

Around My Desert Garden

By Bob Torrest

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January 20 – I was looking forward to writing about the flowering aloes which included some flowering for the first time, but on January 13th and 14th, we had a hard freeze. Even the warmest microclimate on our place, a south-facing adobe wall, had temperatures as low as 23F just a couple of feet away, and probably elsewhere the temperature was more like 20F. This was on 64th Street, a mile north of Camelback Road, but even a little further north the temperatures were lower. So, lots of aloe flower stalks were frozen, with details to follow in the next article, along with damage to other kinds of plants. These rare hard freezes are a reminder of why you mostly see the same plants over and over again in landscaping – they survive. In particular, although there may not be as many fans of opuntias and trichocereus in the CACSS, they are still there adding color and interest to the landscape after the hard freeze that seriously damaged or killed lots of other more “exotic” succulent plants that we like to grow. Of course, in general, agaves handle a hard freeze better than aloes, although some were damaged and they will be described briefly below.

The last article went through November 20th and since then and before the hard freeze, there was lots of color in the foliage plants. Flowering continued for cascalotes, chorisia, *Acacia aneura*, cape honeysuckle, chuparosa, baja ruellia and desert aster. Clusters of colorful berries continued on the pistache, and colorful fruit on the citrus. Smaller citrus like Mexican lime, limequats and calmondins are especial nice. It is always a surprise to see a ferocactus flowering at this time of year, but *F. latispinus* is dependable.

Aloes put on a show in the winter. At the end of November, *Aloe pruinosa* (pink with pale green tips), *A. elegans* (bright yellow-green), *A. divaricata* hybrid (red) and *A. krapohlina* were all at it. Flower stalks had formed on *A. pirottae*, *A. petrophila* and *A. vaombe* and there was the first cone-tipped spike on *A. fleurentinorum*. By early December, *A. suprafoliata* and *A. cryptopoda* were flowering and spikes had formed on *A. rubroviolacea*, *A. kedongensis* and the small *A. jacksonii* (red). *Aloe globuligemma* and a few *A. secundiflora* were getting started while *A. ramossissima* continued with its bright yellow spikes. By late December, there were flower stalks on *Aloe. cv. Rooikappe*, *A. aculeata*, *A. capitata*, *A. arborescens*, *A. vacillans* and a few others. Then *A. harlana*, *A. branddraaiensis* (small coral and green flowers on a 2.5 foot spike) joined in with spikes beginning on *A. spinosissima* and *A. longistyla*. Some of the aloe flowers are long-lasting and some even made it through the hard freeze (details next time).

Many of the agaves grown in the valley are from much higher elevations and have no problem with what we consider a hard freeze. Unfortunately, several that are used commonly in the landscaping here are frost tender and can be seriously damaged with temperatures in the low 20's F. They include *Agave attenuata*, *A. angustifolia* (*marginata*), *A. bovicornuta*, *A. dicipiens*, *A. desmettiana*, *A. guiengola*, *A. sisalana* and *A. tequiliana*. The small colorful agave that used to be listed as Sp. FO 076 and is now often sold as *A. titanota* had lots of damage, while the “old” *A. titanota*, a large glaucous plant, did not. Even the 10 foot flower stalks of *A. murpheyi* (from nearby and higher elevation Superior, AZ) were damaged.