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COLUMNAR CACTI OF EASTERN BRAZIL

ROOT GORELICK & GRAHAM CHARLES



For enthusiasts who live in a climate where growing plants permanently outside is impossible, the CSSA trip to Brazil was a superb chance to see many mature columnar cacti, of which Brazil has an unsurpassed selection. Nobody goes to Brazil to see *Brasilicereus* or *Cipocereus*. *Pilosocereus* is hardly any more popular. Indeed, the only species in these three genera that most of my cohorts were anxious to see on the CSSA field trip was *Pilosocereus fulvilanatus*. Yet plants in all three of these genera are often statuesque and easy to cultivate, *Cipocereus* and *Pilosocereus*

plants often have waxy cuticles in various shades of blue and green, large bat pollinated flowers, and big fruits that split open to yield brightly colored pulp.

BRASILICEREUS

Brasilicereus is a genus of two species, *B. phaeacanthus* and *B. markgrafii*, endemic to Bahia and Minas Gerais. These are thin-stemmed slightly branched columns covered in short straight spines. Considering how thin the stems are, they remain remarkably upright, although they may occasionally flop over and rest on rocks or other vegetation for support. *B. markgrafii* is the more diminutive of the two, with virtually unbranched two-meter-tall stems just 1–2 cm in diameter. While the spines are short and very light brown, they can briefly sport a lovely shade of red on new growth. Closed flower buds are usually green and have few petals, but the petal tips are red or, rarely, bluish, which seems to hint at the relationship with *Cipocereus*.



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CIPOCEREUS

Ritter segregated *Cipocereus* from the *Pilosocereus* thirty years ago, though the two are similar and probably very closely related to one another. The primary difference between them is that only *Cipocereus* has fruits with watery translucent pulp, a somewhat useful character if you like to snack on cactus fruits in the field. Both genera are columnar, usually branching near the base, and both harbor some species with striking blue coloration in their stems, flower buds, and fruits.

Endemics of eastern Brazil, the six species of *Cipocereus* are columnar cacti of modest height (1–3 m) that, unless injured, only branch from the base. This genus is often considered the most ancestral (basal) of the tribe Cereeae.

