

The BCSS Seed List 2017/18

As ever, David Rushforth, he who is always hoping to retire from his job of Seed Purchaser, has assembled an interesting and varied list of seeds. This year's list comprises over 250 items. As ever, again, Cacti vastly outnumber the Other Succulents. This is not necessarily because David, or the BCSS membership, prefer it this way; more probably it is because the seed of the Other Succulents is harder to source. Some Other Succulent seed, moreover, has a short shelf life.

Newer members are especially exhorted to try growing from seed. There is no mystique about doing this, and lots of advice is available through the Society and elsewhere. One reason for holding back is the fear that it might take years to get results. It pays to be a little selective here. Our present list has a large offering of *Aylosteras*, *Mediolobivias* and *Sulcorebutias* that ought to flower in three years or so, and flower most beautifully moreover. So, the time scale works like this: Year 1, ten pots of seedlings (themselves little beauties in miniature); Year 2, ten pots of larger seedlings and ten pots of small seedlings; Year 3, ten pots (or pans, now) of flowering plants, ten pots of larger seedlings, and ten pots of small seedlings; Year 4, twenty pans of flowering plants plus twenty pots of seedlings, i.e. 50% pans of mature plants giving a dazzling display in the spring.

By this time the now not-so-new grower has some decisions to make. The first is how to dispose of surplus plants. The easiest way is through the local Branch at monthly meetings and public events. The second will already have been taken, which is to diversify into the remaining 20,000 types of cacti and other succulents. Many of these are horrible; some are of interest only to specialists. Though it has to be said that today's specialists all started with a few plants on the windowsill.

Let us look at what David has put on the list. One thing that stands out is that there is no consistency with the plant names. That is not merely because of botanical disagreements, which, like the poor, will always be with us. It is also because some nurserymen have remained in the horse-and-cart age, and others are just confused. Let us pick a few examples. *Echinofossulocactus* has disappeared from mortal ken since David Hunt abolished it in the 1980's. Other old names, now more or less superseded, are *Bartschella* (*Mammillaria*), *Gymnocactus* (*Turbinicarpus*), *Helianthocereus* (*Echinopsis*), *Krainzia* (*Mammillaria*) and *Wigginsia* (*Parodia*). It is as well to know these things: it makes it easier to consult the literature when deciding what seeds to buy.

As for confusion, well! The genera *Coryphantha*, *Escobaria* and *Acharagma* are all muddled up. This is due partly to the Americans' never having accepted Britton and Rose's establishment of *Escobaria* in 1923. Some of the names given are merely synonyms, and just a few names are not to be found in any work of reference. The bold will not begrudge 30p to find out what comes up, even if it takes years to identify the plants.

A further benefit of growing plants from seed is that some are difficult to obtain by other means. Nurseries are often reluctant to grow such plants as *Coryphantha* (the real ones) or *Parodia* (*sensu stricto*: there aren't any of these on this year's list) because they take so long to reach saleable size. *Ariocarpus* are also notoriously slow (apart from *agavoides*) because they give priority in their first few years to expanding their underground parts before they take off visibly.

Among the Other Succulents on the BCSS List, mesembs massively predominate. There are many lovely plants here, and would-be purchasers will want to distinguish between summer and winter growers in order to decide whether to sow the seeds in spring or autumn. The two Acacias listed, both non-succulents, are perhaps more suitable for the Eden Project, though bonsai lovers may be able to keep them small and pretty. *Dracaena draco* is the Dragon Tree, fast becoming a favourite of sub-tropical municipalities. *Dyckia distachya* (that is the correct spelling) is a

Bromeliad like the pineapple, so it is not listed in the BCSS Guide to Shows. *Tylecodon singularis* is a remarkable member of the Crassulaceae: it grows just one huge leaf in winter followed by a tall flower spike. *Sinningia warmingii* is a sort of succulent African violet, an attractive caudiciform that can be reproduced from leaf cuttings (see Hazel Taylor's recent article in Cactus World).

The Mesemb Study Group has a seriously interesting seed list due to be published in February. Membership is only £12, so now would be a good time to join. Good Growing!

John Watmough.