

## Around My Desert Garden

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Beyond the usual flowering trees and shrubs like red bird and Mexican bird (*Caesalpinia pulcherrima* and *Mexicana*), yellow bells and desert willow, in early August the Texas barrel (*Ferocactus hamatacanthus*) has bright yellow flowers even in shade. The local mammillaria is covered in bright flowers again as is a similar plant from Tucson. *F. cylindraceus* is starting to flower again and *F. wizlizenii* is getting started. Lots of the trichocereus varieties and other echinopsis are also flowering again, and you can choose the colors you like best. *Aloe karasbergensis* is certainly the most colorful aloes now and the flowers last.

A fast-moving dust storm came through on July 19 with little rain and the next day it was overcast and breezy. A new kind of weather although the monsoon still hadn't officially begun. The high winds knocked over half the arms of a tropical cereus that had gotten up to eight feet and looked almost perfect before the wind. Just cut the arms off where bent over and they will make nice five gallon pots that someone will want. Of course, large prickly pears like Indian fig always do some of this self pruning by this time of year as do *Trichocereus spachianus* and a few others. These are all relatively rapidly growing plants and most of us have more than we need. Remember that the Indian fig cuttings make good rabbit food that helps minimize damage to other more valuable plants.

On July 31, I went out at 9 a.m. to look around after the first rain (only an eighth of an inch). Some things were looking refreshed, and then I saw it. An enormous limb (32 feet) of an old mesquite had come down in the back yard. It took three hours just to prune out enough to get it off some cacti. An eight foot *Neobuxbaumia tetetzo* is now 4.5 feet and several arms had to be taken off a *Stenocereus griseus*. It was sad to see a heavy branch right in the center of an *Agave tequiliana* that, after many years, was finally starting to get some size and look good. It could have been much worse. So, some of the reality of desert gardening is occasional major clean up (a battery powered reciprocating saw really helps). The big, time consuming chores are tree pruning, large cacti cuttings, and the removal of large plants (mostly trees and opuntias) that need to be removed.

We found an empty acre in 1983 and have tried to make almost all of it into desert gardens. It is possible for two people in their spare time if they both enjoy it. Expect bouts of heavy and or tedious work. Of course, if you are so inclined and lucky, you may find some good (and probably expensive) help for the big jobs. Anything much larger than an acre will take full time help (e.g., the Wallace garden, which Lee mentioned recently, has a staff). It is a matter of opinion, but although the Wallace garden is well worth seeing, it doesn't compare with the Huntington. Lee's enthusiasm notwithstanding. Also, most of what is in the greenhouse in the Wallace garden can be grown outside in the somewhat warmer winters in the more southern part of Scottsdale and Tempe, etc.

*Aloe secundiflora* had been fully exposed to the hard freeze and since then the leaves have been drying up and dying back from the tips. I finally pulled this plant (which was

in full sun) since the stem was soft. Cutting off this soft stem allowed more leaves to come off until the remaining core also fell apart. Since many of you have gotten *A. secundiflora* from us, I thought more details about our experience with it this year might be of interest. While the fully exposed and unprotected plant is finally gone, another one up close to a western facing brick wall is fine. Others under trees or otherwise somewhat protected have all made it with some leaf tip die-back. Although I know better, when in San Diego recently I succumbed to the compulsion to "save" some small plants and brought them back and kept them outside in some shade. Among the aloes lost this way were *broomii*, *distans*, *glauca*, *spectabilis*, and *reitzii*. These and others often will not survive the extreme change from cool San Diego to a Phoenix summer.

**PLEASE NOTE: FREE PLANTS FOR CLUB MEMBERS**

I will have landscape plants in one gallon pots and lots of nice cuttings available for club members to take away free. There will be cacti, agaves, and aloes, e.g., about eight varieties of trichocereus all of which make large flowers. Please call to see if there will be anything of interest. We will be doing a desert plants sale with larger pots and many kinds of cacti cuttings and will be busy with that from 9 to about noon. If you would like to look around or talk a bit, please stop by after 11am or in the afternoon until 5 to get your free plants. The sale is: October 6, at 64<sup>th</sup> Street at Luke (one mile north of Camelback Road), 480-994-3868.