



Orchid farm in Mexico
photo by John Chalmers



Around Manzanillo
RV Travel
Nature's Wonders
History and Mythology
Food and Drink
Spanish Skills
Path to Citizenship

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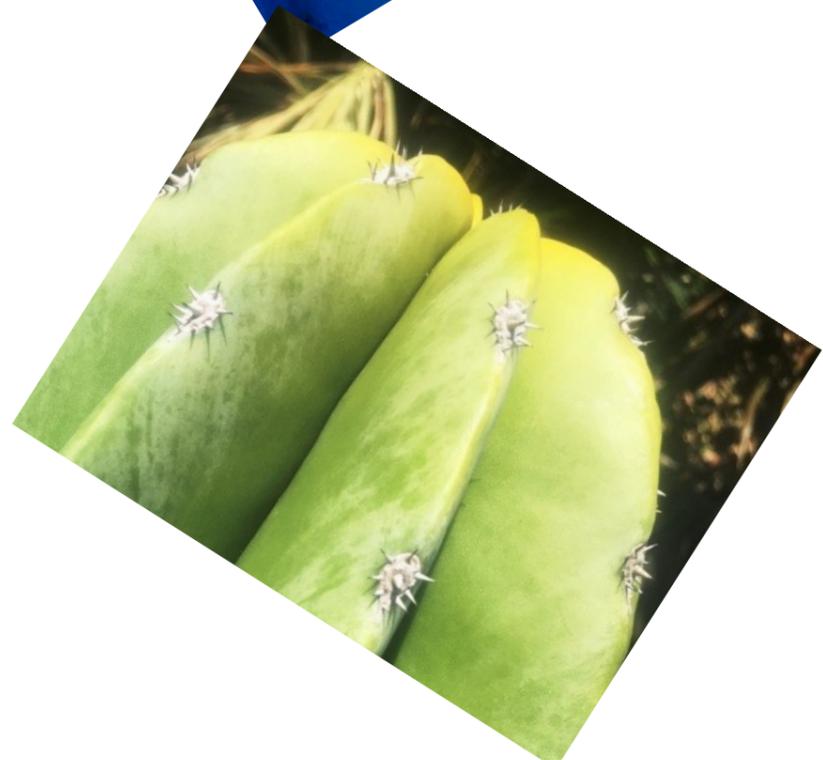
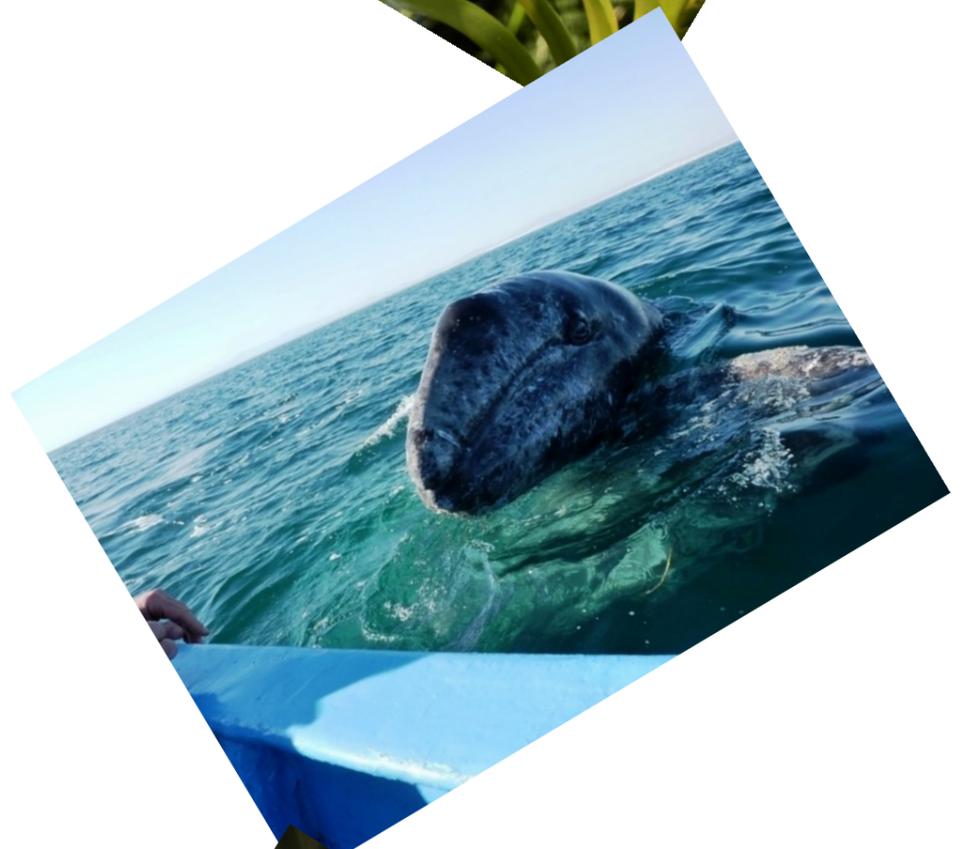
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To send submissions for possible inclusion in the magazine, please send to the editor by 15th of each month. We are always looking for writers or ideas on what you would like us to see as topics for the magazine.

Article submissions:

- Preferred subjects are Manzanillo and Mexico
- All articles should be 1000 words or less or may be serialized or 500-750 words if accompanied by photos
- Pictures are welcome
- Comments, letters to the editor, articles, photos and advertisements are always welcome

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Among the Beauty of Orchids

story and photos by John Chalmers

Near the small town of La Central, close to the port city of Manzanillo on the Pacific coast of Mexico in the state of Colima, is to be found the largest orchid farm in the country. Established in 2002 by proprietor Fidel Maza, the operation has grown to 18 hectares in size, or over 44 acres.



Under the netting and among a field of golden orchids at the Viveplants orchid farm near La Central, our tour lined up for a group photo.

Not in greenhouses but, under protective netting, the farm produces orchids in bloom all year long, thanks to the perfect climate for the beautiful flowers. The Viveplants orchid farm is the result of Fidel's long-standing love affair with the plants. He has studied orchids in Japan where he completed a degree in horticulture and has travelled throughout the Orient to pursue his interest.

The farm employs local personnel. Fidel, his wife Elsa, and their four children - Fidel Jr., Iván, Laura and Marcela - all work in the operation. In the Netherlands, Fidel continued his study of orchids, earning a master's degree there, where children Iván and Laura were born. As all the family speaks English, so tours for visitors are easily understood!

In early January, along with many other snowbirds escaping winter in Canada and the United States, I joined a group on a fascinating tour of the orchid farm, led by Fidel himself.

We learned a great deal about orchids as he described their cycle of growing, as well as challenges of marketing the flowers. Fidel answered all our questions about marketing the flowers and explained the effects of climate, weather and storms on orchid growth and production.

Originally established as a wholesale producer of orchids, the company has seen excellent success recently in expanding its retail operations, particularly in the sale of potted plants rather than cut flowers.

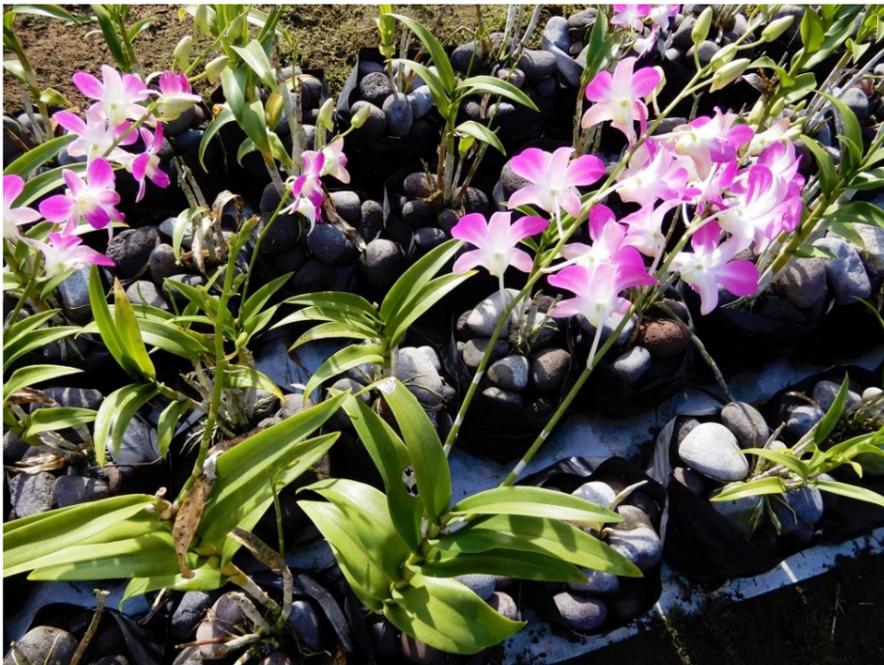


An orchid is the featured image in the logotype image of Viveplants.



Proprietor Fidel Maza explains the significance of the carved stone he commissioned to be placed at the location where the farm started.

