

Fun with Cactus and Succulents by Fran Benton

(because we sure are not going anywhere exotic to see them!!!)

Last month I went south to Victoria for the Succulent and Cactus Societies annual show and sale. I do love a group of obsessives be they model trains, fossils, or plant groups. These guys are very obsessed with these tiny and unusual plants. Oh what a great show! I decided to stock up on plants at the sale. I dragged “he who really does know best” along and he picked out 2 cactus that he liked. I picked up a few that I felt rounded out my collection. When I questioned this I thought, “Well, it’s not like we are going anywhere for a winter vacation this year, AGAIN. No hauling myself up to stare in the mouth of a tropical volcano, no scrambling through the cactusy hills of Arizona. Instead we lavish love and care on the cactus and succulents. Or not. Cactus and succulents enjoy a nice dry winter with just the right dab of moisture from time to time. Most of my cactus actually lives in the garage over winter. Not that pleasant a spot but cactus are tough customers! Certain very special plants get to spend the winter inside the house in my cool south-facing window. There is quite a bit of light but big conifers filter it. I really have to discipline myself to stay away from the watering can. I make sure the cactus have super well-drained soil and I empty the trays so they don’t ever sit in water. I water them well once a month to 6 weeks. They should be good and dry before you water them again. If they are happy they will bloom for you in the summer. My best bloomer is my Lifesaver cactus *Heurnia zebrina*. Outside in the summer the *Echinopsis* has big pink blooms. This cactus produces all sorts of babies that are fun to grow to big fellows. I always have these cacti at our garden sales and am happy to get some to you. They originally came from a friend of Marie Cooke’s and are easy to grow and propagate. I was delighted to pick up a new cactus from (of all places) the Mission Thrift Store in Duncan. The cactus is not spiny and actually is more like a succulent. It’s a *Stapelia gigantea*. I’ve included a picture of it in bloom on the big island of Hawaii.



I wonder if any of you do the kind of thing I do when watching a TV show. Maybe the killer is chasing someone down the street in Phoenix Arizona and they stop and look back at the cops. What do I see in the background WOW it’s a Pencil Euphorbia! I demand the movie be paused while I get a better look at that plant. Then the action resumes and what do I remember about that show? Well you know there are millions of cop dramas but not many with a Pencil Euphorbia. The other excellent show for plants is Montelbono, the Italian murder



mystery filmed on Sicily. They have the most gob-smacking monster Prickly Pear cactus you have ever seen!

For my final cactus comment, at one of the local garden club sales I bought a plant called Queen of the Night. It turns out this cactus grows like stink and crawls all over the other plants. I saw what happens when this plant gets ideal conditions at Miloli’I Park on the big island of Hawaii. We think Ivy is bad! Well as our pandemic rages on go and cheer yourself up with a little cactus or succulent. Tell it all your troubles and show it some love! Happy indoor gardening this fall!