

## Around My Desert Garden

By Bob Torrest

December 2005

December 31—The month began with a few light frosts and ended with above average temperatures. There has been no rain for months. These conditions differ substantially from a year ago and will influence flowering, etc., in ways we will soon see.

Trees continuing to flower include cascalotes and Chorisia. African sumac (*Rhus lancea*) and sweet acacia (*Acacia farnesiana*) got started. Cape honeysuckle (*Tecomaria capensis*) makes a very colorful bush and *Calliandra californica* just keeps flowering. Smaller flowering plants include ruellia, chuparosa, salvias and desert aster.

Aloes with open flowers include *A. ramosissima*, *A. branddraaiensis* with a colorful three-foot spike, *A. krapohliana* (red), *A. divaricata* (red branched), *A. sinkatana* (yellow) and *A. cryptopoda*...very colorful and worth having although it will lose leaves in summer. There are unopened racemes on *A. striata*, *A. arborescens* (these were in full flower in San Diego), *A. suprafoliata*, *A. secundiflora*, *A. ferox*, *A. superba*, *A. vera*, *A. chabaudii*, and *A. vaombe*.

Just a few cacti flowered including *Cochemia maritima* (bright red) and *Ferocactus latispinus* (even small plants). Mammilarias will be flowering soon. There are buds on some *Myrtillocactus geometrizan* and Senita.

In the previous article there were some comments on Euhorbias for landscape use. Agaves are the other group that has been under-represented in these articles. Few people have enough to see flowers on any kind of regular basis. There are good photos of the common varieties in a recent book, *Agaves, Yuccas and Related Plants* (M & G. Irish). Here the focus is on those varieties that you can plant in full sun as we did before we had any shade on our place. The largest include the much planted *Agave Americana* and the standard variegated form (yellow and green), Weber's agave (*A. weberi*) and sisal (*A. sisalana*), which is better with some shade and frost protection. Good colorful plants not quite as large include Datilillo (*A. datylio*), bright green, and *A. lophantha*, green with yellow green mid-stripe. The octopus agave (*A. vilmoriniana*) is often planted in full sun and watered heavily but is better with some shade. They are native to the foothills of the Sierra Madre and if you take the train up into the mountains from the west side you will see them appearing to scramble up the slopes. You can also use *A. angustifolia* (var. *marginata*), *A. murpheyi* and its very nice variegated, and *A. desmettiana*, also with a nice variegated (but better with some shade).

When around San Diego, find some time for Torrey Pines State Reserve between La Jolla and Del Mar. You will see some coast barrels (*Ferocactus viridescens*) and *Agave shawii*. On the ocean side, with chaparral all around, you almost forget the congestion nearby (you can barely see La Jolla off to the south). Quail Gardens in Encinitas has a nice Aloe collection (labeled) and a grove of dragon trees (*Dracaena draco*) among other collections.