...Among the Beauty of Orchids



As seen here, orchids are grown in pots of stones, not dirt, which they don't need, and also to provide better drainage.

Fidel explained the characteristics of orchids, from roots to petals, pollination and genetics, and spoke of the development of hybrid species in a world that loves the flowers. "Most orchids are tropical plants," he stated, which are his specialty, and added that, "There are 25 to 30 thousand species of orchids in nature, and over 70 thousand species have been developed as hybrids."



Impressive orchids are to be found in all areas of the farm.

Orchids are grown in several colors at the farm, although most of them are white, which are preferred for Mexican cultural interests and occasions such as weddings. "The flowers are harvested every other day," said Fidel, "and they are harvested at 70% bloom for marketing."

It takes six years to grow the plants and flowers to be ready for sale, and at Viveplants, visitors have the opportunity to purchase both cut flowers and potted plants.



The beauty of the orchids is appreciated most when they are seen close-up.

The shop also carries related items such as made-in-Mexico orchid jewelry. Attractive baseball caps make a fine and functional souvenir of a visit. Plans for the future may include adding facilities to provide breakfast and lunch to enrich a visit to the farm.

Our tour concluded with coffee and soft drinks for refreshments from our gracious host, Fidel, and time to browse the displays of orchids and merchandise. Several of us chose to purchase orchids and, at no extra cost to the tour, we were given a spectacular lei of orchid blossoms. We left for our homes in Mexico, knowing far more than when we arrived, festooned with fabulous flowers that are admired all around the world.



The map identifies areas of the farm, in which over 50,000 orchids are growing in each section.

Visitors are welcome and tours can be arranged by contacting Fidel Maza at fmaza@viveplants.com, local telephone 314-33-135-40 or mobile 044-314-35-319-19. www.viveplants.com

you can reach John at john.chalmers@manzanillosun.com

... more pics follow

...Among the Beauty of Orchids



Our tour group gathered for an explanation from Fidel about how orchids grow.



Fidel explained the growth cycle of orchids to visitors, using examples of the plants at different stages.



White orchids are grown in abundance at Viveplants as they are widely used in cultural and festive occasions.



Under their protective netting only white orchids are grown in this area of the farm.



An expert on orchid production, Fidel Maza has travelled widely in his study of the plants.



Orchids of many colors are grown at Viveplants for wholesale and retail sales, and can be purchased by visitors.

...Among the Beauty of Orchids



A tour of the operation provides visitors a chance to see how orchids are planted and grown for the market.



The facilities in which the orchids are grown can be seen by visitors and better yet, through an arranged and informative tour.



LEFT
Orchids are seen at various stages of their growth in a tour of Viveplants and Fidel can answer any questions about the flowers.

RIGHT
In his presentation to visitors on tour, Fidel pointed out that orchids are not parasitic, as some people may have thought.



Orchids abound in the various fields at Viveplants, where the Mexican climate is very suitable for their year-round growth.

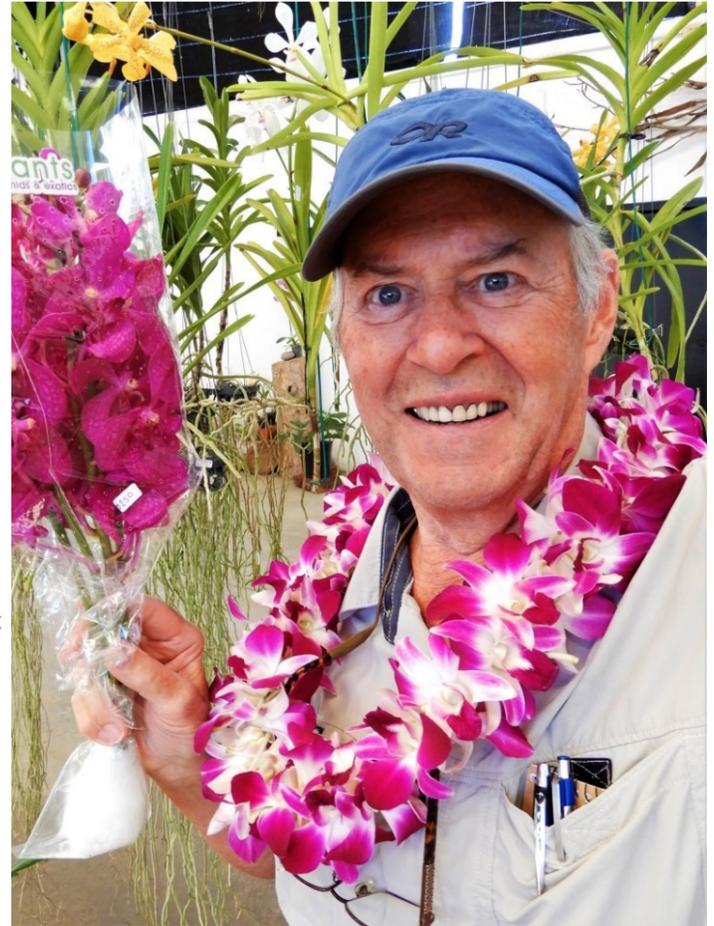


The beauty of this orchid is undeniable and a perfect subject for a camera!

...Among the Beauty of Orchids



LEFT
Boxed and ready for shipment or sale, orchids are available in many colors.



RIGHT
Author Chalmers with the orchid lei he received in the group tour and the cut flowers he purchased.



LEFT
Since its establishment as Viveplants, the operation has continued to grow with expansion of wholesale and retail operations.

RIGHT
Rich Taylor and his wife, Chris, were interviewed in Spanish for national Mexican television about the orchid farm by a television crew present on the same day the group tour was taken.



BELOW
From atop Cerro del Toro, the largest mountain in the area, the town of La Central can be seen in the center of the photo. The dark squares to the right are the nets covering the orchids growing at Viveplants. Just beyond is the Pacific Ocean.



The "FUN" Fundraiser of the Season is Thursday, February 20th



Mexico's Largest Beach Bocce Ball Tournament

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Baja for Snowbirds

by Dan and Lisa Goy

Baja Mexico – Offering Snowbirds adventure for a day, a week or months at a time.

Baja California

“Baja California is a unique, recreational *Paradise-in-the-Sun* dominated by its 2,000 mile coastline. It pampers the jet set in its cities, hotels and resorts, without the high-rise, high-tension setting common in other resort areas. Those craving outdoor adventures find a largely undeveloped, beautiful land where escape to another environment and culture is only a step away. Few visit Baja without knowing they have been in a very special place, truly a magnificent peninsula.” **Jack Williams, Baja author.**

Not surprisingly, tens of thousands of Canadian Snowbirds head south every winter, the majority to the US, the more adventurous to Mexico, and some even farther south. Baja California and Baja California Sur (collectively, Baja), Mexico have much to offer for almost every Canadian Snowbird, even for those not-so-adventurous types. Many Canadians have experienced Los Cabos (the Capes), Cabo San Lucas (Cape St. Luke) and San José del Cabo (St. Joseph of the Cape), very popular destinations for cruise ships and all-inclusive resorts, without even realizing they are on Baja California Sur, Mexico. Even though many Canadians spend the entire winter in and around Los Cabos, this is only the preverbal “*tip of the iceberg*” of Mexico’s frontier.

Valle de Guadalupe-Wine Country

With great access from Tecate, this can be just a day trip or perhaps an overnigher. Who knew such wonderful Wine Country existed just across the American-Mexican border? Officially referred to as *Ruta del Vino de Baja California*, this 70 km drive on Highway 3 later puts you in the center of almost 100 different wineries. This region enjoys a Mediterranean temperate climate with perfect conditions for growing grapes and making high quality red and white wine. El Valle de Guadalupe is 13 miles from the coast. At an elevation of about 1000ft, the valley benefits from an oceanic condition called “upwelling”. Even though temperatures may reach up to 100°C in the daytime, in the evening, moist marine air comes flooding in to cool things off. *This Wine Country rivals anything you have experienced in the Okanagan, Napa Valley or Niagara Escarpment.*



Baja California and Baja California Sur, Mexico

Ensenada

Locally referred to as *La Cenicienta del Pacífico*, “The Cinderella of the Pacific”, Ensenada is the third-largest city in this northern Baja state and a more relaxing place to visit than the much larger Tijuana or Mexicali. Ensenada has always been very popular with tourists from the north and, in more recent years, has emerged as a cruise ship destination. The old part of town features Hussong’s Cantina, the oldest in Mexico, where the Margarita was invented, that has seen many famous patrons such as Bing Crosby, John Wayne, Marilyn Monroe, Steve McQueen and Ronald Reagan.

This historic area has dozens of shops and restaurants to enjoy and nearby a great fish market, cultural center and art gallery. South of town is Punta Banda and *La Bufadora* or Blow Hole,

...Baja for Snowbirds



La Bufadora, Ensenada

the action of this natural feature and gauntlet of vendors makes this a unique experience, well worth the drive. Spending a couple of days in Ensenada not a problem as every kind of hotel, motel and RV park is available.

