



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

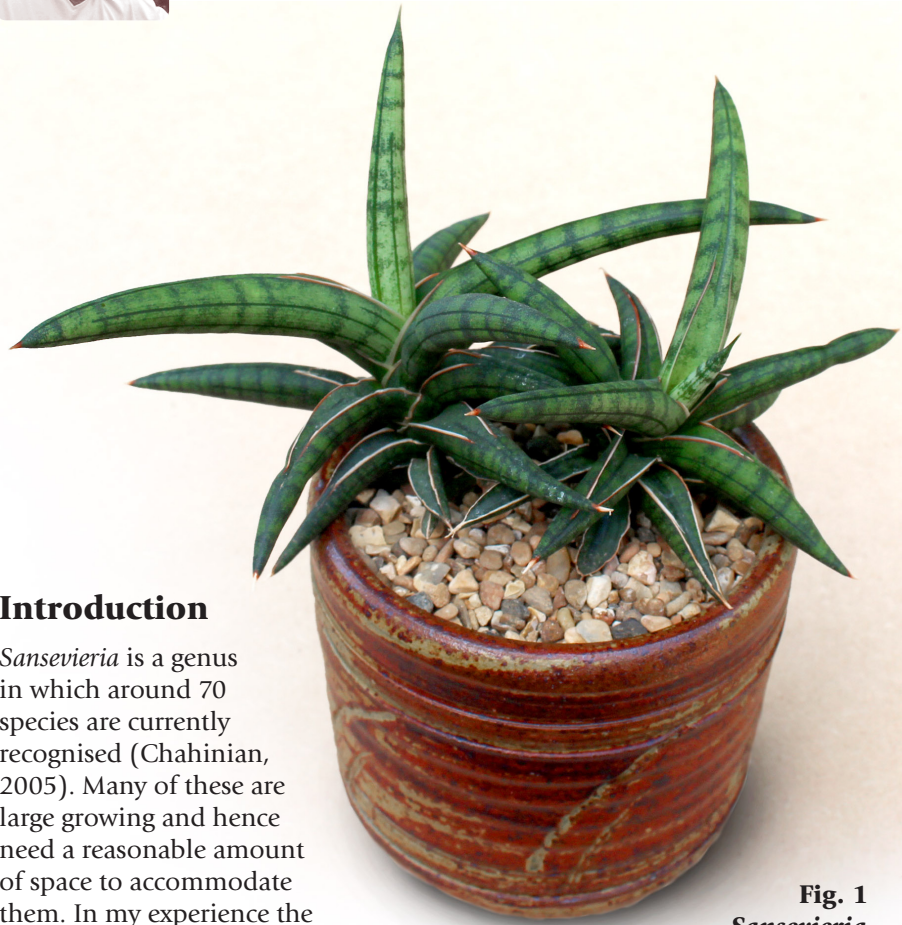


Fig. 1
Sansevieria
hargeisana
in a 10cm
diameter pot.

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).



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

Other similarities between these two species include their exceptional reluctance to flower, at least in my experience, certainly in comparison to other sansevierias that I have grown and flowered frequently. Both species were described by the *Sansevieria* expert Juan Chahinian in the *Sansevieria Journal* (Chahinian 1994, 1996) and neither is especially common in cultivation, with *S. hargeisana* being considered rare both in the wild and in collections.

Sansevieria hargeisana

Sansevieria hargeisana was described by Chahinian (1994) from a collection made by John Lavranos on a 1969–1970 expedition near Hargeisa in what is now the Somaliland Protectorate (formerly Somalia) and to date it has not been recorded from any other locality. Present knowledge therefore suggests that this is a narrow endemic species with a very limited distribution range, hence adding to its collector appeal, such that in cultivation I would describe it as rare. This species was reduced to a synonym of another Somalian species, *S. phillipsiae* in 1995, but was again recognised as distinct by Chahinian (2005) in his handbook on the genus *The Splendid Sansevieria*. It was originally compared to *S. suffruticosa* from Kenya. However, both *S. phillipsiae* and *S. suffruticosa* are larger-growing plants with above-ground stems that branch freely by producing aerial runners. In contrast *S. hargeisana* is a dwarf-growing species, so its recognition as distinct seems justified

on currently available evidence.

My plant (Fig. 1) has leaves up to only 10 cm long (with many only around 8 cm or less). These are cylindrical and round in cross-section for much of their length, with a shallow channel at the base, pronounced cartilaginous rust to fawn margins and with a sharp dried tip at the apex marked with rust at its base. As with many sansevierias the leaves are attractively cross-banded in darker green, with at least 7 dark green longitudinal lines and a slightly rough texture to the surface. In contrast young leaves are flatter, shallowly-channelled and not cylindrical. The plant branches underground and hence has no aerial stem. The flower spike is recorded as being up to 18 cm tall, but my plant has yet to oblige.

In my experience, this is the slowest-growing *Sansevieria* I have nurtured to date, making it especially suitable to a restricted pot class in shows because it is small growing. I obtained it 8 years ago and it was repotted only in 2016 in preparation for the BCSS National Show. It was the winner of the second prize in the class for “One plant in the *Sansevieria* group in a pot not over 140mm”! The pot was chosen because the speckled brown colour, roughened and lined texture and overall design which attractively complement the colour and texture of the plant (Fig. 1).

The plant is best grown with reasonable light levels to maintain the compact growth and attractive leaf markings.



Fig. 3 *Sansevieria hallii* in flower in a 17cm 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 30cm 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 (Rulken & 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.**

