too.

---

### From Tom Cardinal's Cactus paradise

New growth on this home grown 16 inch *Opuntia Echios* v. *gigantea* native to the Galapagos Islands of Ecuador.





---

## Love, War, and Cacti: A Little Story of a Syrian Cactus

by Chaden Yafi, HCSS

My mother fell in love with my father who was her college professor of philosophy at Damascus University in Syria. Her love was genuine and went beyond a youthful crush or infatuation of a young mind with a well-recognized thinker and writer. Years later, they got married. When she moved to his rather small apartment in the heart of Damascus, she thought she knew everything about the man she loved--until she went to the balcony! More than fifty pots of cacti were waiting for her, spiny, dry, and strange looking! My mother tried her best to like them but complained many times about their spines hurting her skin every time she tried to clean the balcony. Yet she admitted: The scene was spectacular every year by the end of spring! All of the cacti flowered at the same time giving mainly yellow flowers! They were mostly *Opuntia* cacti, the type common in Syria, and seemed to thrive well in the dry climate and high summer temperatures.

When my parents had children, they moved to a bigger apartment on the top floor, so they also owned the roof of the building. My father moved his beloved cacti and placed them on the spacious roof. In the cold nights of winter both of my parents would climb up and cover the cacti with blankets.

My father took a job with the United Nations that made us travel a lot. Worried about the cacti, he decided to give them to neighbors in the basement apartment of the building who owned a yard. That move was a big mistake! The neighbors were negligent and didn't like those cacti; they even offered many of them as gifts to their friends. When we came back to settle in Damascus, there were only about a dozen left. They could all fit on the balcony.

Growing up, I didn't care much about plants, and I don't remember any of the cacti ever flowering, as if they were angry at us for neglecting them.

However, I still remember how one of our next-door neighbors used to send us, once every year, a strange, big white flower that had a very strong, exotic fragrance. My mother would place the flower in a cup of water. The whole apartment would smell like perfume for a couple of days. Many years later I came to realize that it was the flower of the Night Blooming *Cereus* cactus. Our neighbor owned a large specimen that gave many flowers every year for just one night. In Syria, this cactus is called *Laylat al Qadr*, "Night of Decree." In Islamic culture this phrase refers to the night when the *Quran* was first sent to the world from heaven, and when the first verse of it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel.

One of the most common fruits, during the hot summers of Syria, is the prickly pear. With the beginning of the hot weather, the streets of Damascus would be filled with little kiosks selling this orange fruit. The merchants would display the fruits on large blocks of ice, and they would have a few chairs around for customers to sit on while eating. The seller would be wearing rubber gloves, and when the buyer pointed at the particular piece of fruit he wanted to eat, the seller would pick it up and gracefully peel it with a knife. Then the customer would pick up the fruit with his hand and devour it, fresh, cold, ripened, and extremely delicious. In Arabic, the prickly pear plants and fruits are called *Sabbara* which means "patient," an adjective derived from the word "Saber," meaning "patience," referring to the plant's ability to endure the arid desert climate without rain. The *Sabbara* kiosks were favorite hanging out spots for lovers and teenagers.

My father used to bring large boxes of prickly pears from the *Opuntia* farms where he befriended many owners. My mom would soak the fruits in buckets of water, then, wearing gloves, would peel them and arrange

them in large bowls. This was such a treat. We devoured many at a time, but my mom wouldn't eat any of the fruit. I saw her many evenings with tweezers and a magnifying glass trying to remove spines from her fingers.



Photo by Khaldoun al Khan



From Facebook Page: All about Damascus

In 2007 I went back to Damascus after finishing my studies in Music at Boston University.





The balcony still had cacti among other plants, but I was somewhat indifferent towards them until the day I noticed a long, hairy stem coming out from a cluster of cacti! I had no clue what it was! The next day, to my surprise, the end of the stem turned into the most beautiful pink flower that I have ever seen! I was thrilled! I rushed to get my camera to take photos! I spent the entire day looking with amazement at the flower. The next day it was gone.



Perhaps that cactus enjoyed my attention so much that a few months later, she gave seven flowers at once. This extravaganza was without any fertilizers or any care from my part, just the regular, once a week watering to all the plants on the balcony. That day I called all my friends and neighbors to come visit and admire the cactus!

There has been a change in my heart since that day. I fell in love so deeply with cacti, with their patience, endurance, resilience, tolerance, and surviving powers.

I started to take better care of them and spent more time looking at and observing them.

In March 2011, the unrest started in Syria and quickly turned into a very ugly war that forced me to escape a year later, leaving my beautiful Echinopsis cactus and her friends alone on the balcony.

Living in Houston, I didn't want to own any cactus as I missed my "Syrian" cactus so much. Then little by little I started to encounter many beautiful types of cacti. Getting the first cactus was difficult; it gave me a bitter sense of guilt. I felt like I was sort of betraying my cacti in Damascus, that I was forgetting them by starting a new collection. After a while, however, the new Texan cacti were able to cheer me up with their varieties and colorful blooms. They brought solace and peace to my heart, away from home.



at home in Houston

### HCSS Leadership and Contact Info

President  
Josie Watts  
josiewatts@mindspring.com

First Vice President  
Wally Ward  
wtw3arb@aol.com

Second Vice President  
Cindy Gray  
grayco60@hotmail.com

Recording Secretary  
Kathleen Canty  
kathleencanty@sbcglobal.net

Treasurer  
Bruce Moffett  
bmoffett@mindspring.com

KK editor and Webmaster  
Karla Halpaap-Wood  
khalpaap@me.com

KK publisher  
Imtiaz Bangee  
imbangee@yahoo.com

Membership  
July Olson  
Saint.juniper@gmail.com

Education  
David Van Langen  
dvl@pdq.net

Ways and Means  
Rolando Ontiveros  
rolandoontiveros@outlook.com

Publicity and CSSA affiliate  
Liliana Cracraft and July Olsen  
opuntia77@yahoo.com