EASTERN BRAZIL SPECIAL ISSUE

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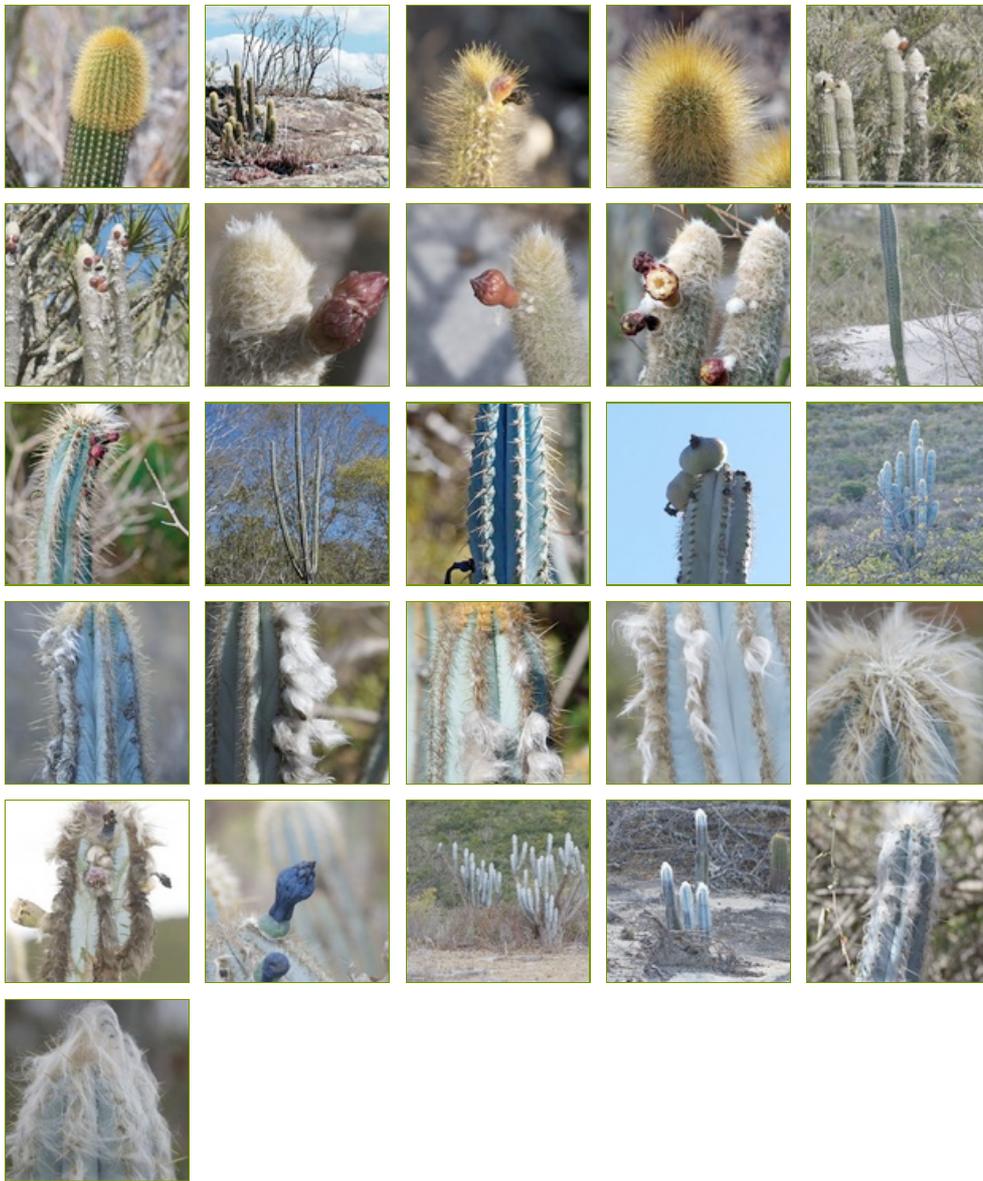


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PILOSOCEREUS

Although little has been written about *Brasilicereus* and *Cipocereus*, Daniela Zappi has done a wonderful job writing about *Pilosocereus* in her native Brazil. *Pilosocereus* contains approximately three dozen species that extend from Ecuador in the west, Paraguay in the south, and the Florida Keys in the north. In terms of geographic range and number of species, *Pilosocereus* has been an incredibly successful genus. The heart of its distribution lies in eastern Brazil, affording us opportunity to visit a dozen species. A detailed treatment is included in the special issue, and many more pictures of plants seen on our trip are offered here.



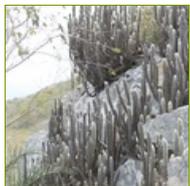


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ESPOSTOOPSIS

Espositoopsis dybowskii is an enigmatic monotypic genus. With cream colored spines and pure white hairs, its four-meter-tall stems branch only from the base and start growing a cephalium when about 1.5–2.0 meters tall. While similar in appearance to the Peruvian genus *Espostoa*, it may not be closely related. While both genera are known for their densely hairy stems (not true in all *Espostoa* species), longer-haired woolly lateral cephalia, off-white funnellform flowers, and tall stems that seldom branch except at the base, these genera live thousands of kilometers apart from one another. Molecular systematists have yet to publish a phylogeny incorporating the DNA of *Espositoopsis*, but when one does we may finally understand where this cactus sits on the family tree. Whatever the case, it is a gorgeous plant in habitat and a fast grower in cultivation.





