

The succulent plant collections of the principal botanical garden of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow

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The succulent plant collection of the principal botanical garden of the Russian Academy of Sciences was founded 1945 concurrently with the foundation of the garden itself. The basis was formed by plants that were mainly brought from Germany. Only a couple of dozen different taxa were cultivated at that time. The collection was placed in the orangery, occupying a surface of 230 m², and was closed to the public. According to an inventory in the mid-1980s, the collection at that time numbered more than 1000 taxa of cacti and other succulent plants. In the course of the economic crisis faced by Russia in the early 1990s, the diversity of the collection declined steeply. In the year 2001 I started my position as curator of the cactus collection, after having studied at the Institut für Systematische Botanik der Universität Zürich, and after obtaining my scientific degree. The cactus collection was in a desolate state at that time, and many plants had not been repotted for a long time. Labels and other documentation of the collection were partly lost. I started completely to rearrange the collection, and here the experience gained in Zürich has been of great help. We now place special emphasis on plants with known wild origin. i.e. with field numbers and information on their original collecting places. In this context I am especially grateful to my Swiss friends and colleagues, namely the staff at the Sukkulente-Sammlung Zürich, as well as A. Hofer, W. Uebelmann, J. & A. Lüthy, U. Eggenschwiler, W. Rösli und R. Hoffmann, and outside Switzerland to the Director of the Botanical Institute at Bonn, W. Barthlott, and my Austrian colleague G. Neuhuber.

The work at the cactus collection is organized in a similar manner to that at the Sukkulente-Sammlung Zürich, where the staff are responsible both for the display collection and the "back-up" collections. Help is also provided by many cactus friends, of which I would like to name especially G. Popov, A. Sidorov, Y. Schinkarenko, V. Gapon, E. Petrishev etc. Thanks to our joint efforts, the cactus collection as of mid-2006 numbers 105 genera and 1329 taxa. We continue to actively add to the collection, for instance at present by raising material from seeds collected in Argentina.

For 2010 we plan to open a new orangery devoted to a nature-like planting of the cactus collection. This will be the largest conservatory in Russia, being 33.6 m high, and having a surface of 9500 m². Once completed, it will allow us to put on display the larger part of our collection, and continue its completion. Unfortunately, we do not currently have the large plants that we would like to have for planting in the new exposition. We shall be grateful for any help provided by colleagues.