

# Graptopetalum mendozae

**G***raptopetalum mendozae* was newly published in 1997, but because the description appeared in the Mexican journal, and in Spanish, many English speakers remain unaware of its existence. However, its discovery and history are the stuff

Years ago, returning home from one of his last field trips, Uhl was passing through the northern part of Mexico's Veracruz state. A curious formation in the so-called Huastec region (a flat expanse dotted with small ancient volcanic cones) seemed to him to be prime habitat for an endemic species of stonecrop, but he lacked time to stop and explore. Some years later, realizing that he would likely never return to the Huastec region, Uhl wrote a letter to Miguel Cházaro and Charles Glass, explaining his hunch and advising that the volcanic cones of this area be explored.

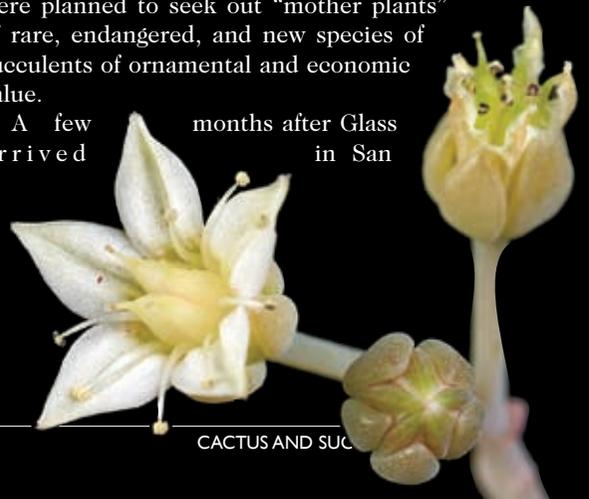
**C**harles ("Charlie") Glass (1934–1998) had moved from California to Mexico in 1991, accepting a job offered by Federico Gama, the director of CANTE, a non-government organization based in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato. Glass arrived with several botanical aims: to build a succulent-focused botanical garden and conservatory, to establish an associated herbarium and library and, most importantly, to teach young locals how to identify and propagate cacti, stonecrops, agaves, and other interesting native plants. As part of this ambitious and visionary project, field trips were planned to seek out "mother plants" of rare, endangered, and new species of succulents of ornamental and economic value.

A few months after Glass arrived in San

of legend, involving some of the best-known personalities in the succulent plant world.

Retired botany professor Charles Uhl of Cornell University has studied the Mexican Crassulaceae (the stonecrop family) for many decades, counting chromosomes and conducting hybridization experiments aimed at unraveling the complex genetic heritage of its many species. He is well known among the scholars of this family, having published numerous papers on the topic, and he also undertook several field trips to different parts of the Mexican Republic in the stonecrop quest. Some live collections were carried home to his laboratory, and many were pressed and dried to serve as permanent herbarium specimens.

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Miguel de Allende he contacted Mario Mendoza-García, director of a small elementary school in Alcoer, a tiny village 6 km to the west. It turned out to be a good match, and after just a few field trips Mario became so interested in botany and plant propagation that he joined the CANTE staff. Mario proved a versatile field worker, and under Charlie's tutelage he developed a good eye for interesting plants and became an adept rock climber and rappeller. This dynamic duo visited nearby and remote localities, and together they unearthed many novelties. Some were published, but many have languished since Charlie's untimely death in early 1998.

In November 1992, at Uhl's urging, Charlie, Mario, Federico Gama, and Marcos Sierra packed their VW Combi and headed out to northern Veracruz to explore the small volcanoes there. And—by god!—Uhl's prediction turned out to be right. Mario found a new *Graptopetalum* on November 21, and it bloomed the following April in his collection in Alcoer, Guanajuato. The plant was christened *G. mendozae* in honor of its discoverer<sup>1</sup>.

**B**oca Chango, the plant's type locality, is a volcanic plug near Corral Falso in the municipality of Tepetzintla. At 100–150 meters above sea level, the area harbors a tropical subperennial forest. Here *G. mendozae* grows

alongside orchids, the cycad *Dioon edule*, and species of *Selenicereus*, *Peperomia*, and *Agave*.

*G. mendozae* is most closely related (both geographically and phylogenetically) to *G. paraguayense* ssp. *bernalense*, which is also known only from an isolated volcanic plug, el peñon Bernal de Horcasitas, in southern Tamaulipas, where it grows at 700–800 meters<sup>2,3</sup>. *G. mendozae* is one of the few species in the genus that defies its very name in having a purely white corolla. In other words, the petals completely lack dots (*grap-*to = dot, *petalum* = petals).

So far, the geographic distribution of this species encompasses just three volcanic plugs (cerro Boca Chango, cerro Tenecuila, and cerro Ayacaxtli) between Corral Falso, Tlacolula and Tepenhuauc. For this reason *G. mendozae* must be considered rare in wild, although it is now common in cultivation, as CANTE distributed many cultivated specimens. Readily available, it is fast growing and easy to propagate by cuttings. 🌱

Photos: J Etter and M Kristen

#### REFERENCES

- 1 Glass C, Cházaro M. 1997. Una nueva especie de *Graptopetalum* (Crassulaceae) del norte de Veracruz. *Cactáceas y Suculentas Mexicanas* 42: 79–82.
- 2 Kimmach M, Moran R. 1986. *Graptopetalum paraguayense*: a history and a new subspecies. *Cact Succ J* (US) 58: 48–56.
- 3 Acevedo-Rosas R, Cameron K, Sosa V, Pell S. 2004. A molecular phylogenetic study of *Graptopetalum* (Crassulaceae) based on ETS, ITS, *rpl16*, and *trnL-F* nucleotide sequences. *Amer J Bot* 91(7): 1099–1104.