

THELOCACTUS PHYMATOTHELOS

by Sue Haffner

Thelocactus species, in the words of John Pilbeam, “have continued to find a place in many collectors’ hearts, who have a leaning towards tough, strongly spined plants, some of which give the impression that if a tank rolled over them, they would merely sit a little more deeply in the soil, before sending up their annual floral offering as though nothing had happened.”

Most hobbyists have some ‘thelos’ in their collections. There are around 20, or so, species and subspecies, mostly native to the deserts of Texas and adjacent areas of Mexico down as far as San Luis Potosi.

Thelocactus phymatothelos is now considered to be a subspecies of *T. rinconensis*. It is known from one locality only, the slopes of Arteaga Canyon just south of Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico, growing quite flat to the ground, the ribs mostly obscured by tubercles that are more rounded and compressed than those of the main species, *T. rinconensis*.

A distinctive looking plant, it is mostly solitary, 3 ½ to 6 inches in diameter with a compressed top, grayish-green in color. Its 13 or more ribs are divided into very prominent angled tubercles, each up to about ½ inch high. This species is usually considered to have short spines—or even none, but Elton Roberts believes there are short-spined and long-spined forms [from a May 2007 email]: “My largest plant is 20cm. across and 11 cm. tall. One has just gone from a short spined form with spines only 1 to 1.5 cm long to having spines that are 4 cm long. That still has some to grow to reach the 6 cm spines on the long spined plant. The long spined plant is only 9 years old and is close to 10 cm in diameter. The long spines started last year. That was the same time that the plants started to bloom.”

Flowers are white to pinkish with a pink midstripe. Elton notes that the pink in the petals goes out to

the edge, which is so thin that it is almost as clear as pinkish glass.

Thelos are slow-growing, very slow to offset. Propagation is by seed.

Culture is generally easy. Here is Elton’s prescription: “I give the plants my regular soil mix and I find that if it is acidic that the plants grow and look much better and seem to bloom more. I do keep the plants dry over the winter and they have come through temperatures down to 9 F. I do not advise letting them get that cold, as you may have a lot different growing conditions than I do. So keep them above 25 F if possible.”



Thelocactus rinconensis

Photo: A. Mosco



Thelocactus phymatothelos

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