Catavina – Central Baja

Located in the center of Baja, at over a 1000 feet, this entire region has much to offer hikers, naturalists, geology buffs and students of cave art alike. The landscape that is nothing less than enchanting includes boulder fields and very unique flora, including cactus such as the Cirios or Boojum. Catavina, and much further south in central Baja, features over 300 cave art (also known as pictographs) locations that were added to UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites in 1993. Visiting these prehistoric paintings, estimated to be about 9000 years old, can be as easy as a short 15 minute walk from Hwy 1 or as adventurous as a 2-day mule trip sleeping under the stars.



The gang heads out for whale watching

Grey Whales of Guerrero Negro

Guerrero Negro (Spanish for Black Warrior) is all about the whales and, to a lesser extent, salt! There are 3 locations on the

Baja to see the Pacific Grey Whales in the winter. In our opinion, nothing compares to the experience provided in Guerrero Negro. Beginning in the Bering and Chukchi seas and ending in the warm-water lagoons of Mexico's Baja peninsula, thousands of California Grey Whales make the round-trip journey each year through 12,500 miles of coastline.

Travelling both night and day, the Gray Whale averages approximately 120 km (80 miles) per day. By mid-December to early January, the majority of the Gray Whales are usually found between Monterey and San Diego, where they are often seen from shore. The animals travel in small groups to the coastal waters of Baja California and the southern Gulf of California, where they breed and the young are born. Whale watching in the salt lagoons is nothing short of extraordinary. Some characterize this experience as breathtaking and a true wonder of the world.

The mothers often push the calves right up to the boats and you can actually touch them, up close and personal for sure. You can take your RV, simply drive and motel it, or engage a bus tour out of San Diego to see this wondrous event. In March of this year, there were over 2,700 whales in Scammon's Lagoon. Our favourite whale watching company is Malarrimo. They have an RV park, motel, gift shop, convenience store and a great restaurant.

Heroic Mulegé, Hotel Serenidad & Bahía Concepción

Mulegé, a date palm oasis located on the mouth of the Mulegé River on the Sea of Cortez, is the site of the only battle where the Mexicans were successful in preventing the invasion of American troops during the American-Mexican conflict (1846 -1848). This sleepy village is very popular with RVers who congregate on the many beaches in the Bay of Concepción, a short drive south. Other snowbirds have longer-term residences, both in town and in communities throughout the region.



Mulegé's date palm oasis

The Hotel Serenidad is a Baja legend, as is the owner Don Johnson, with plenty of clean, affordable rooms at reasonable rates and a great Saturday night pig roast, a Mulegé tradition! Make your way out to Ray's Place and you are in for a real

...Baja for Snowbirds

treat. Lots to see and do in this small village, very comfortable with an equal number of foreigners as locals during the winter.



Entryway to the Hotel Serenidad

Bahía Concepción lies just south of Mulegé and 625 miles south of the Tijuana border. Bahía Concepción is one of the most beautiful spots in Baja. The bay is just over 20 miles long and varies in width from two to five miles. Over the past 40 years, it has become the final destination for many Baja RV travelers. A lot of seasoned Baja RV travelers simply aim straight for Bahía Concepción with no intention of going any farther. Many first timers arrive and they are absolutely overwhelmed with the beauty and serenity of this area...somehow they just cannot manage to leave, often extending their vacation plans by days or even weeks. The dramatic scenery along the western coastline of Bahía Concepción is the ultimate photo opportunity for almost all Baja visitors that travel this far south.

Loreto; Birthplace of the Californias

Founded in 1697, Loreto was the first permanent settlement anywhere in the Californias, including the US state to the north and was the capital of both Californias for 132 years. Once a sleepy village where summer's heat made for a laid-back pace for locals and visitors, very little changed until the 1960s when anglers began to learn about the dorado, yellowtail, marlin, sailfish, grouper, rock sea bass, roosterfish and other species



being caught there. If you like to fish, this is the place to be. It is also known for great restaurants, a beautiful malecón (beachfront walk), and friendly people.

Loreto is also famous for "**Nuestra Señora de Loreto**" (Our Lady of Loreto) mission which was the first 17th century development that began the entire California mission system. The second of these missions is just outside of Loreto called **San Javier**. Loreto is very outdoorsy with the centre of town having great shopping for tourists in a kind of market atmosphere. Again, lots of Canadian snowbirds call Loreto home for the winter with easy access and an international airport.

La Paz

Spanish for "**The Peace**", La Paz is the capital of Baja Sur and an important regional commercial center, having a metropolitan population of roughly 350,000 because of surrounding towns like el Centenario, el Zacatal and San Pedro. On May 3, 1535, Hernán Cortés arrived in the bay by La Paz and named it Santa Cruz; he attempted to start a colony but abandoned his efforts after several years due to logistical problems. In 1596, Sebastián Vizcaíno arrived, giving the area its modern name, La Paz. It was once noted for its black pearls (metallic gray) that were harvested for over 400 years. In the late 1800s, the beautiful abalone shells themselves were harvested and shipped. By 1861, the population was about 800 people and was named a free port and was able to receive foreign goods.



Carnaval - La Paz

Now Pichilingue is the principal port and ferry terminal for ferries that depart to Topolobampo and Mazatlán on the Mexican mainland. By 1941, the pearling industry had gone entirely, as the pearl oyster disappeared due to overharvesting and disease. Nobel prize-winning writer, John Steinbeck, visited La Paz and based his book *The Pearl* on his experience.

...Baja for Snowbirds

La Paz is as close to an old-time Mexican City as you can find on Baja and eco-tourism is by far the major source of tourism income here as people come to enjoy its marine wonders, as well as its diverse and often unique terrestrial species endemic to the region. Its diving, snorkelling, swimming with whale sharks and kayaking are considered second to none. The Malecón (beach boulevard), Alvaro Obregón, is five kilometres long where you will find the best restaurants, hotels, night clubs, bars and specialty stores.



La Paz monument at city entrance

You can take a relaxing walk on its wide and well-illuminated sidewalks; or just simply enjoy its reddish sunsets that include live music on the weekends. The annual Carnival (Carnaval) in La Paz is held usually sometime in February, runs for 5 days and attracts tens of thousands of (mostly) Mexicans but is lots of fun for everyone who attends. We have had the opportunity to visit La Paz during Carnival and no one has ever been disappointed with the Parade that is held every day!



La Paz pearl on the malecón

Los Barriles - Wind Surfer and Kite Boarder Paradise, RVs too!

Los Barriles is located in Baja California Sur, on the Sea of Cortez coast, about halfway between La Paz, the capital of Baja California Sur, and Cabo San Lucas. It's a small town of around 5,000 residents, half of which are ex-patriots. Los Barriles is part of The East Cape region that comprises the entire eastern Sea of Cortez of the Baja peninsula from Punta Pescadero, just north of Los Barriles, south to the eastern edge of the new marina in San José del Cabo. There are a string of small settlements and villages including Santiago, La Ribera and Cabo Pulmo within the East Cape region. There are several RV parks in Los Barriles. Baja Sunrise is the favourite for our groups.



Kiteboarding in Los Barriles

Todos Santos and Hotel California

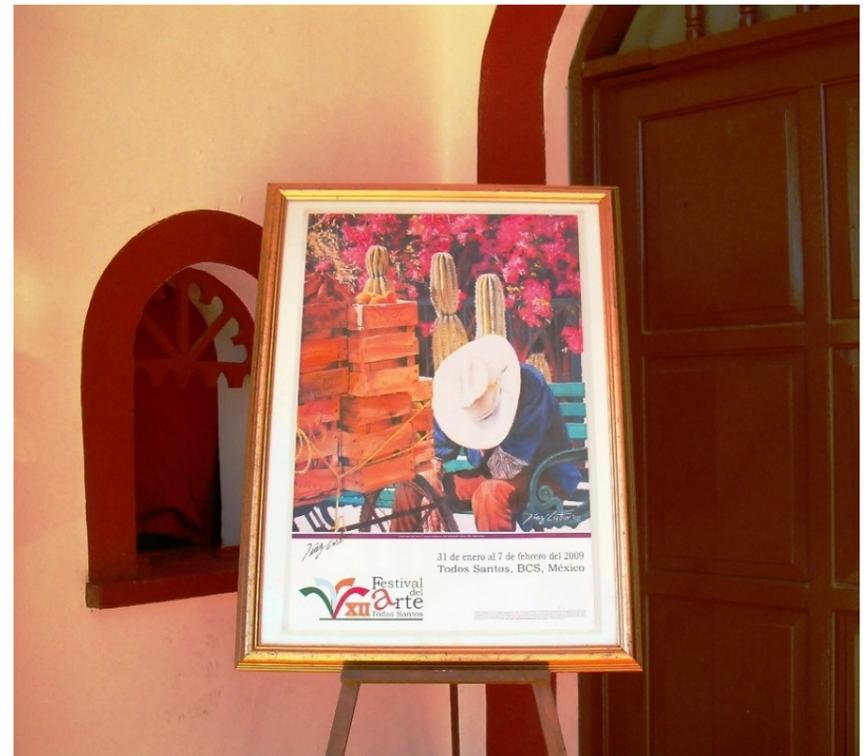
Spanish for "All Saints", this coastal oasis village was initially founded as a Mission, in 1724, and emerged as a major sugarcane producer. In addition to *The Hotel California*, a favorite stop here because of the name association with the song made famous by "The Eagles," Todos Santos has long been special with the mission Nuestra Señora del Pilar de La Paz, founded by father Jaime Bravo in 1723, as well as its theater, cultural center and museum that are often open to the public and tourists all year round.

