

# Around My Desert Garden

By Bob Torrest

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June 30—This is the time of year when everyone wishes they had more shade in their garden...and why these articles usually start with trees and shrubs. But don't count on the Ceiba seedling. Now at five feet, it is still leafing out and while there was no freeze damage, it has grown only a bit since last summer. There was lots of color in mid-May with all the usuals...Desert willows, Ironwood, Sweet acacia, Acacia aneura, Jerusalem thorn, Cordia, Screw bean mesquite, Leather leaf acacia and Pomegranates. A large acacia with long white spines and clusters of yellow puffball flowers (probably *A. eburnea*) won't quit. Although it seemed like an old *Acacia pennatula* (Feather acacia) was lost to the freeze, it has come back from the bottom two feet and is growing vigorously now. Unfortunately a large *Chorisia* was seriously damaged and only about 25 percent of the top growth is still alive. With this limited leaf cover, there is bound to be further damage from sunburn. Large Cascalotes and Jacaranda are coming back from substantial damage. Shrubs flowering included red calliandra, red, yellow, and Mexican bird of paradise and *Gossypinem harkenesii* (San Marcos hibiscus). The Mexican bird as well as yellow bells and yellow oleander came on later. By the way, you can probably keep new or small plants of Jacaranda, citrus, Blue hibiscus and Blue solanum alive through the extreme high temperatures, but they will need lots of extra watering and will often look wilted.

Where is the color now? There are always some barrels in flower. Large golden barrels made their small yellow flowers in early May and the California barrels, *Ferocactus cylindraceus*, began their extended flowering (even small "pups" removed from high up on large plants flowered at five inches) *F. chrysacanthus* is always colorful and flowered at only four inches. By mid-June, *Echinocactus ingens* had its egg yellow flowers coming through the wooly top. Several other varieties have been flowering for weeks including one that was misidentified as *F. pilosus* last year. A real effort to identify these has not been fully successful. By the end of the month, *F. hamatacanthus* (Texas barrel) was flowering even in shade. Of course, *F. setispinus* (Hamatocactus) has colorful flowers and fruits with regularity.

Arizona Organ pipes have been covered with flowers (finally, after 20+ years of growth). While Senitas are faster and have been flowering for years, the first small fruit were harvested in June. *Stenocereus gummosus* (Pitaya agria) has produced a few of its large flowers and has mostly recovered from minor freeze damage. Rathbunia makes bright red tubular flowers for an extended period and while most *S. griseus* (Mexican organ pipes) are done, the type with larger, more tubular flowers waited until month's end. *Myrtillocactus geometrizans* still have fruit, but the Baja variety, *M. cochal*, flowered for the first time in a pot, while larger plants in the ground have not. The Notocacti have put on an exceptional display. In mid-June *N. warasii* had its large yellow flowers again. This is a deep green plant with short golden spines on sharp ribs and always looks good. *N. schumannianus*, *N. leninhausii* and *N. herteri* have all done very well. *N. magnificus* can grow as a single large plant or a large clump of many smaller plants. We like the blue

plants better than the green, but all are very nice and well worth having in several places in your garden. Of course, many varieties of trichocereus have flowered multiple times as have the large cereus. The Echinocereus finished flowering with *E. pentalophus* and *E. viereckii*. While these plants aren't impressive, their flowers are. And with most of the mammillarias done, the native *M. microcarpa* got going in mid-June.

*Aloe karasbergensis* is just now flowering with its colorful unique display. It is the largest of the aloes flowering now. More typical for this time of year are the smaller *A. nobilis*, *A. sladeniana*, *A. rauhii*, *A. jucunda*, and *A. dorotheae-cameronii*. Five months after the hard freeze, leaf tips on several aloes continue to die back. They include *A. divaricta*, *A. secundiflora*, *A. kedongensis*, *A. arborescens* and *A. melanacantha*... but all of these will survive. A four foot *A. dichotoma* finally gave out just above the base, but when examined, the trunk was gone to within a few inches of the leaf cluster. There continues to be some leaf tip die back for furcreas but the agaves damaged by the freeze have recovered and now some are struggling with the heat and sun. Two 20+ year old *Agave weberi* produced 38 foot flower spikes. One bent over and remains on top of a tree. The other broke off at 15 feet and neither had open flowers. Gentry in "Agaves of..." says "the high (summer) insolation withers flowers which may not open and always fail to set seed."

Tropical Fruit - A six foot Strawberry guava "tree" in afternoon shade had all leaves killed by the hard freeze but has slowly come back all the way. A white sapote was damaged but survived...it has never flowered. A "Tropic Pink" guava is gone and a Surinam cherry is mostly gone. If you are determined to grow tropical fruit, the book, *Extreme Gardening*, by Dave Owens will help. We've decided to take the easier and more productive path. Opuntias like *O. robusta* produce attractive fruit. *Myrtillocactus geometrizans* have good berries for months and *F. hamatacanthus* makes a good juicy sour fruit. There are others...try some!