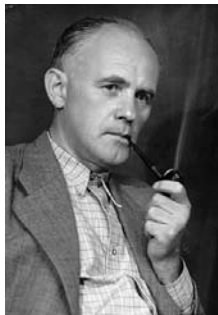


CURT BACKEBERG BIOGRAPHY

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Backeberg, Curt (1894–1966)—author of *Die Cactaceae* (in six volumes 1958–62) condensed into *Das Kakteenlexikon* (one volume, 1966) and describer of many new cactus genera and species.



Born in Lüneburg, Germany, on 2 August 1894, Curt Backeberg became a horticulturist, lecturer, classifier, photographer and a prolific writer on cacti. Two of his early botanical influences were botanists Edgar Irmscher (1887–1968) and Alwin Berger (1871–1931). In Backeberg's early years he collected and studied cacti as a hobby. Through the influence of Professor Irmscher, a well-known geobotanist, Backeberg studied the geographic distribution of cacti and later published papers on his findings. Backeberg became acquainted with Alwin Berger in the 1920s, and at Berger's suggestion he undertook his first cactus collecting trips in South and Central America, beginning with trips to Venezuela and northern Colombia. Backeberg was owner of an exporting business in South America from 1925 and specialized in cacti exports from 1927 on to Germany and other European countries.

Beginning in the late 1940s he worked on the systematics of his living collection, spending six years studying opuntias and other succulents in Riviere de Caralt's famous garden, Pinya de Rosa, in Spain and four years as conservator of J Marnier-Lapostolle's celebrated garden Les Cedres at Cap Ferrat in southern France. Backeberg's work culminated in the six large volumes of *Die Cactaceae* (1958–1962), which he condensed into one volume, *Das Kakteen Lexikon*, shortly before his death in 1966. This condensed volume was translated into English as *Cactus Lexicon* by Lois Glass (1915–2007) in 1976. There was a storm of protest over Backeberg's taxonomic treatment of the cactus family, for which he nearly doubled the number of genera. Many of those have since dropped into synonymy, including *Acanthocalycium*, *Brazilicactus*, *Eriocactus*, *Gymnocereus*, *Marenopuntia*, *Morawetzia*, *Neocardenasia*, *Philippicereus*, *Reicheocactus*, *Soehrensia* and *Vatricania*, to name just a few. Backeberg genera that survives include *Armatocereus*, *Austrocylindropuntia*, *Brasilicereus*, *Coleocephalocereus*, *Haageocereus*, *Micranthocereus*, *Neobuxbaumia*, *Polaskia*, *Pygmaeocereus*, *Rauhocereus* and *Turbinicarpus*.

The genus *Backebergia* was named in his honor by Helia Bravo-Hollis (1901–2001) in 1954 for some cephalium-bearing cacti trees of Mexico, but the name has since dropped into synonymy under *Pachycereus*. *Echeveria backebergii*, *Echinopsis backebergii*, *Mammillaria backebergiana* and *Sedum backebergii* were all named succulent plants in his honor. Backeberg was the author of many cacti species from the 1930s through the 1950s—about half transferring to other genera by other authors keeping the same specific epithet of the species.

Curt Backeberg died of a heart attack on 14 January 1966.

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