...Baja for Snowbirds

This village hosts both an Art Festival and a Film Festival annually during the winter and there has been a gradual increase in tourist activity and a boom in real estate development. Todos Santos is replete with handicraft shops, owner-operated art galleries, upscale restaurants and boutique hotels. A favourite for us is Casa Bentley, a real treasure owned and operated by our friend Robert Bentley.

This is but a glimpse of what Baja California Mexico has to offer any snowbird.

Dan and Lisa Goy own and operate Baja Amigos RV Caravan Tours and have been camping and touring in Mexico since 1985. <http://www.bajaamigos.net>



Above right, Todos Santos art festival
Below, happy hour on Playa Médano, Cabo San Lucas



Right, Dan on the boogie board near Todos Santos
Left, Dan hiking in Catavina, Baja



Submitted by
Dan and Lisa Goy
Baja Amigos RV Caravan Tours
www.BajaAmigos.net

... more pics follow

...Baja for Snowbirds



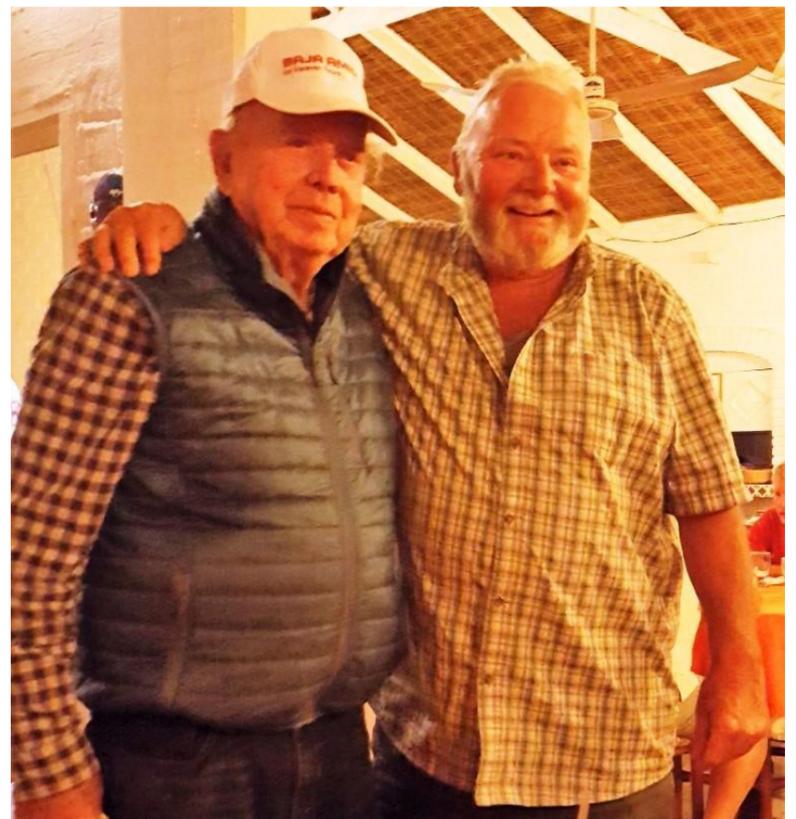
Baja 1000 - Ensenada to La Paz



Baja Sunrise RV Park, Los Barriles, Hwy 1



Blanket factory in Pescadero



Don Johnson and Dan Goy, Hotel Serenidad



Break on the way to Loreto

...Baja for Snowbirds



Hwy 1, Mulegé to Loreto



Kayaking near Loreto



Left, entrance to the Los Barriles area
Above, Riviera del Mar RV Park entrance, Loreto



Mike and Kelly at the Loreto overlook



Good fishing at the Loreto Marine Reserve

...Baja for Snowbirds



Fiesta dinner in Loreto



New Baja highway is much wider



Whale watching, Guerrero Negro



Breakfast at Oasis, Loreto



Whale shark of Playa Coyote



LA Cetto tasting room



CARNAVAL

MANZANILLO 2020

Alebrijes

del 13 al 16 de febrero del 2020



by Tommy Clarkson

Mexican Fence Post *Pachycereus marginatus*, *Cereus marginatus*, *Lemaireocereus marginatus*, *Marginocereus marginatus*, *Stenocereus marginatus*, *Cereus gemmatus* or *Stenocereus marginatus* var. *gemmaus*

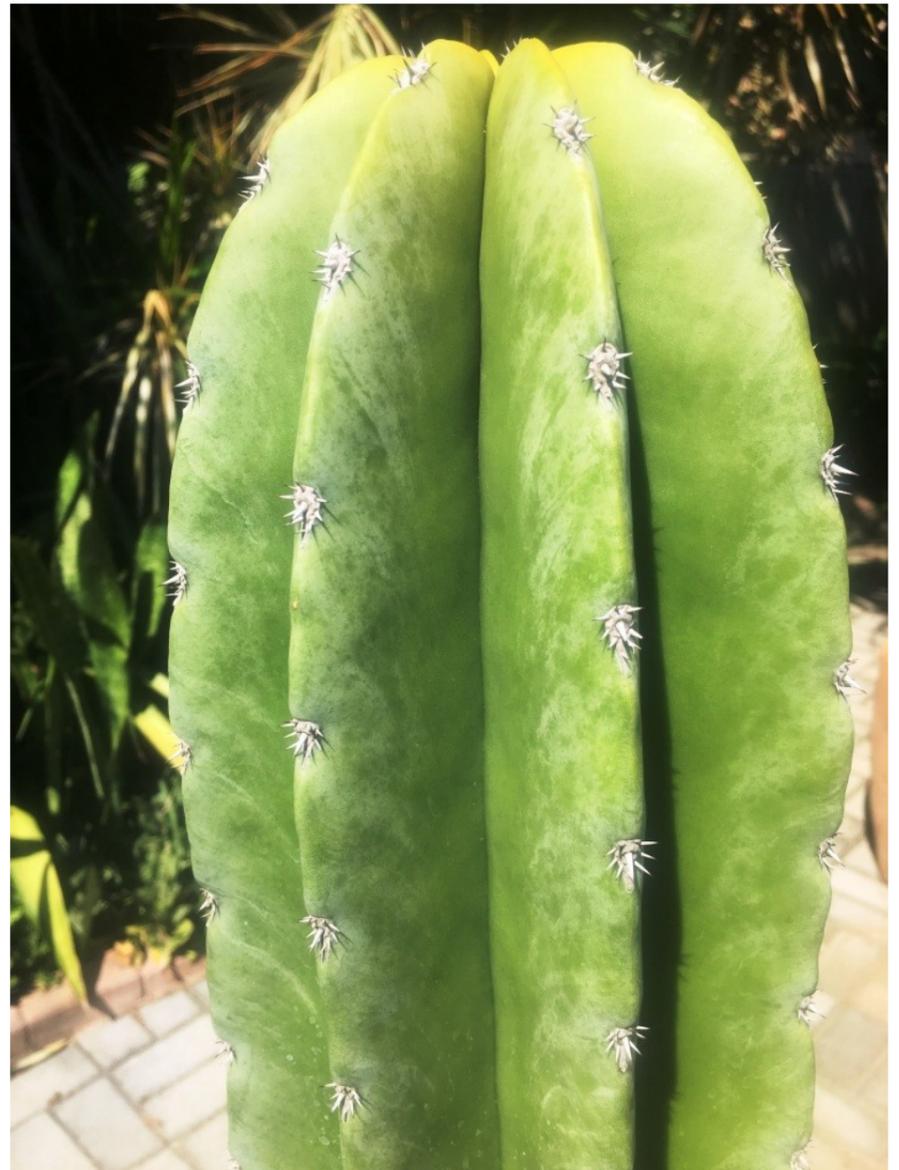
Family *Cactaceae*

Also known as Central Mexico Pipe Organ, Organ Cactus or Órgano

(Some plants' common names seem to fit them perfectly. Such is the case for the Mexican Fence Post. But, regarding its Latin designation, well, it seems everyone has a different opinion!)

But first, let's have a very brief discussion of the genus *Pachycereus*. (The preferred of the variety of possible genera cited above.) It contains some of the largest growing cacti in the world with one species reported to reach a height of 82 feet (24.99 meters). Ribbed, most are either a blue-green or a bright green in color. Like most columnar cacti, there is a substantive difference between small, newly-sprouted plants and the large, mature ones.

