

Succulents contained

Eulychnia acida

by Colin C Walker

Layout by Alice Vanden Bon

My plant (Figs. 1 & 2) was acquired at the Scottish Zone Show auction in 2018. It came in a plastic pot and was repotted into what I consider to be an upturned beehive-style pot which is an unglazed terracotta pot with rustic charm. The plant has therefore only been in my collection for four years, during which time it has grown steadily but relatively slowly, so I am unlikely to see this plant grow to maturity and flower during my lifetime!

The plant came labelled as *Eulychnia acida*. The generic name comes from the Greek meaning 'true torch' or 'candlestick' for the columnar stems, whilst '*acida*' refers to the sour-tasting fruit. *Eulychnia* has been the subject of a significant amount of recent research with the paper by Merklinger et al (2021) being amongst the most recent. The genus currently consists of eight recognised species with a single species, *E. ritteri*, from Peru, confirmed as

being distinct in this study. The rest are endemic to Chile. They form moderately-branched large shrubs to small trees up to about 5m tall. One of the attractions of these plants is their fierce spination (Fig. 2): *E. acida* spines can be up to 20cm long. For such large plants the flowers are relatively small and campanulate (bell-shaped) up to 7×5cm. Merklinger et al (2021) in their study of the evolutionary history of this genus conclude that the current taxonomy may not accurately reflect the true generic diversity. For example, their evolutionary family trees include two currently unidentified species.

Whenever I add a plant to my collection, I try to confirm its identification. Is my plant correctly identified? I may never have the answer to this question as I will need to see flowers before a confirmed identification can be applied but my plant does seem to match *E. acida* as presently understood.

LITERATURE:

Merklinger, F F et al (2021) Quaternary diversification of a columnar cactus in the driest place on earth. *Amer. J. Bot.* **108**(2): 184–199.



Fig. 1 *Eulychnia acida*, 50cm tall in a 22cm-diameter pot



Fig. 2 Close-up of *E. acida* (Photographs by the author)