

December Succulent of the Month

Karla Halpaap-Wood

Alluaudia procera

Common Name: Octopus tree, Madagascar Ocotillo, Madagascan Ocotillo, African Ocotillo

Scientific Name: *Alluaudia procera*

Family Name: Didiereaceae

Origin: South Madagascar

The Didiereaceae is a small family endemic to Madagascar, consisting of four genera, *Alluaudia*, *Alluaudiopsis*, *Decaryia*, and *Didierea*, with eleven species total. The spiny stems of the plants look similar to columnar species of *Euphorbia* or cacti and the Didiereaceae are sometimes known as “the cacti of the old world”.

The whole family is threatened by habitat destruction and utilization of the wood for construction and charcoal production. Another threat to Didiereaceae is collection for horticulture. All species are in demand by collectors, but they rarely flower in cultivation, and seed is in short supply.

Habitat: It is one of the thorny plants of the Madagascan spine forests (along with *Pachypodium* species) found in the island’s semi-arid southwest. It grows in areas that might not receive any rain for more than a year. It can withstand extended periods of drought, but lacks the water storage tissues associated with most true succulents. Plants in the *Alluaudia* family vary from small shrubs to tall trees. All are deciduous in the dry season but leaf out virtually over night when the rains come.

Description: *Alluaudia procera* is a spiny and scarcely branched small succulent tree. The plant can grow 1.5-3 m high indoors and up to 18 m tall in its native habitat. This is the only truly woody Didiereacea. Leaves are small, oval or rounded, green succulent growing directly off the trunk, 1 to 5 cm long.

The leaves will drop during any lengthy dry periods. Flowers are yellowish white in clusters at the end of the branches. *Alluaudia* are dioecious, individual plants are either male or female. Flowers will be produced in mature specimens taller than 3 m

It resembles the American ocotillo *Fouquieria splendens* with red flowers. Both have small rounded leaves and grayish trunks with a lot of spines. This is an example of convergent evolution - unrelated plants adapting similar shapes and survival strategies in response to the same environmental conditions.

Cultivation: It needs full sun with a very well drained soil mix. It is frost tender, but mature plants can survive 0° C. It is not freely branching, but will branch when the tip is cut.



References:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alluaudia_procera

<https://prota.prota4u.org/protav8.asp?h=M4&t=Alluaudia,procera&p=Alluaudia+procera#Synonyms>

http://www.llifile.com/Encyclopedia/TREES/Family/Didiereaceae/487/Alluaudia_procera

<https://www.pslbg.org/madagascar-ocotillo.html>