This is one of the easier cactus species to identify. Specifically, the Mexican Fence Post is an attractive, moderate to fast growing, clean-looking, column-like and rather tall cactus. (Some folks have recorded that their plants have grown up to three feet (91.44 cm) per year.) The kind shown here, to the best of my awareness, may grow to around ten to, potentially, twenty-feet (3.05-6.10 meters) tall. As it grows stems - each three to



Yes, like any self-respecting cactus, it has "protective aspects!"

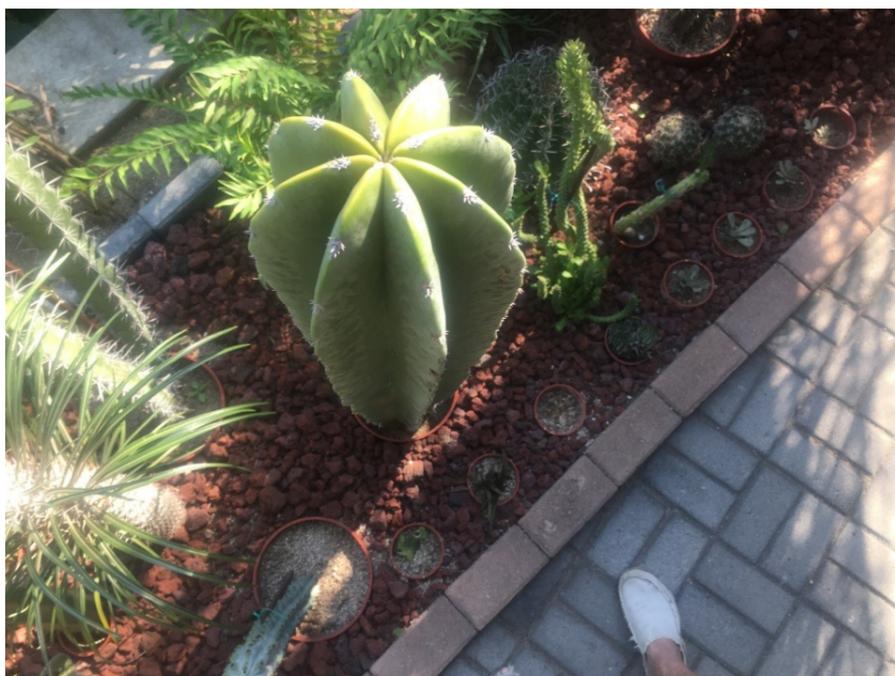
eight inches (.91-2.44 cm) across - they will branch out from its base and form a fence-like cluster of tall, cylindrical "posts". As a group, its overall width will reach around six feet (1.83 meters).

Each of these prickly pillars has five to seven, rather pronounced, ribs - hence the variant, different species. Areoles (the "cushions" from which spines arise) are vertically lined on the outside edges or margins. Each areole sports one to three yellowish central spines.

Each of these has five to nine radial spines. These begin yellow in color, but as they mature, they turn gray. From a ways off, this cactus looks striped as along those ridges run symmetrical rows of small, white thorns.

...Mexican Fence Post

When more mature - generally in the springtime - it produces flowers ranging in color from cream or light green through pink to light-red. As a rule, these appear at the topmost areoles. These small flowers are funnel-shaped and become round, marble to golf ball-sized, edible, dark-red, sweet fruits. Though a cactus, it likes to drink regularly. So, during the warmer season, the Mexican Fence Post appreciates being watered weekly. As long as it gets enough light, this stately cactus makes an excellent container plant - inside and out. It's used as a living fence, visual screen, statement plant against a solid wall or a large-scale living accent. Some are planted close together to form barriers, while others have been used as firebreak plants.



Each of these prickly pillars has five to seven, rather pronounced ribs.

Native to the semi-tropical areas of central, southwestern Mexico, locals sometimes cut the plants into sections, place these cuttings into the ground and then wire them together making a living fence in which to keep livestock.

(Which could, possibly, beg the rather bizarre question of why anyone would ever maintain - let alone fence in - deadstock!)

In that those spines aren't really of the hurtful sort, the Mexican Fence Post Cactus can be picked up when wearing gloves or - if careful - even bare hands. They've a rather sturdy constitution and are capable of taking temperatures down to twenty-five degrees Fahrenheit (-3.89 C°). They will grow in a variety of soil types as long as they are well drained. They need to be fully dry between waterings as, overwatered, they're susceptible to fungal diseases. Also they can rot if the soil is too moist or if they are kept in the shade with too little exposure to sunlight.

Their root system is not the strongest. As a result, the tall stems are vulnerable to wind damage as, once they have grown rather tall, they can sway in strong gusts and might break off halfway up. While this may well be the end of the solitary stem look, if left alone, new stems just might form at the edges of the break leading to branching - a rather rare phenomenon. From the animal kingdom, Mexican Fence Posts are prone to attacks from scale insects.

The Mexican Fence Post does not do well as a loner. They take on enhanced attractiveness when grown in multiples. So, if you have a hankering to create a living fence, you need only dig a deep, but narrow, trench and place the unrooted, but callused, cuttings in the hole. *Pretty simple, huh?*

Get your copy of The Civilized Jungle: Tropical Plants Facts and Fun From Ola Brisa Gardens [Volume I](#), and now [Volume II](#) is here!!

For back issues of "Roots", gardening tips, tropical plant book reviews and videos of numerous, highly unique eco/adventure/nature tours, as well as memorable "Ultimate Experiences" such as Tropical Garden Brunches

Visit us at... www.olabrisagardens.com



you can reach Tommy Clarkson at tommy@manzanillosun.com

The "FUN" Fundraiser of the Season is

Thursday, February 20th



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MAYAN MAGICAL MUNCHIES

as told by Kirby Vickery

I love Mexican food. I have always loved Mexican food. Not so much all the Southwestern American versions, but good Mexican food. I was surprised as a child that the food I got in Barcelona, Spain, didn't come close to what I thought it should be after growing up in El Paso and eating real Mexican food. I will not debate the authenticity of any of it. But I thought folks would like to see the top few historical references to the best food in the world.

1. Chocolate

Legions of chocoholics would argue that the Mayan "Food of the Gods," made from the toasted, fermented seeds of the cacao tree, is the New World's greatest gift to civilization. Though Cortés learned of chocolate from the Aztecs, they had acquired it through trade with the Maya, who first cultivated it about 3,000 years ago. Maya and Aztec aficionados drank their chocolate bitter and spicy; sugar was unknown before the conquest. Even today, chocolate in the Yucatán may be flavored with paprika, annatto or even pepper. But it was more than a drink to the Maya who believed it came from the gods and formed a bridge between heaven and earth. Cacao seeds were an early form of money, and archaeologists have uncovered counterfeit seeds made of clay.

2. Vanilla (*vainilla*)

The elixir is from the world's only known edible orchid. It was probably first cultivated by the Totonaca in the state of Veracruz and had become a common flavoring for the Maya's chocolate drinks by the 1500s. Vanilla, too, was adopted by the Aztecs, who introduced it to Cortés. Spanish and Portuguese explorers who brought it to Africa and Asia in the 16th century named it '*vainilla*,' or "little pod." Southern Mexico's jungle is still the only place the *Vanilla planifolia* orchid grows wild, pollinated by native, non-stinging bees that produce Maya honey. Today's prized Tahitian vanilla, which came from Mexican stock, requires hand-pollination. An interesting side note about the Aztec's bloodthirsty behavior toward their conquered enemies was that they would demand slaves and an annual tax from the vanquished. When they conquered the Totonaca, all they wanted was the vanilla.

3. Corn (*maíz*)

Every elementary-school kid knows corn was the most important food in the Americas. The Popul Vuh, the Maya "bible," attributes humankind's very existence to this domesticated strain of wild grass. In its creation myth, the "Creators and Makers" fashioned man from tender kernels of yellow and white corn after failed attempts with mud and wood. Though corn was a dietary staple in most of Mexico as long as 6,000 years ago, it was the Maya who first cultivated it around 2500 B.C., abandoning their nomadic ways to settle in villages surrounded by cornfields.

4. Chile

Chiles were cultivated in the Americas as long as 7,500 years ago. Blame Christopher Columbus for mistaking them as relatives of black pepper, native to southern Asia, but give him credit for spreading them throughout the world.

The release of endorphins, increased heart rate, mental stimulation and euphoria provoked by chiles' capsaicinoids—the ingredient that makes them taste hot—qualifies them as psychoactive plants. Southern Mexico's *Capsicum annum* species, with its many cultivars, is crucial to nearly every fiery cuisine in the world.

5. Tomatoes (*tomates*)

Even the Italians had to make do without tomato sauce before Columbus set out for the New World. Precursors originated in Peru, but the tomato as we know it came from the Yucatán, where the Maya cultivated it long before Cortés first encountered one in an Aztec market around 1520. Native versions were small, like cherry tomatoes, and probably yellow rather than red.

Two years after Cortés brought the tomato back to Spain, it made its way to Naples—then under Spanish rule—where invention of the pizza made tomato sauce a necessity of life. Once believed poisonous because they are related to the deadly nightshade, tomatoes are now a staple of nearly every cuisine in the world.