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FACHEIROA

Facheiroa is a genus of three species: *F. cephaliomelana*, *F. ulei*, and *F. squamosa*. Unlike *Espositoopsis*, *Facheiroa* is now considered a relative of *Espostoa/Vatricania* by biologists, although hobbyists tend to disregard them as straggly weeds. The first two species have long lateral cephalia, which the third lacks. Despite the bad rap this genus receives, *Facheiroa cephaliomelana* subspecies *estevesii*, which we saw atop a large hill of bambuí limestone near Iuiú, Bahia, was the prettiest plant I saw in eastern Brazil. Even without these magnificent columnar cacti, this would have been a fantastic habitat with *Euphorbia attastoma*, succulent Bombaceae in the genera *Cavanillesia*, and *Ceiba*, fantastic bromeliads, *Melocactus levitestatis*, *Quiabentia zehntneri*, and the ubiquitous *Pilosocereus pachycladus*.



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MICRANTHOCEREUS

Expert on the cacti of eastern Brazil, and one of our guides on the CSSA field trip, Graham Charles provided a detailed overview of the eight species of the popular genus *Micranthocereus* for our special issue on eastern Brazil. These are smaller columnar cacti which can be managed in a pot. His article provide not only details of the plant habits and habitats, but also an overview of their cultural requirements.



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MICRANTHOCEREUS IN CULTIVATION

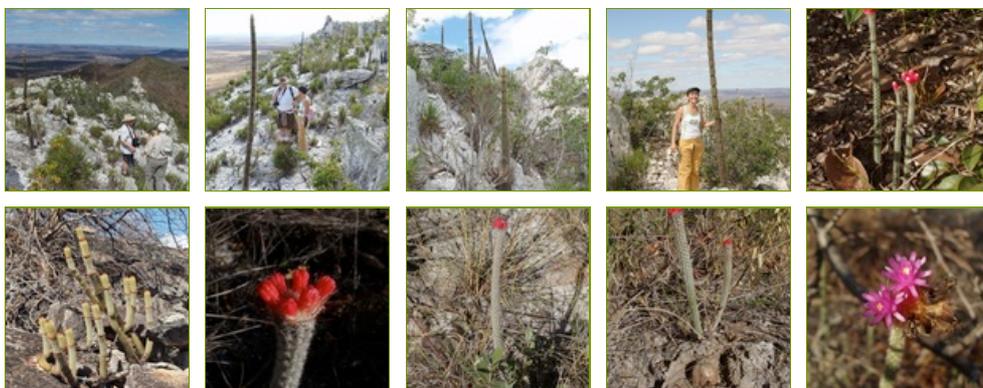
All these plants have similar requirements in cultivation, although some are easier than others. They enjoy heat and the sunniest place you can give them, with a winter minimum of 10° C (50° F). The growing medium should be acidic and sharply-drained. You probably have a favorite mix of your own which already fits the bill. Ample rainwater (or acidified tap water) should be given in summer and, particularly, in autumn when the plants flower and grow the most. These are tropical plants from eastern Brazil, so they thrive in heat. You only have to see the excellent results obtained in places with a climate like Southern California to appreciate their potential. If watered insufficiently the stems may stop growing and may even die back from the tip.

With plants from the subgenus *Micranthocereus* such as *M. densiflorus* and *M. polyanthus*, flowers will begin to appear on single stems 15 cm long. Other species, notably *M. auriazureus* and *M. streckeri*, need to be much larger. The flowers are produced from a modified zone on one side of the stem where the areoles develop extra bristles. The flowers are tubular and small (*Micrantho* means small flowers) but are produced in large numbers, probably as an adaptation toward hummingbird pollination. They are often bi-colored, with pink or red on the outer petals and yellow or white inside. The resulting fruits are small, red when ripe, and contain black seeds in a pulp. The seeds are easy to raise (bearing in mind the need to keep them warm), and the seedlings quickly grow into attractively-spined little plants.

Grafting is commonly used to accelerate the development of seedlings, particularly in continental Europe, and the resulting plants are indistinguishable from those on their own roots. I would recommend this method of cultivation for fast results and easy long-term care, especially if high temperatures are difficult to maintain.

ARROJADOA

Seen throughout the trip, Arrojadoas are interesting cacti that bear ring cephalia. They were not covered in detail in our special issue due to recent detailed coverage in *CSJ* provided by Brazilian cactus expert Pierre Braun, but trip participants returned with many photos. Here are a few:



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