

CACTUS COURIER

Newsletter of the Palomar Cactus and Succulent Society

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The Meeting is the **4th** Saturday

JULY 25, 2009

Quail Botanical Gardens

Ecke Building (south of the parking lot)

230 Quail Gardens Drive, Encinitas, CA

Noon “ish”

For a Wonderful Potluck Lunch!!!



Photo by John Tashjian



“Quail Botanical Gardens”

Summer is here with a vengeance! The temperature is soaring! So wend your way towards Encinitas where you can count on it being several degrees cooler near the ocean. (It will still be pretty warm, so don't forget your hat and your sunscreen.)

We are most fortunate to be able to meet again at the **Quail Botanical Gardens** for our summer meeting. This excellent facility features desert gardens, rare bamboo groves, a tropical rainforest, California native plants,

Mediterranean climate landscapes, and a subtropical fruit garden. As part of our arrangements, we will be welcome to visit throughout the Gardens – we are even hoping for a Docent to escort us to the most interesting spots. Please take some time to enjoy this wonderful place. And feel free to bring a friend!

We are planning one of our excellent **Potluck Lunches**, so please bring a dish to share: appetizers, salads, main dishes, desserts, etc... (*Dick, there might even be a flan or two!*) I know this bunch – I expect there will be lots of food, so you better bring guests! The Club will provide the drinks and tableware.

**NO Board Meeting • Brag Plants • Plant-of-the-Month
or Exchange Table**
...It's TOO Hot!! ;-)



Jeff Moore's Seabed at Quail



Garden Days
Dick Henderson

The next meeting will be Saturday, August 1st from 11 am to 2 pm. Come and enjoy the pleasures of the Garden! (Work in the shade!)

2009 MEETING SCHEDULE

25 July	Quail Gardens
August	NO MEETING!!
26 September	Joslyn Center
24 October	Joslyn Center
21 November	Joslyn Center
NOTE!!! 3rd Saturday !!	
20 December	Joslyn Center
NOTE!!! 3rd Saturday !!	

Rolling out the barrels...

With their intriguing texture and color, golden barrel cactuses gain popularity.

By Debra Lee Baldwin



Chris Sullivan wishes he hadn't bothered to install an irrigation system. The garden that he and wife, Margaret, designed and planted 2 1/2 years ago needs no water other than the occasional rainstorm, although "we do hose off the barrel cactuses in summer if they're dusty," Chris says.

Golden barrel cactuses are showing up in more dry landscapes these days, and not just because they need so little irrigation. Designers often use golden barrels to provide intriguing texture, dramatic pattern (when used in numbers) and bright color year-round. When backlit, the golden spines surround the plant with a glowing halo. In spring, buds form a whorl at the crown, and a succession of satiny yellow flowers unfurl for months.

"Golden barrels are more popular than ever," says Molly Thongthiraj, co-owner of California Cactus Center in Pasadena.

Five years ago, the store provided the Getty Center with 552 of the spiny tuffets for the South Promontory garden. The plants -- 15 to 19 inches in diameter when installed -- are now 20 to 24 inches, Thongthiraj says. The inch-per-year growth rate slows as golden barrels approach about 36 inches in diameter.

Golden barrels tolerate more irrigation than other cactuses and consequently do not rot as easily. Thongthiraj says the plants do equally well in desert gardens and in landscapes that require slightly more water.

"They're the perfect finishing touch for a succulent garden," she says.

The Sullivans' previous residence mixed spherical and columnar cactuses with aloes, agaves, kalanchoes and other succulents -- plants that store water in fleshy leaves and stems in order to survive drought.

The couple's new home has a front garden that's smaller, so they disciplined themselves.

"With succulents, it's tempting to want one of everything," Margaret says.

They went with a limited palette of barrel cactuses and other sculptural, architectural plants that suited the contemporary lines of their remodeled home. Against a backdrop of greenish tan walls, columnar cactuses mix with *Yucca rostrata* trees with strappy leaves.

