

Around My Desert Garden

The Aftermath of the Really Hard Freeze of January 13 and 14, 2007 Part 2

By Bob Torrest

March 31 –Last time, some of the freeze damage was described. Before adding to that material, let's start with all of the color in the garden now. Trees flowering include *Caesalpinia mexicana*, *Eucalyptus torquata*, Palo Verde, *Acacia willardiana* (Palo blanco), pomegranates, Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*), and Texas lead ball (*Leucaena pulverulenta*) at only four feet; El Chanar (Chilean Palo Verde) finished its bright display recently. Shrubs flowering include cassias, creosote, and Baja fairy duster. Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*) had the best flowers I've ever seen here and *Yucca rigida* (Blue yucca) always looks good with or without flowers.

Aloes now flowering include *A. gariepensis*, *A. camperi* (with unusual cone-shaped flowers), *A. striata*, *A. eru*, *A. grandidentata*, *A. saponaria*, *A. vera*, *A. barbadensis*, *A. vacillans* (the last flowers) and a very nice cross of *A. variegata* with *A. saponaria*. There are several aloes with persistent red flowers that are still unidentified. Since these came through with little or no frost damage, they need to be identified and I'm sure some readers can help (PLEASE). Also, the small red flowers of *A. divaricata* were protected under a leaf cluster that froze. Lots of mammillarias are in flower now. Hedgehogs started with *Echinocereus triglochidiatus*, a high country clumping plant that has done well here with afternoon shade. The native *E. engelmannii* var. *richolii* with golden spines can get fairly large and has great pink-purple flowers, while *E. pentalophus* (Texas "lady-fingers") looks good cascading over rocks. There are lots more and almost all make great landscape plants. Opuntias began with *O. basilaris* (beaver tail) and *O. aciculata*, both good ground covers, and now the shrubby *O. rufida* is starting (from Big Bend, Texas and south) as is *O. robusta*. The notocacti started with *N. buiningii* (lots of large flowers) followed by *N. schumanianus* and *N. warasii*, while the Ferocacti include *F. glaucescens* (still for more than a month), *F. echidne* and *F. schwarzii* just getting started, and a tall, red spined barrel with relatively small but bright red flowers.

Columnar cacti—Freeze damage for some of these was summarized last time. Other stenocereus that suffered were some *S. beneckeii*, and *S. pruinosus* had some rib edges frozen but the damage is now dried and easily removed. *S. eruca* (the "creeping devil") came through fine with and without light covers and *S. stellatus* has never looked better. Although *S. alamosensis* and *S. griseus* had some damage, they are now flowering along with some senitas. Of course, oreocereus, espostoa, *Stetsonia coryne* and *Neocardenasia herzogiana* are all fine. The beautiful blue columnar, *Browningia hertlingiana*, was fine with a paper bag on the tip, but a five foot plant, unprotected in a mostly shaded place, has a frozen tip that it may grow through.

Trees and shrubs—Starting with succulents, a large *Jatropha cinerea* is coming back along the interior trunk, as is a 10 foot *Pachycormus discolor*. *Bursera microphylla* and

B. fagaroides were up to six feet and took the freeze unprotected. They are now green along the trunk to a foot or so. *Alluaudia procera* (Madagascar “ocotillo”) has come back on the bottom six feet that were wrapped in a sheet, but another eight foot unprotected plant is gone as are smaller plants under trees. The boojums (*Idria columnaris*) are fine as are *Fouquieria macdougalii* (often sold as Mexican ocotillo). Other trees that were damaged include some cascalotes (now all trying to come back), *Chorisia speciosa* now leafing out along the larger branches, and yellow oleander. *Acacia penatula* is gone but there may be some life in a five foot *Ceiba acuminata*. *Ficus palmeri*, at five feet, is starting to leaf out at the base.

Euphorbias—In the last Central Spine, Tom Gatz reminded you that *E. resinifera* is one of several that is freeze tolerant. You will see nice mounds of this “ground-cover” around town and they have been there for years. Another relatively low grower is *E. echinus* with nice white edging. *E. fruticosa* is flowering now as is *E. polycantha* and *E. pseudocactus* var. *zigzag* with very nice markings. Somewhat larger plants include *E. coerulescens* and *E. grandialata*. While all these came through the hard freeze without damage, *E. stenoclada* is gone as is the “pencil tree,” *E. tirucalli*. Although we lost eight foot plants of *E. ingens* and *E. ammak*, they had all made it through several years in the ground with winter temperatures as low as 25F. If you are willing to risk no more 20F temperatures for another 30 years, you should give them a try.

Myrtillocactus geometrizans continues to flower. Where there was some tip frost damage, new growth is coming through. Cleistocacti continue to flower and *Echinocereus texensis* flowered at the end of the month as did borzicacti and astrophytum. Large red buds on *Trichocereus candicans* (sold as “Argentine giant”) look like they are about to explode and several other trichocereus are also about to flower. A cardon (*Pachycereus pringlei*) has lots of buds starting at eight feet on a 10 foot plant (the first time). Each cardon is an individual with varying tip color, markings and blue color. Since they are faster than a saguaro and can take even this extreme winter, try some. Finally, some potted melocacti were inadvertently left out in the hard freeze. Surprisingly, the only one that was lost was *M. neomontanus*.