

Around My Desert Garden

By Bob Torrest

June 2006

June 30—The warmest June ever didn't seem quite that hot. The average mean temperature of 94.6 F was almost five degrees above the normal mean because of higher overnight lows. The cacti didn't mind and the exceptional flower display continued. This is also the time of year when some of the "common" trees and shrubs provide most of the color. They include desert willow, oleander, red bird, Mexican bird (yellow), red yucca, yellow bells, calliandra, lantana and bougainvillea.

Kapok (*Ceiba acuminata*) at five feet has been slowly leafing out all month. These are trees you can see down in southeast Sonora and further south in the "thorn scrub forest" along with Tabebuia (very colorful in yellow or pink) which is occasionally available in local nurseries. Texas ebony (*Pithecellobium flexicaule*) has dark green foliage and fragrant flower spikes. Texas sage (*Leucophyllum frutescens*) responded colorfully to a little bit of rain and the San Marcos hibiscus (*Gossypium harknessii*) continued with its yellow flowers. Although you can grow tropical hibiscus here, it requires constant attention, so we planted the better adapted Blue hibiscus (*Alyogyne huegelii*) and discovered yet another rabbit favorite. A small Baobab seedling (*Adansonia digitata*) sold at a nursery for bonsai was "saved" and is now growing rapidly in the heat (in part shade).

Columnar cacti like the larger cereus varieties flowered again and were joined by *C. aethiops* and *C. huntingtoniana* (only the one in some shade). Stenocereus flowering included Rathbunia (tubular red flowers), Arizona organ pipe and Pitaya agria (*S. gummosus*) with the largest flowers of all near the tops of the five to six foot columns. By the way, the fastest growing of the stenocereus, *S. griseus*, often sold as Mexican organ pipe, is sometimes mislabeled as *S. pruinosus*, which is clearly different with five or six deep ribs and dull green (the only stenocereus that hasn't flowered for us). The stenocereus are best in the ground and don't really lend themselves to pots but pilosocereus can make great pot plants. Pilocereus are mostly associated with Brazil and Brazilian varieties like *gounellei*, *pachycladus* and *magnificus*, and others are often available in the nurseries. The Brazilian varieties can be grown in the ground with a little protection, but there are also Mexican varieties like *P. alensis*, which is from Sonora and hardier than most. It is bluish-green with light purple flowers and white wool near the top (see the photo in Miles Anderson's book). It makes a great pot plant as do other Mexican varieties like *P. palmeri* (flowers at a meter or less) and *P. chrysacanthus*.

Pereskia aculeata was flowering at the start of the month and is best in part shade. The barrels included *Ferocactus pilosus*, *F. pottsii*, *F. acanthodes* and even a small *F. hamatacanthus* in deep shade with a cluster of bright yellow flowers. Several trichocereus flowered again as did *Thelocactus setispinus*. There were also gymnocalyciums, borzicacti (red tubular flowers), *Monvillea spegazzini*, cleistocacti and

Leuchtenbergia principis. Notocacti have flowered several times with the best being *N. magnificus*, *N. schumanianus* and *N. warasii*.

Succulents other than cacti included *Pachycormus discolor*, Manfreda, and a few small aloes. *Aloe sladeniana* has a sparse, pale-colored spike and certainly would not be grown for the flower display. Apparently the rabbits agree and only eat the leaves, leaving the flower. *A. somaliensis* gets the same treatment but *A. nobilis* with its red flower hasn't been damaged. *A. karasbergensis* has put up its multi-branched spike and the colorful flowers will open next month. *Synadenium grantii* is usually grown as a pot plant but is up to eight feet in the ground under a cascalote tree. This relative of the euphorbias has bright green leaves with purple splotches. The variety "Rubra" has deep purplish-red leaves. A *Moringa drouhardii* which slowly got to seven feet in the ground is now looking much better in a pot in a more shaded spot.