...Mayan Magical Munchies

6. Black beans (*frijoles negros*)

Archaeological digs indicate the black bean originated in southern Mexico and Central America more than 7,000 years ago. With their meaty flavor and velvety texture, black beans are still the favorite in and around the Yucatán, where they may turn up in almost any dish. They have spread widely throughout Latin America, the Caribbean, and the southern United States, becoming an important part of the many regional cuisines.

7. Avocado (*aguacate*)

From its origins in southern Mexico, where it was prized as an aphrodisiac—the Aztecs called it *ahuacatl*, meaning "testicle," and kept their daughters indoors during harvest season—the avocado spread north to the Rio Grande and south to central Peru before Europeans encountered it. The tree is one of the few that has 'male' and 'female' trees, with only the female tree bearing fruit. In an orchard, everybody gets along great when they have only one male tree for every nine females. The sexual association carried through the 19th century when growers who wanted to cultivate avocados commercially first had to mount a campaign to persuade the public that eating avocados did not equate to licentiousness. Mexico is still the world's main source of avocados.

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8. Sweet potato (*camote*)

Sweet potatoes are native to the tropics, from the Yucatán to Venezuela, and the Maya domesticated the plant at least 5,000 years ago. By 2500 B.C., sweet potatoes had spread throughout the Caribbean and South America. Sweet potatoes belong to the genus *Ipomoea*, which includes morning glories. Though commonly confused with the yam, what we know as yams are simply another variety of sweet potato. True yams are native to Africa; when slaves from that continent were deposited in North America they adopted sweet potatoes as a substitute for the tuber they had eaten in their homeland and called it by the familiar name.

9. Squash (*calabaza, calabacita*)

Though corn and beans are better-known Mexican natives, squash predates them by several thousand years; Maya people domesticated several varieties of squash as early as 8000 B.C. Oils from these seeds were the main source of dietary fat before the Spanish introduced beef and pork. Though the native plants included cucumber, zucchini, patty pan and butternut squash, great quantities of pumpkin (*la calabaza grande*) defines the Yucatán diet even today. Toasted, ground pumpkin seeds still appear on menus even more than the flesh. Another good reason for their popularity was that the hollowed-out gourds made excellent water containers for people on long trips. Please remember that pig bladders could have been used but they, like horses, were introduced by the Spaniards. So, the Mesoamerican people were on foot while travelling, carrying gourds with woven fiber straps.

10. Papaya

Though it is more closely associated with Hawaii now, all indications are that the papaya originated in the tropics of southern Mexico and Central America. After the Spanish carried seeds to Panama and the Dominican Republic, cultivation spread throughout South and Central America, the Caribbean, Europe, the Pacific Islands, India, and parts of Africa. It became naturalized in many areas and still grows wild along Mexican roadsides. Hawaii, where papayas first arrived in the 1800s, is the only U.S. state to grow them commercially.

Yes, I know there are others, and most of them run in the spices and herb categories. But these are the unique biggies.

Happy New Year everyone.

you can reach Kirby at kirby.vickery@manzanillosun.com



by Tommy Clarkson

Dwarf Dracaena *Dracaena compacta*

Family *Agavaceae*

Also known as Pineapple Dracaena or Dwarf Dracaena

The *Dracaena compacta* is a rather compact (Gee, ya' think?), somewhat, slow-growing native from South East Africa. Though it's been an indoor favorite of many homeowners for years (though, at times, difficult for some to grow), there remains a degree of name disagreement. Regarding its Latin designation, some folks refer to it as a *Dracaena fragrans*, while others employ the *Dracaena deremensis* "handle." However, let's not allow the lack of botanical nomenclature clarity to end there! Yet others contend that it is a close relative to "Dracaena Janet Craig," with yet others saying they are one and the same!

This is perhaps understandable as there are around forty varieties of these evergreen, woody plants in its genus. However, one common characteristic of each of these numerous *Dracaena* variants is that all have varying width, sword-shaped, sometimes stalkless, thick, stiff, glossy, dark green leaves that grow in a spiral rosette atop the plant's canes (trunk) or at branch ends on older plants.

These leaves are two to five inches (5.08-12.70 cm) in length and grow to between three to six feet (.91-1.83 meters) in height when planted indoors. I've read, but not seen, that they can reach heights of fifteen feet (4.57 meters) feet in its natural environs which doesn't seem very "compact" to me!



Sometimes white or pink flowers, somewhat resembling an ear of "bumpty" corn, grow from the middle of their rosettes.

Though it is rare, sometimes white or pink flowers – somewhat resembling an ear of "bumpty" corn (*Yes, another, non-botanical "Tommy word/description"*) - grow from the middle of those rosettes. These have an intense scent, reminiscent of honey. Contending that allowing the flowers to remain on the plant may distort its overall growth pattern and ruin its shape, some recommend cutting off the flowers as soon as they are seen. Figuring that the plant has worked hard to present us with its own, personal flora, I don't!

A *Dracaena compacta* plant grows best indoors in medium light. In low light, they grow quite slowly and tend to lose their bottom leaves more quickly. In such locales, be extremely careful to not over-water. Also, for these indoor, domesticated plants, rotate them weekly to prevent their leaning toward the light and becoming unattractively one-sided . . . *the latter reminding me of a few folks' political attitudes!*

The Dwarf Dracaena has a bit of a drinking problem, so to speak! Its slow growth makes it quite difficult to correctly determine whether it is being over or under watered. Add to that, seasonality, with natural changes in light and temperature and, well, just keep in mind that one needs to be sensitive to its needs. (*As we should all be for anyone/thing for which we greatly care!*)

...Dwarf Dracaena



Growing in a spiral rosette are its sword-shaped, stalkless, thick, stiff, glossy, dark green leaves.

A good rule of (green) thumb might be that when its soil has almost dried out (in its well-draining soil) is a good time to give it a spot of water. Employing the other thumb: Brown, muddy-colored, leaf tips on new growth is a clear indication that the plant needs more water.

In turn, too much water may cause root rot and/or Leaf Spot Disease. That all said, they actually do better when watered on a regular schedule, so this makes it all a bit of a challenge!

Dark brown tips could also indicate that you've used "city water" with too much chlorine or fluoride, salty water passed through a softener or, simply, too much plant food – as a slow grower, they require very little fertilizer. Feed them only twice a year - spring and summer - and dilute the plant food to half its recommended strength.

What other problems might we face with our Dwarf Dracaenas? Mealy Bugs and scale are a concern, as is Leaf Spot Disease. The latter is caused by a fungus that has taken up residence in your soil, causing reddish brown spots on the new leaves. Other than that, I encourage that you quickly remove all dead or dying canes.



The leaf scars of former "residents" are clearly seen on its stalks.

And, when pruning brown, crunchy or yellow leaf tips, do so with wet scissors. The tips can be trimmed back to the green area of the leaf or, if severe enough, remove the entire leaf.

On one end of the spectrum, NASA states that *Dracaenas* are excellent plants for removing benzene, formaldehyde and trichloroethylene from the air. Conversely, while there is disagreement as to whether *Dracaenas* are poisonous or not, no few contend that it is.

Accordingly, let's proceed on the presumption that they might cause problems for children and animals.

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you can reach Tommy Clarkson at tommy@manzanillosun.com

Mexican Wedding Cake

recipe by Chris Hetherington

Ingredients

Recipe serves 40

- ✓ 350g unsalted butter
- ✓ 100g icing sugar
- ✓ 3/4 teaspoon salt
- ✓ 220g finely ground almonds
- ✓ 4 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- ✓ 375g sifted plain flour
- ✓ 5 tablespoons icing sugar for rolling



Directions

Prep:45min > Cook:15min > Extra time:1hr > Ready in:2hr

1. Preheat oven to 170 C / Gas 3.
2. Cream butter in a bowl, gradually add icing sugar and salt. Beat until light and fluffy. Add almonds and vanilla. Blend in flour gradually and mix well.
3. Shape into balls (or crescents) using about 1 teaspoon for each biscuit.
4. Place on ungreased baking trays, and bake for 15-20 minutes. Do not brown.
5. Cool slightly, then roll in the extra icing sugar.

