

Around My Desert Garden

By Bob Torrest

November 2005

November 30 –The month began with flowers still on *Chorisia*, *Calliandra californica* and willow acacia (*Acacia salicina*) and a few remaining on Coulter's and san Marcos hibiscus. Cascalotes were beginning to flower (with a name like *Caesalpinia cacalaco* and great yellow flowers you should have at least one). By mid-month there was a *Cassia artemisioides* (the common feather cassia) and *Acacia aneura* (Mulga). Chuparosa's red flowers are seven feet up in a *Pachycormus discolor*. *Salvia greggii*'s red flowers are welcome and desert aster continues to flower in sun and shade.

Aloes flowering in full and part sun included *A. ramosissima* (with its unique bright yellow flower spikes), *A. somaliensis*, *A. branddaaiensis* (much branched, coral red) and *A. krapohlina*. There are buds on *A. divaricata*, and next month many others will flower.

Remarkably, *Coryphantha elephantides* continued to flower all month. Some *Notocactus magnificus* flowered again and *Ferocactus latispinus*, with its attractive buds and colorful flowers, was getting started.

The articles in this series have begun with “what’s flowering” and that emphasis shortchanges Euphorbias and Agaves. Since poinsettias with their brightly colored bracts are everywhere in the holiday season, I will include some brief comments about my experiences with Euphorbias in the landscape. The wild poinsettia, *Euphorbia heterophylla* (Mexican fire plant) seed themselves and remind you that you’ve got them this time of year as their leaf-like bracts are blotched with white and red. The Sunset Western Garden Book says they “give the appearance of second-rate poinsettias” but you will be glad you’ve got them.

Euphorbia resinifera has been planted around Phoenix for years and will take full sun. *E. echinus*, another relatively small plant from Morocco, forms nice clumps. *E. fruticosa* has done well in light shade, as has *E. grandialata*, which makes larger branches from the base. *E. coerulescens* is shrubby and grows well, with yellow inflorescence near branch tips. *E. tirucalli*, the “pencil tree,” can get large with the protection and support of a desert tree but will also take lots of bright light. A small bushy plant in full winter sun (but high summer shade) was lost after a frost.

Larger varieties, including the very spiny *Euphorbia stenoclada*, *E. ingens* and *E. ammak*, etc., do well with light shade and frost protection. *E. canariensis* will get large in the ground in a greenhouse but does not like frost. You can also grow *E. lactea* and *E. trigona* outdoors with some protection (these are usually sold as house plants) but *E. milii* (lots of colorful varieties) are best used indoors (in south Florida they make nice ground covers). I am still experimenting a bit with Euphorbias outdoors and your questions are welcome.

Euphorbias are interesting and different BUT remember the latex is poisonous and a severe irritant to eyes and open cuts. BE CAREFUL.