

GLORY

By JACKSON SELLERS

Nobody sees these blossoms except us. They open fully at midnight, often in August, and wilt and die at sunrise. In the wee morning hours of a single day, they survive only a fraction of the lifespan



of short-lived cherry blossoms. The botanical name of this cactus plant is *Selenicereus grandiflorus*, but we call it by its

poetic Japanese name, *Gekka Bijin*, which means “Queen of the Night” or “Lady Beneath the Moon” or something like that. Anyway, this potted patio plant produced an amazing 42 blossoms on the night of August 30, 2009! Surprised the hell out of us. Last year in August, eight blossoms burst forth, as seen at lower right, and we thought that was great, surely the most we would ever get at one time. Our friend Yutaka Katayama in Tokyo, who will turn 100 years old this September, saw the eight 2008 *Gekka Bijin* blossoms as a perfect *kimono* pattern needing no design modifications. Now, there were 42, as counted by Yoshi on both sides of the six-foot-tall plant. She is a meticulous counter. She even counts the plums produced by the tree under which the *Gekka Bijin* has found a home it truly likes. The succulent was a gift a few years ago, presented to us by Ken and Harue Asano, whose home sits amid a full acre of gardens several miles away. The plant was small then and didn’t do much for a couple of years. It just grew quietly



beneath white birches at the rear of our backyard. When we saw it was going to do more, perhaps something spectacular, we moved it to the patio, where we could keep an eye on it. We weren’t disappointed. The cactus plant generated clusters of flowers on a timetable I’ve never really figured out, except that August seems to be its most prolific month. It positively exploded this August. Yoshi stood back after counting the 42 blossoms and murmured “*Ichigo, ichi e.*” It’s a Japanese expression meaning that no pleasure, once experienced, can be recreated exactly. So enjoy the moment. It may never come again.

