

ALWIN BERGER BIOGRAPHY

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Berger, Alwin (1871-1931)—best known for his contribution to the nomenclature of succulent plants, particularly Agaves and Cacti—one of the first to give serious study relating to the evolutionary development, diversification and relationships of cacti.



Born in the small village Möschlitz in the state of Thuringia in central Germany, on 28 August 1871, Alwin Berger became a landscape gardener, botanist and succulent plant researcher. After school, he became a gardener and worked in several nurseries and botanical gardens between 1887 and 1897. Berger then became curator of the Hanbury garden 'La Mortola' in Italy until World War I in 1915 — where he came in contact with cactus and succulent plants. It was during this time that Carl Ludwig Sprenger (1846–1917), partner at Dammann & Company horticultural house in Naples, Italy, suggested Berger study succulent plants more in detail.

After the War Berger worked at the King's Park and Garden in Stuttgart, Germany until 1923. He then went to America where he worked at the New York State Experimental Station in Geneva, New York for 3 years —returning to Germany to take charge of the botanical section of the Museum of Natural History in Stuttgart for the rest of his life.

Berger had correspondence and personal contacts with many gardeners, botanists and biologists such as Dr Nicholas Edward Brown (1849–1934), Professor Moritz Kurt Dinter (1868–1945), Dr Ernst Heinrich Philipp August Haeckel (1834–1919), Dr Joseph Nelson Rose (1862–1928), Camillo Karl Schneider (1876–1951), Dr Frederick Albert-Constantin Weber (1830–1903) and Dr Richard Wettstein (1863–1931), all connected to succulent plants in one way or another. He visited in many botanical gardens and herbaria such as Kew Gardens in England along with succulent plant nurseries and collections of Frans de Laet (1866–1928), Friedrich Ferdinand Haage (1859–1930), Wilhelm Weingart (1856–1936), and with others. However, Berger never explored in habitats of his favorite study objects.

Berger published many books, booklets and articles in journals devoted to horticulture, botany and succulent plants. Major books on succulent plants were:

- Die Sukkulente Euphorbien (1907) with 135 pages;
- Liliaceae-Asphodeloideae-Aloineae (1908) 347 pages;
- Mesembrianthem und Portulacaceen (1908) 328 pages;
- Stapelieen and Kleinien (1910) 433 pages;
- Hortus Mortolensis (1912) 468 pages, a catalog of plants at La Mortola;
- Die Agaven, Beitrage zu Einer Monographie (1915) 288 pages;
- Kakteen (1929) 346 pages;
- Crassulaceae (1930) 133 pages.

It's interesting to note that Berger attempted to split some of the *Ariocarpus* species into another genus *Roseocactus* in honor of Dr Rose, due to a couple of minor differences (according to Dr Edward Frederick Anderson (1932–2001). In an article in Number 4 of Volume 33 (1961) of the US Journal, Dr Anderson pointed out the number of similarities of these species and that all should continue to be placed in the *Ariocarpus* genus due to these similarities reducing *Roseocactus* as a synonym of *Ariocarpus*.

In 1909 Dr Nathaniel Lord Britton (1859–1934) and Dr Rose named the genus *Bergerocactus* in honor of Alwin Berger. *Bergerocactus emoryi* is the sole member of the genus *Bergerocactus* that grows near both sides of the border of California (US) and Baja California (Mexico)—see Alwin Berger Images for a picture. It is also known by the common name 'snake plant' due to its clustering thin stems.

In 1926 Dr Martin Heinrich Gustav Schwantes (1881–1960) named the genus *Bergeranthus* in honor of Alwin Berger. Succulent species of *Chortoliron*, *Euphorbia*, *Mesembryanthemum*, *Sedum* and *Stapelia* were also named in his honor. Berger described a number of genera: *Afrovivella*, *Arthrocerus*, *Brasiliopuntia*, *Chamaealoe*, *Chortoliron*, *Encephalocarpus* (*Pelecypora*), *Epiphyllanthus* (*Schlumbergera*), *Erythrorhipsalis* (*Rhipsalis*), *Hypagophytum*, *Pseudosedum*, *Pyrrhocactus* (*Eriosyce*), *Roseocactus* (*Ariocarpus*), *Sinocrassula* and *Stephanocereus*. He described a few Agaves, a number of Aloes, quite a few Mesembryanthumums (many moved over into other genera by other authors) and other species.

Alwin Berger died of appendicitis on 20 April 1931.

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