

Welcome to our special issue for 2001—it's almost entirely occupied with the charms and challenges of a delightful group of cacti noted for their prolific flowers, compact attractive growth and ease of culture. Widely available in most of its numerous variations, it would seem to be an ideal group to collect and grow, both for the beginner and the advanced specialist.

What to call them? Ah, therein lies a problem, as you will see in the following pages. For many years they were—and usually still are—grown under various generic names: *Sulcorebutia*, *Rebutia*, *Mediolobivia*, *Weingartia*, *Digitorebutia*, *Aylostera*. Recently it was proposed to unite them all under the oldest name, *Rebutia*, and to downgrade most of the species to synonyms, acts that have disturbed many enthusiasts.

This journal does not follow any particular system of taxonomy, for that science is based on interpreting data—and taxonomic botanists (or zoologists or classifiers of languages) are notably divergent in their interpretations. However, for the purposes of this issue, we are considering all of these plants to be rebutias (i.e., belonging to *Rebutia* sensu lato—in the wide sense) because they are closely related and have a similar appearance. Whether they are "really" one genus, three or six is only a matter of personal opinion. The actual relationships between these groups has not yet been determined through DNA analysis, but, even if that were done, there still would not be unanimous agreement as to which genera or species to recognize. It's the old story of looking through opposite ends of the telescope—some want to see similarities, others prefer differences. If any consensus concerning these plants develops it will probably come slowly or, perhaps, never. One can only encourage you to read the various viewpoints, form your own opinions if you wish, but in any case enjoy growing them and admire their cheerful display of flowers.

The earlier treatments of these plants by Schumann, Britton and Rose, and Backeberg are summarized in several of the enclosed articles, with titles of their works listed there under References. Since Backeberg, several significant works have appeared: *Sulcorebutia and Weingartia, a collector's guide*, by John Pilbeam (1985, now out of print); *Sulcorebutia*, by Augustin, Gertel & Hentzschel (2000, text in German see the review in this issue); and Stefan Mosti, in the journal *Cactus & Co.* (text in Italian and English), has been running a three-part series on section *Digitorebutia* of *Rebutia*, making another 24 new nomenclatural combinations. New taxa of the rebutia group are also frequently described in the various cactus Journals, especially those of Germany, Netherlands and the Czech Republic.

Although there is a certain futility in arguing about what genera and species to recognize for such a variable group of plants, we do hope that some of those who favor reducing their number will expound on their beliefs in a subsequent issue (David Hunt has already promised to do so!).

We trust you will enjoy these pages. Thanks are due not only to the authors for their articles but to some of them and others who suggested authors to contact or who translated or helped edit: Brian Bates, Willi Gertel, Paul Hoffman, Ron Monroe and Johan Pot—this issue is dedicated to them all.

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