

Around My (or Your) Desert Garden

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Soon after May 23, the date for the first article, both *Ceiba acuminata* (in a five gallon pot) and *Acacia pennutula* (feather acacia) finally leafed out (an old one that has been through some frosts). Apparently, at 110 F they decided that winter was over. Several months ago in an effort to develop some more shade, a number of six foot trees in five gallon pots were planted. The palo brea and hybrid palo verde are doing fine as is an *Acacia saligna*. There were two *Eucalyptus spathulate*, but only one remains. A melaleuca (paperbark tree) was planted even earlier never really grew and has finally given up (perhaps because of residual herbicide in the soil after 22 years). The *Chorisia speciosa* leaves are all brown and it is unlikely that it will come back. I think some losses are typical in the first summer when planting large trees from five gallon containers.

Trees flowering in the last month include *Caesalpinia mexicana* (Mexican bird of paradise), *Acacia craspedocarpa* (leather leaf), Mexican palo verde, desert willow, and an African acacia. Driving by there seems to be some royal poincianas (*Delonix regia*) along the street in front of the main Scottsdale library. If you live in a frost-free area or can create a warm microclimate, you might try this great shade tree. They grow readily from seed that are easy to find in south Florida.

Cacti flowering in full sun include four of the *Stenocereus*: *thurberi* (Arizona organ pipe,) *gummosus* (pitahaya agria) with its large tubular flowers and elegant look, *rathbunia* which has been flowering for months, and *schottii* (senita). *Cereus huntingtoniana* is a bit less common with a unique angular look, long black spines and lots of flowers. *Cereus aethiops* is medium-sized with colorful flowers and appreciates some shade. The other large cereus varieties have been flowering on and off for a month or more. The ferocacti include *Ferocacti acanthodes*, *rectispinus* and *pilosus*. A nice book by Pierre Fischer *70 Common Cacti of the Southwest*, has good descriptions to help distinguish the three Arizona barrels.

In the last month lots of smaller cacti have flowered. *Trichocereus* varieties with their large flowers are easy to grow and should be more commonly used. There are a range of shapes, textures and spine colors. *Trichocereus huascha* (echinopsis, helianthocereus—it depends on the book) was flowering at the start of the month and at the end with lots of bright red and red-orange flowers in both sun and shade. *Cleistocacti* also continues to flower through most of June. In succession there were flowers on various *Echinopsis* (I still distinguish them from *trichocereus*), *hamatocactus*, *coryphantha*, *copiapoa*, *thelocactus*, *parodia*, and *leuchtenbergia*. The native *mammillarias* flowered a couple of times, and towards the end of the month, the *melocacti* had their turn, as did some *notocacti*.

Other succulents flowering included *Aloe saladeniana*, *rauhii* and *karasbergensis* (one of the best!). A 12-foot *Pachycormis discolor* flowered for weeks, as did some *adeniums*.

Pachypodium namaquanum finally started leafing out (the one you can put in the ground).

Succulents are often sold in one gallon black plastic pots and may look fine at the nursery. But, when you get them home, keep the pots in the shade and water more often than you would for plants in the ground. A one gallon pot filled with a good fast draining dry soil can reach 140 F when left in the sun with dry air temperatures of 110 F. When moist, the soil tracks the air temperature and will dry out in a day or two. In shade or filtered sunlight, the dry soil will lag below the air temperature. In the ground, even just a few inches below the surface, but in the sun, the temperatures will be substantially moderated with a maximum of about 105 F and less when wet.