

## Around My Desert Garden

By Bob Torrest

April 2006

APRIL 30 – Sweet acacia, flowering for some time, was joined by Palo blanco (*Acacia willardiana*), Catclaw (*A. greggii*) and *A. aneura*. Palo verdes and Palo breas (*Cercidium floridum*, *microphyllum* and *praecox*) all put on a great show. Mexican palo verde (*Parkinsonia aculeata*) is fast and has shlowy flowers, but an old tree (20 years is old for these) had major damage from the heavy winds at mid-month. Pomegranates produced their colorful red flowers even under the shade of a large mesquite tree. *Grivillea robusta* (silk oak) is a tall tree with lots of leaf litter but also golden-orange flowers. A very nice book, “Gardening in the Desert” by Mary Irish, has lots of useful information on trees and shrubs as well as other plants that do well here.

Cascalotes (*Caesalpinia cacalaco*) now look almost exhausted after their winter displays of yellow spikes. Along with leaf drop, there is a substantial white granular deposit. The tree is also spiny and needs lots of pruning when small, but even with these problems, it is still well worth growing. Another Caesalpinia, Palo Colorado, also produces these granular deposits. Does anyone know what they are? This “tree” has been a disappointment, frozen at six feet for years, and has never flowered. Texas guaiacum (*Guaiacum angustifolium*) grown from seed, has reached all of two feet after eight years (of mostly neglect). It is an evergreen shrub with blue to purple flowers and is said to reach eight feet slowly (and is going to get some fertilizer!) Honey Locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) has also been disappointing. This deciduous tree can get large and we planted a couple on the west side of the house for summer shade. But after six or eight years, they are only now hinting at the shade they may yet provide.

After a very good flower display this winter, the aloes are just about done. *Aloe camperi* still has some of its two colored flowers and *A. dorotheae* is flowering again but *A. divaricata* and *A. barbadensis* were done early in the month. We try to keep small aloes and agaves in pots of one gallon or larger for the summer, stored in a shady spot and given extra water. Once there is a good root ball, they go into the ground when the right spot turns up. *A. plicatilis* doesn't appreciate our summer heat and will go in an outside room with evaporative cooling. A good sized clump of *Euphorbia resinifera* started flowering late in the month but the other euphorbias are done. Pachypodiums, adeniums, etc., that were protected during the winter (at 45 F or more) are outdoors again and flowering.

Cacti flowering at the start of the month were *Thelocactus bicolor*, neopterias, notocacti, *Matucana madisconiorum*, with its red tubular flower, cleistocacti, echinocereus, *Astrophytum ornatum*, *Echinocactus texensis* (Horse crippler) and *Ferocactus glaucescens* (continuing since February). By mid-month, trichocereus put on a real show with their very large, mostly white flowers, but also some yellow and red. They are mostly low spreading plants and very easy to grow. There were about eight varieties flowering almost simultaneously and most did so again at the end of the month.

Opuntias were flowering by mid-month. *Opuntia basilaris* (Beavertail) was first with its rose flowers and then *O. acicularis* with red-orange flowers but always colorful with orange-brown glochids at the pad edges. *O. rufida* is a shrubby plant to six feet with flowers bright yellow at first and then darker. *O. robusta* is larger, with large pads, yellow flowers and good fruit. *O. tomentosa* and *velutina* are colorful tree forms, as is Nopalea (spineless with red buds). *O. erinacea* (Plains prickly pear) is low-growing and spiny with pale red flowers at the end of the month. Echinocereus flowering at mid-month included *E. nicholii* (continuing since March), *E. riglochidiatus* (claret cup...an upland plant that does well here with some shade), *E. pentalophus* (Texas lady fingers), a sprawling plant with large lilac flowers, and *E. pectinatus* v. *dasyacanthus* with large yellow flowers. These four very different plants give just a hint of the variety available with hedgehogs.

Stenocereus that began flowering included *S. alamosensis* (Rathbunia) with red tubular flowers, *S. griseus* (and others sold as Mexican organ pipes) and a large, more tropical stenocereus with larger flowers. Large cuttings (six to eight feet) of this one and totem poles sometimes take up to a year to show new growth. Some of the senitas (*S. schottii*) also flowered as did some Arizona organ pipes (*S. thurberi*). Later in the month there were lots of pink-white flowers on *Montevillea spegazzini*. These can climb on tree trunks and are very good on east-facing walls or fences.