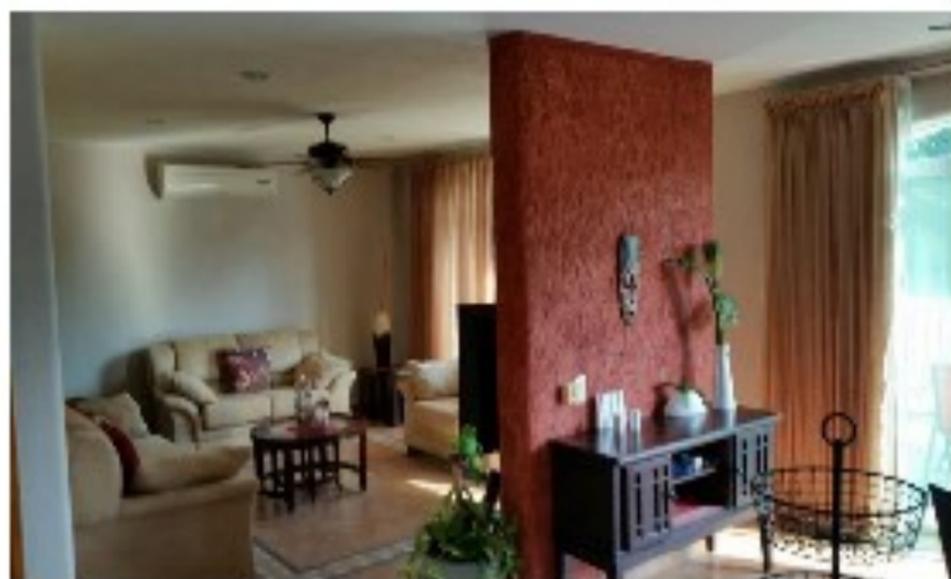
Source [article and images](#)



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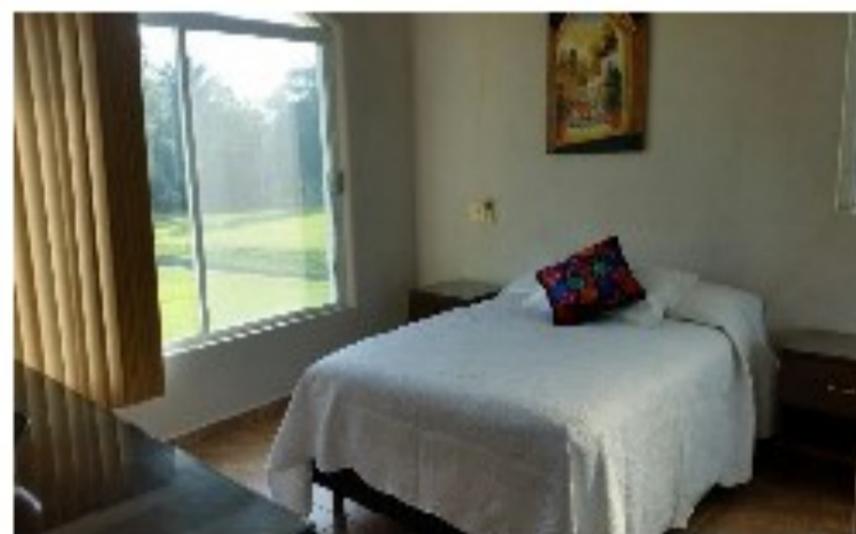
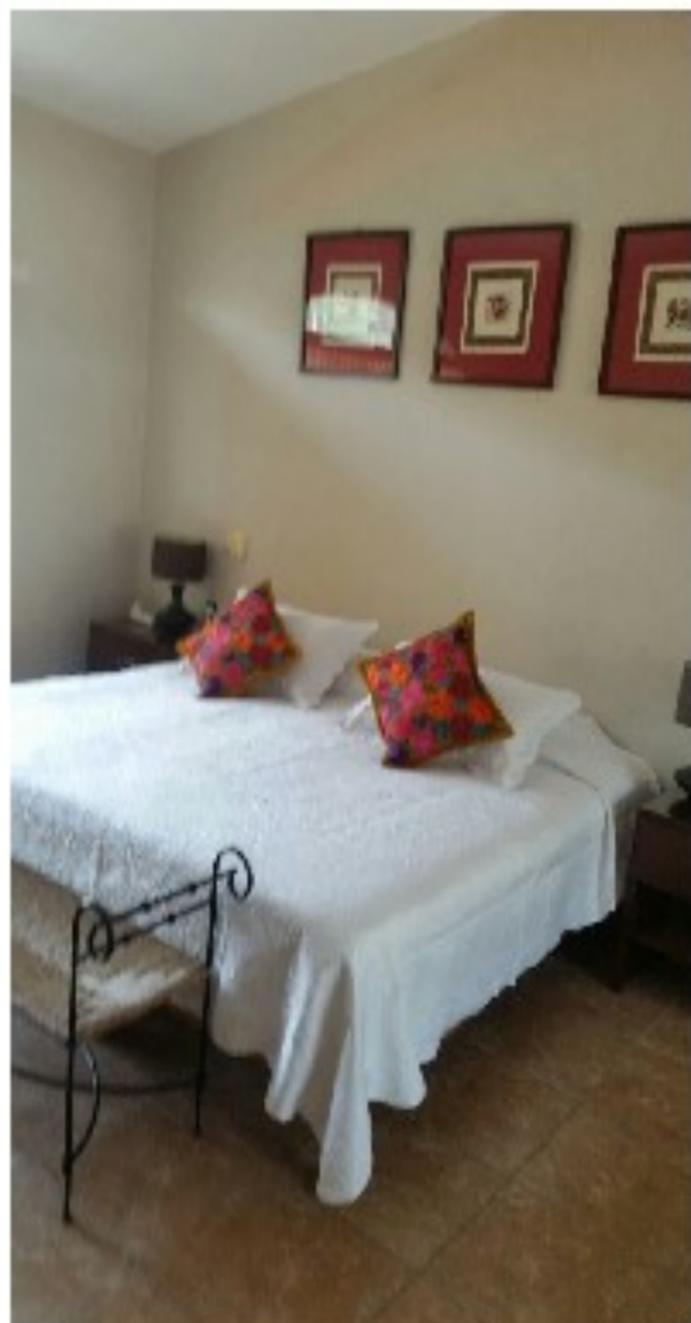
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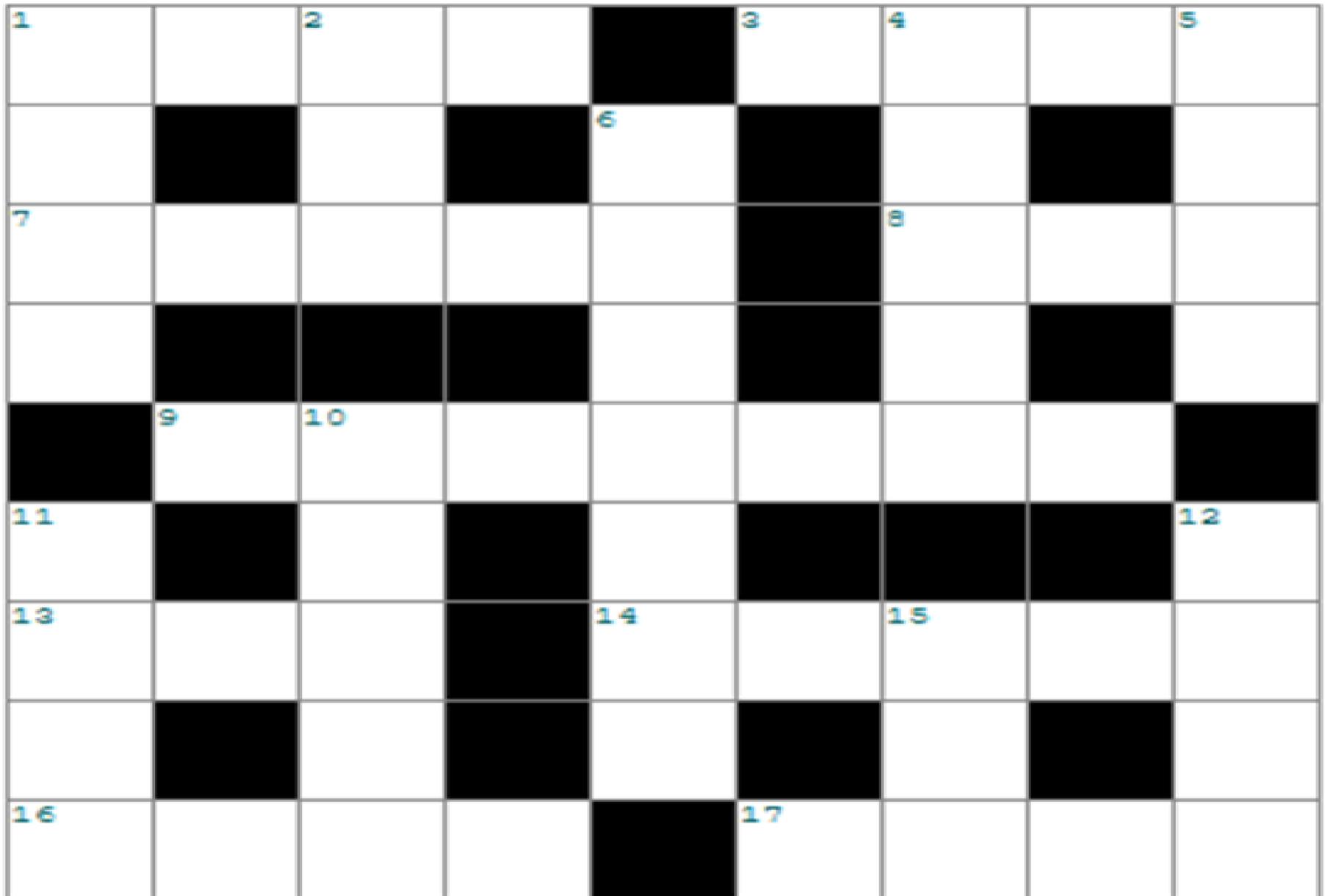
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Crossword

