

# Euphorbias from A to Z

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## *Euphorbia turbiniformis* CHIOV.



This gem of a *Euphorbia* is endemic to a limestone plateau of 300 m altitude in Somalia, where it grows partially buried in the soil. Its subglobose or turbiniform body may reach up to 4 cm in diameter. Still rare in collections and sought after because of its beautiful tessellated markings. Cymes produced on stout peduncles of 2 – 5 mm around the apex of the plant body, each consisting of a central male cyathium and 2 to 6 lateral female cyathia. Spine-shields are reduced to minute scales at the centre of the tessellations, spines and prickles are present only on very young seedlings (below), that have

a sticky surface and often are covered by a thin layer of soil. *E. turbiniformis* is a very sensitive, slow growing species that takes two resting periods during summer and winter months; it needs very bright light, especially well drained soil and

extra bottom heating and is best grown grafted. Propagation from seed is very difficult and will hardly ever result in well established plants.

## *Euphorbia gymnocalycioides*

M.G.GILBERT & S.CARTER

Another species with an almost globular body is *Euphorbia gymnocalycioides* from Ethiopia, where it grows in heavy, sticky mud on limestone. The main stem may reach 6 cm (up to 12 cm in cultivation) in diameter; the colour is a dark green to olive or purplish brown. The tubercles are variable in size, this picture shows a plant in the collection of Jaap Keijzer with tubercles up to 5 mm high. Cymes are produced in groups of 3 – 5 from the axils of the tubercles, each consisting of 1 – 3 cyathia. There is a report in literature that a cultivated plant has produced small side shoots with paired spines suggesting a relationship to species such as *E. columnaris* P.R.O.Bally. *Euphorbia gymnocalycioides* is best kept in light shade. This species grows in spring and au-

tumn and goes dormant during summer and winter. It is recommended to reduce watering in summer very much and keep plants dry during winter.



## *Euphorbia ponderosa* S.Carter

*Euphorbia ponderosa* has been collected from rocky hill slopes of gypsum outcrops in Somalia at 600 – 750 m altitude. It grows as densely branched cushions of up to 30 cm in height and in diameter; seedlings (left) from



a short and stout central stem that soon branches at its top. Branches are terete, 1 – 2.5 cm in diameter, covered with tubercles in 5 to 8 spiral series. The paired spines are up to 12 mm long and sturdy. Cymes consists of 3 small, yellow cyathia.

Again a very sensitive species that is

still quite rare in collections. Seedlings are best grown grafted to accelerate growth and to increase survival rates of the seedlings.



## *Euphorbia atrox* F.K.HORW. EX S.CARTER

Another endemic from Somalia, *Euphorbia atrox* is a small shrub, sparsely branching to form conical cushions, up to 30 cm high and 40 cm in diameter; branches are 15 – 25 mm in diameter, covered with very prominent tubercles arranged in 5 series; oblong, separate spine shields cover the entire apex of the tubercles. Spines are sturdy and up to 25 mm long. Cymes consist of 1 – 3 cyathia that are orange-yellow.

As many euphorbias from Somalia *Euphorbia atrox* is a very sensitive species and best grown grafted. Recommended minimum temperature is 12 °C or even above. Again, seedlings are very difficult to keep alive. This species will probably stay rare in collections for quite some time.



### *Euphorbia columnaris* P.R.O.BALLY

On steep cliffs and slopes of gypsum hills of Somalia grows *Euphorbia columnaris* (habitat picture by John Lavranos). Usually it forms a solitary, columnar main stem up to 8 cm in diameter and 1.3 m high, its sides divided by deeply impressed lines. Spines develop in pairs, 8 – 18 mm long, often joined at their base into a short column 1 – 2 mm high. They are widely spreading and conspicuously recurved, white and get lost with age; cymes are terminally crowded in groups of 10 – 30 at each flowering eye, maturing successively, each consisting of 3 golden yellow cyathia.

Still rare in cultivation this plants usually are offered grafted.

Some specimen may stop their apical growth and produce off-sets around their top which might be used for propagation. Minimum temperature during winter should not drop below 10 °C.



### *Euphorbia johannis* S.CARTER

From the edge of a limestone gorge, in xerophytic Somalian bushland Susan Carter has described this pair-spined *Euphorbia* in 1992. It is a dwarf shrub of up to 25 cm in diameter. Usually 5 to 8 branches are produced from a short stem and continue a prostrate growth. Branches are 10 – 15 mm in diameter and covered with tubercle-like teeth, arranged in 8 – 10 longitudinal series. Spines are slender, 5 – 18 mm long, accompanied by minute prickles. Cyathia are 2.5 mm in diameter only and brownish yellow.

*Euphorbia johannis* is still rare in cultivation. Plants usually are offered grafted. They need a minimum temperature of 12 °C.

*Euphorbia erigavensis* S.CARTER

*Euphorbia erigavensis* was described by Susan Carter in 1992 along with some other species from Somalia, where it grows on open rocky limestone plains at 1465 – 1790 m altitude. It forms small shrubs up to 30 cm high, with a main stem partly underground and the apex of the stem at ground level; branches are few and rebranch sparsely. The strong (1.5 – 2.5 cm in diameter) branches are of a pale greyish green colour with reddish brown markings and shallowly toothed. Spines are single, 1.5 – 3 cm long and very robust. *Euphorbia erigavensis* has been portrayed by Rikus van Veldhuisen in Euphorbia World 3(1). The picture below shows a seedling with main stem and developing branches from the collection of Jaap Keijzer.

*Euphorbia globulicaulis* S.CARTER

*Euphorbia globulicaulis* was described by Susan Carter in 1990 and ever since then it has been one of the most sought after *Euphorbia* species. It, too, comes from Somalia, where it grows on rocky limestone slopes covered with low bushland at 725 to 800 m altitude. One of the smallest succulent *Euphorbia* species, it grows only 3 to 5 cm high, including the herbaceous shoots. The subglobose fleshy stem is 2 – 3 cm in diameter and



develops a strong taproot. Apically it produces some herbaceous, short-lived shoots, which can only be seen at times of good rain (usually October and November); these shoots are up to 3 cm long and carry a few ovate leaves 10 – 15 mm long and 6 – 10 mm wide. Cymes appear at the apices of the branches, forking 2 – 4 times, with the primary rays 1 – 5 mm long, while cyathia are only 2 mm in diameter.

*Euphorbia globulicaulis* is a very sensitive species that has to be kept completely dry during dormancy and needs minimum temperatures of at least 14 °C. Some additional bottom heating is recommended during cold periods. Because of its globular, unbranched growth it can only be propagated by seeds, with seedlings being very tender and difficult to keep alive. At least in cultivation *Euphorbia globulicaulis* has shown to be rather short lived.

