

July 2025

Plant of the month

Pasquita, Snowflake



Common Name: Pasquita, Snowflake
Scientific Name: *Euphorbia leucocephala* Benth.
Family: Euphorbiaceae
Genus: For *Euphorbus* the first century physician to the king of Mauretania, Juba 2.
Species epithet: From the Greek *leuco* – white and *cephale* – head.



Euphorbia is a very large and diverse genus of plants with over 2000 species distributed on all continents except the Antarctic. They range from small herbaceous plants to candelabra succulents and towering trees. Many have toxic or irritant sap, but the sap of some species has been used in both traditional and modern medicine. Snowflake's sap is an irritant if in contact with the skin and can lead to blisters or rashes. The clear sap is also poisonous if ingested.

Euphorbia leucocephala is a drought tolerant medium sized shrub that glows white for months. This is due to pure white, modified leaves or bracts, called cyathophylls that cover the plant from late autumn. Flowers are tiny, yellow-green and held in a structure called a involucre, which is in the centre of a whorl of five small white cyathophylls. Unusually for the genus, the flowers are lightly fragrant.

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Distribution

Mexico (Baja California, Sonora).

Native Habitat

Desert or dry shrubland.

Description

Multi-stemmed shrub to 3m tall. Clear sap is an irritant and is also poisonous if ingested. Deciduous during dry season in arid conditions.

Flowers

Flowers are unisexual, either male or female and very small. Individual flowers are clustered into an inflorescence known as a cyathium. These are surrounded by a floral envelope called an involucre.

Fruit

A small capsule that explodes when ripe releasing the seeds.

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