solution posted in next month's edition



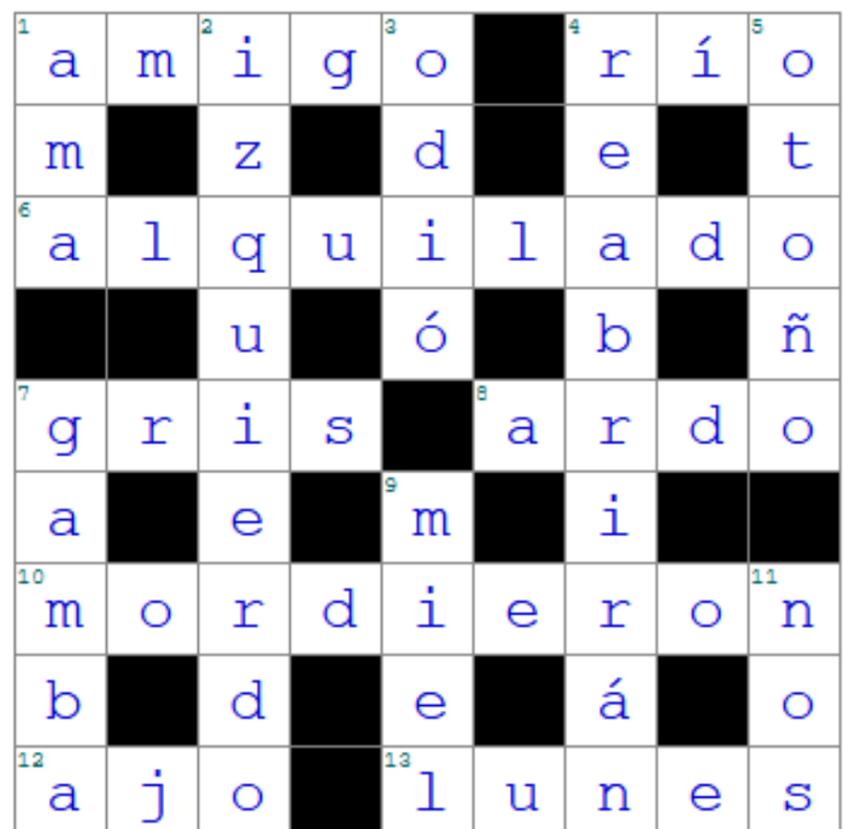
Across

- 1 ball, solid or hollow sphere
- 3 tuna
- 7 (you/tú) hunt
- 8 that: 'He says that he is sad.'
- 9 to choose
- 13 nail, fingernail; claw
- 14 needle
- 16 yesterday
- 17 broken, fragmented

Down

- 1 mouth
- 2 light, as sensed by the eye
- 4 touch
- 5 nut, hard-shelled fruit
- 6 brooms
- 10 soft, of a cloth
- 11 (it) sums
- 12 (I) gain
- 15 one

Last month's crossword solution:



lexisrex.com

Julián Carrillo

from the Path to Citizenship series

Julián Carrillo Trujillo (January 28, 1875 – September 9, 1965) was a Mexican composer, conductor, violinist and music theorist, famous for developing a theory of microtonal music which he dubbed "The Thirteenth Sound" (Sonido 13).

Studies abroad

As a young musician, Carrillo was admitted to the Leipzig Royal Conservatory, where he studied with Hans Becker (violin), Johann Merkel (piano), and Salomon Jadassohn (composition, harmony and counterpoint). He became first violin in two orchestras: the Conservatory's Orchestra, conducted by Hans Sitt; and the Gewandhaus Orchestra, conducted by Arthur Nikisch. Carrillo composed several works at Leipzig, including Sextet in G Major for two violins, two violas and two violoncellos (1900), and the First Symphony in D Major for Orchestra (1901). Carrillo conducted the Leipzig Royal Conservatory Orchestra in the premiere performance of his First Symphony.

In 1900, Carrillo attended the International Congress of Music in Paris, presided by Camille Saint-Saëns. He presented a paper, which the Congress accepted and published, on the names of musical sounds. He proposed that, since each note is one sound, each note name (C, D flat, etc.) should be a single syllable. He proposed 35 monosyllabic names. He also befriended Romain Rolland.

When he finished his studies in the Leipzig Conservatory, he went to Belgium to improve his skills as a violinist. There, he studied with Hans Zimmer (who had been Eugène Ysaÿe's student) and was admitted to the Ghent Royal Conservatory of Music. In 1903, he composed a Quartet in E minor, which he intended to give, "ideological unity, [and] tonal variety," to classical forms.



Statue of Carrillo

Return to Mexico

In 1904, he won the First Award Cum Laud and with Distinction in the Ghent Conservatory International Violin Competition. Later that year, he returned to Mexico where President Díaz gave him an Amati violin "as a present from the Mexican Nation" for his excellent performance in foreign countries. In Mexico City, Carrillo began intense work as violinist, orchestra conductor, composer and teacher. He was appointed professor of history (1906), composition, counterpoint, fugue and orchestration in 1908 by the National Conservatory.

Among his students was José Francisco Vázquez Cano who founded the Free School of Music and Declamation, the Faculty of Music of the National University (UNAM) and the National University Philharmonic Orchestra (OFUNAM). In 1910 he performed for the first time his [Canto a la Bandera](#) (Song to the Flag, with lyrics by Rafael López) (different from the national anthem), which has been since an official song to the Mexican Patriot Flag.

For the full story, see the source [image](#) by Alejandro Ags, CC BY 3.0 and [article](#)

Mexican National Anthem

from the Path to Citizenship series

Mexico’s flag day takes place on February 24

Learn more about the celebration [at this link](#)., and about the flag [at this link](#).

Flag ceremonies take place regularly at schools country-wide and, on flag day, at public offices.

[Francisco González Bocanegra](#) (January 8, 1824– April 11, 1861) was a Mexican poet who wrote the lyrics of the Mexican National Anthem in 1853.



La bandera mexicana. (The Mexican flag.).
Photo by [Alvaro qc](#); licensed via Creative Commons.

Estribillo: Mexicanos, al grito de guerra
El acero aprestad y el bridón,
Y retiemble en sus centros la tierra
Al sonoro rugir del cañón.

Estrofa 1: Ciña ¡oh Patria! tus sienes de oliva
De la paz el arcángel divino,
Que en el cielo tu eterno destino,
Por el dedo de Dios se escribió;
Mas si osare un extraño enemigo,
Profanar con su planta tu suelo,
Piensa ¡oh Patria querida! que el cielo
Un soldado en cada hijo te dio.

Estrofa 2: Guerra, guerra sin tregua al que intente
¡De la patria manchar los blasones!
¡Guerra, guerra! Los patrios pendones
En las olas de sangre empapad.
¡Guerra, guerra! En el monte, en el valle
Los cañones horrísonos truenen
Y los ecos sonoros resuenen
Con las voces de ¡Unión! ¡Libertad!

Estrofa 3: Antes, patria,
que inermes tus hijos
Bajo el yugo su cuello dobleguen,
Tus campiñas con sangre se rieguen,
Sobre sangre se estampe su pie.
Y tus templos, palacios y torres
Se derrumben con hórrido estruendo,
Y sus ruinas existan diciendo:
De mil héroes la patria aquí fue.

Estrofa 4: ¡Patria! ¡Patria! tus hijos te juran
Exhalar en tus aras su aliento,
Si el clarín con su bélico acento,
Los convoca a lidiar con valor:
¡Para ti las guirnaldas de oliva!
¡Un recuerdo para ellos de gloria!
¡Un laurel para ti de victoria!
¡Un sepulcro para ellos de honor!

Chorus: Mexicans, when the war cry is heard,
Have sword and bridle ready.
Let the earth's foundations tremble
At the loud cannon's roar.

Stanza 1: May the divine archangel crown your brow,
Oh fatherland, with an olive branch of peace,
For your eternal destiny has been written
In heaven by the finger of God.
But should a foreign enemy
Dare to profane your soil with his tread,
Know, beloved fatherland, that heaven gave you
A soldier in each of your sons.

Stanza 2: War, war without truce against who would attempt
to blemish the honor of the fatherland!
War, war! The patriotic banners
saturate in waves of blood.
War, war! On the mount, in the vale
The terrifying cannon thunder
and the echoes nobly resound
to the cries of union! liberty!

Stanza 2: Fatherland, before your children become unarmed
Beneath the yoke their necks in sway,
May your countryside be watered with blood,
On blood their feet trample.
And may your temples, palaces and towers
crumble in horrid crash,
and their ruins exist saying:
The fatherland was made of one thousand heroes here.

Stanza 4: Fatherland, oh fatherland, your sons vow
To give their last breath on your altars,
If the trumpet with its warlike sound
Calls them to valiant battle.
For you, the olive garlands,
For them, a glorious memory.
For you, the victory laurels,
For them, an honored tomb.