

Around My Desert Garden

By Bob Torrest

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FEBRUARY 28—Sweet Acacia (*A farnesiana*) and *Eucalyptus torquata* (coral red long-lasting flowers) continued to flower. Mescal bean (*Sophora secundiflora*) with its fragrant violet-blue flowers and *Caesalpinia mexicana* (Mexican bird) have been flowering for several weeks and Palo blanco (*A. willardiana*) is getting started. *Leucaena retusa* (golden lead ball tree) and Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*) are leafing out as are pomegranates. The yellow flowered cassias were mentioned last time. They all continue to flower along with *Cassia phyllodenia* (silver leaf). Cape honeysuckle continues to flower, as does ruellia, chuparosa, salvias and justicias. Although not really shade plants or succulents, calmondins (miniature tangerines), limequats and Mexican limes are all very colorful this time of year (as are all the usual citrus).

Aloes done flowering include *A. vaombe*, *branddraaiensis*, *cryptopoda*, *ferox*, *arborescens*, *secundiflora*, *dorotheae* and *sinkatana*. Aloes still flowering include *striata*, *variegata x saponaria* and *echinata*. Flowers are getting started on *A. divaricata*, *kedongensis*, *camperi*, *karasbergensis*, *barbadensis* and several still unidentified. *Aloe vaombe*, in particular, has been rewarding. The plant in the most exposed location flowered first and most prolifically but produced little seed. Others in more shaded spots are still flowering but only with small clusters. One plant in the warmest spot in full sun produced lots of seed. By placing *A. vaombe* in various locations you can enjoy an extended period of the bright red flowers. On the other hand, *A. secundiflora* was also in a variety of locations but only flowered in the most exposed spot.

Lots of mammillarias have been flowering but not the “native” yet. Three very different plants are *M. lindsayi* with a wooly top and yellow green flowers, *M. spinossima* (“super red”) and *M. pilcayensis* (“brittle bush”) with a ring of purple-red flowers just below the top. Cleistocacti are very colorful for a long time. *C. straussi* (“silver torch”) has red flowers while *C. dependens* has a purple flower with a yellow tip. One with golden spines forms nice clusters with lots of red flowers and there is even one that gets long enough to climb in trees. There are buds on senitas, *Stenocereus marginatus* and nopals, and Arizona organ-pipes are showing new growth. Also flowering are some stenocacti and neoporterias and *Ferocactus glaucescens*. So far, only the cristate form of *Myrtillocactus geometrizans* has been flowering and fruit is starting to form.

If you heard Leo’s talk on Feb. 26, you know that *Agave titanota* and one he identified as FO 076 seem to integrate in habitat. Last month I listed them separately. In these articles we are concerned with landscape applications, and the “old” *A. titanota*, a medium-large, robust plant with glaucous white leaves, simply does not look at all like the usual form of FO 076, which is apple green with brown, horny edges and teeth, and medium-small (i.e., effectively differently plants for landscape applications). We are now getting to watch the rapid growth of the flower stalk of *Agave vilmoriniana* (the “octopus”) which, at about six feet, is growing two feet a week, but I cut off the flower stalk of *A. utahensis* var. *nevadensis* at Gard’s suggestion in the hope of producing some pups.

Rabbits destroyed a full two-gallon sized *Yucca elata* right after it was planted. That is, there was nothing left but a white stub. Surprisingly, within a few days it was putting out leaves. A rare white ruellia (one gallon size) was eaten to the ground, but with chicken wire around it, it too is coming back. So...when things go wrong, don't be too quick to give up!!