For over twenty years now I’ve been cultivating a garden on the Costa del Sol of southern Spain. Many of my plants were brought in from “The Exotic Collection” in the south of England 22 years ago, when some 20 tons were transported overland. When first set out, the plants were covered with a double layer of green shade netting to prevent burning from the strong Mediterranean sun. Today they luxuriate in a climate nearly ideal for growing succulents.

Our garden receives an average annual rainfall of 25 inches, but over the last 22 years we have exceeded 50 inches of rain on one occasion and had as little as eight inches a year for three years running. Fluctuations in rainfall are minor horticultural challenges (a single wet year often more difficult to endure than several dry ones), but we are also in a winter rainfall area, complicating matters for many popular succulents. We get rain normally from the middle of September through to April or May, when temperatures normally do not drop much below 40°F at night. But in February 2006 temps fell to 27°F, so the occasional frost is not unheard of. Fortunately, nighttime cold snaps are mitigated by sharp daytime temperature shifts; winter daytime temperatures can reach the high 70s in the shade, on occasion higher. And during the dry summer months daytime temps are invariably in the high 90s. I’ve recorded as high 110°F.

In this and the articles that follow I plan to cover a wide range of genera, mostly species I have originally raised from seed in England. I have had many wonderful successes in transferring my plants to a totally different climate (not least of all in their flowering qualities), and there have been some notable disappointments. I was particularly worried the winter when rainfall exceeded 50 inches, but stood amazed at how the plants responded, most not turning a hair at such a soaking! In contrast, hail damage suffered last November combined with an unusually wet winter led to significant losses. Such are the trials of any gardener.

As conscientious gardeners we tend to think that we should plant only after first considering the habitat conditions most preferred by our subjects. I have discovered that this is not entirely necessary—our favorite plants are remarkably adaptable, and forgiving. And with this wonderful hobby, one never stops learning, because the plants never stop teaching. Hopefully these articles will encourage you to experiment with a wider range of cacti and succulents in your garden.

**Cyphostemma juttae** (Namibia)

Cyphostemmas are members of the Grape Family (Vitaceae), and they make wonderful plants for landscaping. No two plants are quite the same as regards their knobbly stem shape. I have two large ones in my garden, both planted in pockets on a sloping rock face. These plants are now 44 years old—I know because I grew them from seed in England. For a number of years they were pot grown, then for four years they were planted in a greenhouse bed with free root run. They were transported to Spain bare root 22 years ago to be planted outside, and immediately their growth rate doubled. The tallest is now nearly six feet, producing large fleshy leaves during the growing season, and going leafless from October or November through to May. Both flower profusely and produce attractive clusters of small reddish fruits which, as they are poisonous, remain on the plants untouched by birds or other creatures.

I have quite a number of younger specimens raised from seed sown now 20 years ago, and these,