

Around My Desert Garden

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Finally, a bit of rain at 6 p.m. on July 31, and the hope that the worst of a brutal summer is over. Even after all those consecutive days over 110 F there is still some color. Today *Trichocereus huascha* has flowers again (red), along with several different echinopsis. *Acanthocalycium glaucum* has bright yellow flowers. *Mammillaria microcarpa* is also flowering again as are the *Notocacti schmannianus* and *warasii*. *Matucana madisoniorum* has tubular red flowers and *Ferocactus hamatacanthus* has bright yellow flowers even in shade. Try the fruit, and you will be pleasantly surprised. *Stenocereus gummosus* and *thruberi* continue to flower. If you need a reason to try an opuntia, *O. aciculate* is always colorful and now has purple fruit.

Aloe darasbergensis is in full flower in shade under a mesquite tree, but another one nearby that gets some late afternoon sun has folded its leaves up for protection. While not in flower, *Aloe broomii* looks fine in shade, but another one that gets some sun has blackened lower leaves and leaf tips. This one grows at 6,000 feet in elevation, and is happy here in winter. Other aloes with some color of the undesirable kind include *A. cryptopoda* (which always has some leaf blackening in summer), *A. lutescens*, *A. rubriviola* and *A. supraciliata*.

After seeing a large *Aloe speciosa* in full sun at the Living Desert in Palm Spring, we had to try it. One went into the ground and got a half day of direct sun. The other was kept in a pot in more shade. Both are now a mass of soggy purple leaves. An *Aloe buhrii* that got half day of sun did not make it, and *Aloe spinosissima* has major damage (it was fine in past years). *Aloe bainesii* made it through the winter and seemed to recover, but now most of the leaves look some what bleached and dried out even though it is in a shaded protected location.

Desert willows are still flowering, especially the purple flowered variety. *Jatropha cinerea* has small flowers that are easy to miss. *Leucaena retusa* (golden lead ball tree) has put on some new growth with the start of the monsoon season as has *Caesalpinia platyloba* (palo Colorado) which we first saw in front of the small cat exhibit at Arizona Sonoran Desert Museum. An old Brazilian pepper tree has finally been killed. The roots of this attractive tree are very invasive. Use it only if you can contain it. In the Everglades, these trees are removed by scraping away all of the vegetation.

July is when the top pads of *Opuntia ficus indica* and some other tree form prickly pears fold over and it almost looks like the plant is melting. Just cut off anything that needs it. We have always used the pads for rabbit food. The deal I thought we had was that in exchange for the pads the rabbits would not do much damage to everything else. That plan worked until this summer when agaves, cereus, echinopsis, the ribs of some ferocacti and even aloes were eaten. Protect whatever is worth the trouble with chicken wire rings or, split black plastic 5 or 15 gallon pots.

There were some comments about soil temperatures last time. For 1 and 5 gallon black plastic pots in full sun with the lower maximum temperature of the monsoon season of 105 – 110 F the dry pot soil can still reach 130 F. When wet, the max is more like 115 F in full sun and in shade (under a tree) it tracks the air temperature. If you keep cuttings in pots during the summer for rooting (some people believe this to be less stressful than direct planting) keep the pots in shade to minimize soil temperatures. If you put a cutting in the ground in a sunny location, it needs to be staked and shaded. The stakes also provide a framework for surrounding the plant with shade cloth. If you don't like that look, wait until milder conditions before planting directly, but you may still need shade cloth to acclimate the plant. You will need some shade cloth in the summer any way for when some agaves and cacti get yellow in the sun.