

## Press release

### Cactus of the Year 2023: the Red Cap Cactus

A cactus that does not exist in nature but is probably the world's most frequently sold globular cactus: the Red Cap Cactus was chosen by the cactus societies of the three German-speaking countries Germany, Austria, and Switzerland as Cactus of the Year 2023.

Red ball on a green stem: this is how the Cactus of the Year presents itself in flower stores, garden centers and department stores. The attractive bright red color was the reason for the name "Erdbeerkaktus" in German-speaking countries. The scientific name is *Gymnocalycium friedrichii* 'Hibotan'. This is a cultivar, created by selecting mutants that lacked leaf green.

The plant bodies of the parent species *Gymnocalycium friedrichii*, which is native to the dry forest of northern Paraguay, are naturally olive green to brown. This coloration results from the mixture of the leaf green (chlorophyll) with reddish pigments (betacyans). In the variety 'Hibotan', however, the body is pure red due to the absence of leaf green.

In the 1940s, two chlorophyll-free, red seedlings are said to have appeared in a Japanese cactus nursery during a sowing of *Gymnocalycium friedrichii*. Since they were not viable due to the lack of leaf green, they were immediately grafted onto a green rootstock and thus provided with the necessary nutrients by the grafting rootstock. By grafting the abundant side shoots, the plants were further propagated and eventually commercialized as the cultivar 'Hibotan'.

Botanical laymen can easily mistake the Red Cap Cactus on the green rootstock for its flower. They do not realize that these are two different species. With good care, however, the strawberry cactus can indeed bloom: then bell-shaped, pinkish-white flowers appear that last for several days.

The Red Cap Cactus is a representative of a series of color mutants more or less leaf green-free of different cactus species and hybrids, which exist in various colorings – red, pink, yellow or almost black. Nowadays they are produced in large quantities mainly in South Korea and then exported worldwide. Mostly they are grafted on the three-ribbed cactus *Hylocereus undatus* (*Selenicereus undatus*). This grafting rootstock is vigorous and easy to propagate, but it does not tolerate cold: at permanent temperatures below 12 °C it rots easily and with it the grafted plant. This means that the Red Cap Cactus, which is often regarded only as a decorative element, can easily become a disposable product that survives only a few years, if at all.

However, with proper care, which must be adapted to the grafting rootstock (temperature above 12 °C in winter, no permanent drying out of the substrate, bright and slightly sunny location), a longer culture is quite possible. Grafting it onto a more robust rootstock (e.g., *Eriocereus jusbertii* or *Echinopsis*) contributes to this. This way the Red Cap Cactus can give pleasure for many years. It then joins the many other species of the form-rich cactus family, whose cultivation at the window, on the balcony or in the greenhouse has become an attractive and fulfilling hobby for so many plant lovers.

For more information on the Cactus of the Year (and other questions about cacti and other succulents), please contact:

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