Chris planted one yucca so its trunk was parallel to the ground. The tree has since curved upward, lending a sculptural element that contrasts effectively with the angular hardscape and the setting's strong vertical lines.

Enhancing the composition are boulders from the couple's previous garden. Other transplants include low-water Mexican blue palms (*Brahea armata*) and a type of *Kalanchoe beharensis* called Napoleon's Hat, a diminutive succulent tree with boat-shaped, feltlike leaves.

Through it all, clusters of golden barrel cactuses pop up like spiny beach balls.

The Sullivans made a point not to place the plants equidistant from each other.

"We gave some thought to how they might look in nature," Margaret says. "Randomly spaced, odd-numbered groupings seemed to work best."

Because the soil was compacted - "like concrete," Chris says - they hired a crew to haul a significant amount to the dump.

"We brought in 10 yards of decomposed granite for the substrate," he says. "On top of that went a blend of decomposed granite and cactus mix. Our main goal was good drainage. These plants need loose soil that drains well."

The top dressing is 3/8 -inch golden gravel. The installation probably cost more than a typical frontyard landscape, Chris said, unable to provide specifics since many of the plants came from their previous residence. "But it's 100 times less work than a lawn."

The new garden gets no pesticides or fertilizer, and rabbits that dine on the neighbors' ornamental plants leave the Sullivans' garden alone. Chris takes a hands-off approach too, using long-handled tweezers to extract weeds growing close to the cactuses.

Easy maintenance is one of the allures. Thongthiraj says her father, who founded the California Cactus Center 35 years ago, had a passion for golden barrels.

"He taught us kids how to collect and germinate the seeds," she says. "We used to hate having to do it. His goal was to have a million of them."

The nursery may not have a million of them, but propagating golden barrels has proved worthwhile.

"Surprisingly, they're hugely popular in China," Thongthiraj says. "We ship them there all the time -- whole containers full."

Baldwin is the author of "Designing With Succulents." You can find her blog at debraleebaldwin.com



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Los Angeles Times
July 11, 2009

Barrel cactus thrive in full sun

The plant, native to coastal Mexico, also will take to cool, misty conditions.

-- Debra Lee Baldwin

Siting: Golden barrel cactus (*Echinocactus grusonii*) can thrive in hot, dry landscapes but is native to coastal Mexico, so it doesn't mind cool, misty conditions. It is hardy to about 20 degrees.

Digging: A transplanted barrel doesn't require a deep hole, but if it's too shallow, the weight of the plant may crush its roots. Trim them and they will grow back rapidly. Give roots about a week to heal before watering.

Lifting: Plant barrel cactuses when they're small, about the size of bowling balls, so they're still easy to lift. By the time they're 2 feet across, the plants weigh hundreds of pounds. To lift one without breaking its spines, lasso it with an old, soft garden hose, or hold the plant between wads of crumpled newspaper. Wear puncture-proof gardening or welder's gloves.

Watering: For optimal growth, keep the soil moist (but not soggy) during the spring growing season. Avoid soaking the crown; hand-watering or drip irrigation is best.

Considerations: Golden barrels are not kid- or pet-friendly. Over time, they will lean in the direction of greatest sun exposure. Give the plants full sun all day or make their tilt look natural by installing them at the base of a boulder.

[...actually, kids and pets learn very quickly to leave the plants alone. It has always been Eleanore who gets "bitten," not the kids or the cats!]

Resources: Any nursery with a good selection of cactus and succulents should have golden barrels. Sources include the California Cactus Center in Pasadena, (626) 795-2788, www.cactuscenter.com; California Nursery Specialties Cactus Ranch in Reseda (commercial operation that opens to the public only on weekends), (818) 894-5694, www.california-cactus-succulents.com; Tropic World Nursery in Escondido (where the Sullivans purchased their plants), (760) 746-6108; and the May and October plant sales at the Huntington Botanical Gardens in San Marino, www.huntington.org.



Don't forget...
No August Meeting!!!