

Around My (Or Your) Desert Garden

By Bob Torrest

August 2006

August 31—If you've been here all summer, you should have given yourself a break in mid-August and gone to the Annual Inter-City Cactus and Succulent Show and Sale at the Los Angeles County Arboretum in Arcadia. The show is by far the best I've ever seen and it is all inclusive. You will find incredible examples of whatever you are looking for. If you are interested in the sale, get there on Saturday morning. By Sunday morning when we got there, most of the rare and unusual plants had been sold. Of course, when you go, leave at least half a day for the nearby Huntington Botanical Gardens.

The "monsoon" season brings new growth to desert trees...even though we had less than half the rain of August 2005. The leather-leaf Acacia (*A. craspedocarpa*) and Tipuana tipu flowered again. Desert Willow (*Chilopsis linearis*) continues to flower, and a few flowers on a Coral Gum (*Eucalyptus torquata*) were attractive enough for some hummingbirds to fight over. *Eucalyptus campaspe* (silver topped gimlet) also had clusters of white flowers that we had never noticed before. This small tree has a striking smooth cinnamon brown bark. The common shrubs continued to flower as did the San Marcos and Coulter's hibiscus. By the end of the month the Baja Ruellia (*R. peninsularis*) were back in flower. Good sized flame trees (Royal Poinciana – *Delonix regia*) do survive our summer and even flower (a bit). A small (one foot) seedling has been fine in mostly shade, while another in sun couldn't handle August even under shade cloth.

Aloe karasbergensis continued to flower all month (in shade) and is, by far, the best aloe flower this month. *Aloe somaliensis* flowered again, as did *A. rauhii*, *A. harlana* and *A. jucunda*...all small plants. Several other aloes gave up in August. *A. bainesii* struggled to stay alive for over a year but finally turned to mush in the ground in a shaded area. This tree aloe from coastal South Africa does very well in Los Angeles...so go see it there and don't bother here. An old *A. marlothii* had reached eight feet with a double head (under a desert tree) but the heat and humidity finally took it out. *A. alooides* in a pot in a shaded area also gave up (a surprise) as did *A. suprafoliata* in some afternoon sun (this one is fine in shade). We try most varieties a couple of times before giving up...I hope these comments help to save you some time and money. If you know of other aloes that do well here and flower in July and August, please tell us!!

All of the ferocacti cited last month continued to flower. *F. pilosus* is very colorful with yellow and green fruit densely packed around buds and open flowers at the top of 14 inch plants in full sun. *F. hamatacanthus* (Texas barrel) continued to flower in sun and shade..a distinctive bright yellow. *F. herrerae* are attractive at all sizes and do well in part shade. *F. chrysacanthus* flowered for the first time at seven inches in a pot. This golden spined barrel from Baja is frost tender. *Echinocactus ingens* flowered for the first time at 12 inches (an egg-yolk yellow). Other cacti flowering included most of the large cereus varieties, *Thelocactus setispinus*, *Notocactus magnificus* and *N. schumannianus*, *Monvillea spegazzini*, *Acanthocalycium glaucum* (powder blue body with large yellow flowers) some astrophytum, a large totem pole (senita), and *Coryphantha elephantidens* got started at month's end.