

February's program was both interesting and entertaining as presented by our guest speaker Jeff Chemnick, owner and operator of Aloes-in-Wonderland, a specialty nursery and garden in Santa Barbara. He is also the founder and operator of Mexico Nature Tours, specializing in botanical (and ornithological) ecotours throughout Mexico and a respected authority on Mexican cycads who has published numerous articles and described several species new to science. The topic for the evening's slide show was "Treasures of the Sierra Madre: Botanizing in Mexico," and we were taken on a lively, colorful and informative tour focusing primarily on the states of Oaxaca and Chiapas.



Photo provided by Jeff Chemnick

Chemnick explained that the eastern and western Sierra Madre mountain ranges converge in the Mexican state of Chiapas, in a region known as the Transvolcanic Belt. The area is characterized by snow-capped mountains which drive the botanic speciation but is also home to cloud forests and deserts, with the whole range available for exploration in the Tehuacan Cuicatlan Biosphere Reserve in Oaxaca. There is also an abundance of limestone outcroppings and cliffs throughout southern Mexico, and Chemnick shared photos of some of the varied, but inaccessible, plant life that could be seen growing on these rock walls. It is his contention that this region is home to the best plants because of its unique climate and terrain.

Chemnick's first trips were cycad tours to Chiapas, and he remarked that in addition to the cycads, he found that the agaves and echeverias

were among the plants given the best reviews from his tour participants. His slide show supported his assertions about the diversity and popularity of the plant life, as the audience reacted positively to the many species depicted, including an enormous *Beaucarnia gracilis* and a *Yucca lacandonica*. Other unusual specimens he showed were the red *Hechtias*, the white-flowered *Plumeria rubra*, the very tall *Dasyllirion longissimum*, as well as *Agave montana*, *Pachycereus weberi*, *Platanus mexicana*, and many, many

mammillarias, echeverias and tillandsias. His pictures gave viewers a great sense of the size and longevity some of these plants can attain when growing undisturbed in their natural habitat. He also

included pictures of large dahlias growing wild among the cactus to further illustrate diversity. While many of these specimens cannot be grown locally, over the years Chemnick has collected and successfully bred others, including echeverias, agaves and aloes. Of course, most of the plants seen on his tours are only collected as photographs, as many are threatened, like the local Golden Barrel Cactus which was nearly wiped out when a regional dam was built.

After his presentation Chemnick responded to audience questions and noted that many of this tours can be tailored to a group's preferences, as the areas he travels to offer such a variety of choices for exploration. For more information on his tours, you can visit: www.mexiconaturetours.com; or you can check out his local plant selections from his nursery at www.aloesinwonderland.com.

✂ Sabine Steinmetz

SHARING SECRETS RESPONSES

Who would you like to nominate for consideration to be honored as 2018's Horticulturist of the Year?



The responses we received to last month's question have been compiled and will be reviewed at the next Board Meeting. We will be announcing this year's Horticulturist of the Year (HOTY) honoree in the next few months and appreciate all of your suggestions, and especially your participation.

Thank you!



We will resume printing your responses to the current "Sharing Secrets" question in the April newsletter - but to hold you over, we have a few more holiday horticultural gift responses to share:

When I returned to L.A. after holidays up north, I was greeted by a huge box full of tillandsias — courtesy of a colleague I met at the Association of Zoological Horticulture conference. When she said she would send me a few "tillies" I was thinking a handful of specimens but this was a cornucopia of beauties. It was a lovely way to start the New Year, deploying them in the garden.

Sandy Masuo

I was delighted to receive gift certificates for two of my favorite mail order nurseries from my son and daughter-in-law!

Sherry Heyman

While I was given several lovely gardening books and other garden-related items, the best gift I received was getting my husband's assistance (during his week off at New Year's) to plant all the miscellaneous gallon containers that were wasting away in our driveway. They now have a chance to thrive and I have room for new acquisitions....

Anonymous