Two choice African Sansevierias: S. hargeisana and S. hallii

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Introduction

Sansevieria is a genus in which around 70 species are currently recognised (Chahinian, 2005). Many of these are large growing and hence need a reasonable amount of space to accommodate them. In my experience the two species showcased here are relatively slow growing and are therefore choice collectors’ items. I grow most of my sansevierias as house or conservatory plants, provide them with winter warmth and they are watered all year around. My Sansevieria collection is mostly accommodated in a range of ceramic pots or other unglazed pots making them a doubly attractive feature of the windowsills (Figs. 1 & 2).

Two choice African Sansevierias: S. hargeisana and S. hallii
by Colin C. Walker

Fig. 1
Sansevieria hargeisana in a 10cm diameter pot.

Fig. 2
Sansevieria hallii in an 11cm diameter pot.
Sansevieria hallii

This species has been in cultivation since the 1950s and was known as Sansevieria 'Baseball Bat' because of the leaf shape, until it was formally described as Sansevieria hallii by Chahinian (1996).

I have grown this species for 25 years with my original plant being a gift from Juan Chahinian three years before he had published the name. In my care it is fairly slow-growing, again like S. hargeisana, making it a desirable plant for those with limited space. Fig. 2 shows a young plant growing in a pale speckled coffee-coloured pot. It has immature tongue-shaped leaves in the centre and the stem is a rhizome, growing mostly underground, but a small piece of above-ground stem also shown in Fig. 2. Mature leaves are highly succulent and indeed baseball bat-shaped. In my largest specimen leaves are at most 30 cm long, but are recorded to grow up to 60 cm or more in length. These have a deep round channel with acute membranous edges, pronounced longitudinal lines with somewhat indistinct horizontal banding and a roughened surface.

Surprisingly I have only flowered this species once (Fig. 3). It belongs to a group of about 10 species in the genus that produce capitate inflorescences with the flowers.
clustered into a single “head”, unlike the majority of sansevierias that have tall, elongated flower spikes. The inflorescence is produced below soil level with each flower being about 10 cm long, white with a pink tinge and a slight fragrance reminiscent of the scent of hyacinth. As with all sansevierias, individual flowers open in the evening and last only a single night. It was suggested by Chahinian (1996) that flowers produced at ground level might suggest a mammal as the pollinator, although as far as I am aware there is as yet no evidence to support this proposal, hence field observations are needed to confirm or refute this hypothesis. In contrast, moths have been observed as pollinators of other sansevierias producing tall inflorescences bearing nocturnally-opening flowers.

Sansevieria hallii was originally described from south east Zimbabwe but is now known to occur in northern South Africa (van Jaarsveld, 2016). Similar plants, yet to be formally identified as this species, have also been found in central Mozambique (Rulkens & Baptista, 2009), so it is possible that it might turn out to be moderately widespread across south east Africa. The species is reasonably variable and a number of cultivars are available at least in the UK and USA including ‘Blue Bat’, ‘Lundi Bat’ and ‘Pink Bat’, but I know nothing about their availability in New Zealand.

The species name commemorates Harry Hall (1906–1986) who collected the original plant. He was a British succulent plant enthusiast who spent half his life in South Africa as curator of succulents at Kirstenbosch Botanic Garden, Cape Town.

References


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Scenic snowfalls in central Scotland... challenging conditions for even the most enthusiastic succulent growers!

Photo by Marjorie Thorburn.