

Around My Desert Garden

By Bob Torrest

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October 31 —Finally maximum temperatures below 90F. Part of the reason for these articles was to see how the plants handled the summer. I've been surprised at how many plants flowered during those hot months (near record hot!) And now it gets even better.

The month began with flowers on yellow bells, *Acacia aneura*, red bird and San Marcos hibiscus. By mid-month there was *Baja ruellia (peninsularis)*, *Calliandra californica* and desert willow. After that there was Coulter's hibiscus, cape honeysuckle, *Salvias*, cascalote, *Chorisia* and *Acacia salicina*.

Coryphantha elephantidens continued to produce carmine flowers as it has for months (most unusual for cacti). Several of the tall *Cereus* cacti flowered again as did a few *Ferocactus*. There were also flowers on *Notocactus magnificus*, *Chocemias*, *Ariocarpus fissuratus* and *agavoides* and *Pilosereus alensis*. Boojums, *Pachycormus discolor*, and the Baja ocotillo (*Fouquieria diguetii*) are leafing out. Some *Aloes* flowering include *rauhii*, *somaliensis* and *krapohlina*. A large aloe with a show multicolor candelabra-like flower stalk that flowers several times during the year still remains unidentified... (several of you have it...any ideas?)

Thanks again to the 15 to 20 members who came by to pick up to 10 plants in one gallon pots and thereby saved most of over 200 plants that were up for grabs. While here, their most common questions were about soils and handling cactus cuttings (we also had a sale going on.) For tough plants that don't need to be coddled (e.g., senitas) we usually screen out rocks and caliche (and sometimes debris like cement pieces) over 3/8 inch. If the soil is fine grained, add some gravel (up to 1/4 inch) to improve drainage. For aloes, agaves, etc., we usually add some topsoil or potting soil (about 25% by volume), but be sure to retain good drainage. This kind of enriched soil is fine for pots usually with some added pumice and a bit of time-release fertilizer. If you experiment a bit with your yard soil, you will soon find a good mix.

Columnar cacti cuttings can make an immediate landscape impact and root readily up to about four or five feet. Larger cuttings often take much longer to root and start growing again. After the cut is dry (a week when warm), up to a foot can be buried for larger cuttings. You may need to stake thinner columns for a while and shade cloth will prevent sunburn.

There were also questions about *Trichocereus* which seem to be unfamiliar and confusing to some and aren't grown as much as they should be (we had about 10 varieties at our sale). The flowers are large and relatively frequent. Only a few do well in full sun... They include *terschekii* (cardon grande), *candicans*, *spachianus* and *huascha*. You will see commercial landscapers put *pasacana* (San Pedro), a dark green, almost spineless column, in full sun. Don't do it... They may survive for a while but really need some shade. Most of the others, many of which get up to a foot or two before snaking around, prefer some light shade as, for example, under a creosote bush or desert tree. Give some a try!