

Around My Desert Garden

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Trees and shrubs are providing lots of color although it is still unusually warm. Since the end of August there have been flowers on yellow bells, red birds, yellow oleander, Coulter's hibiscus, and even some on *Tipuana tipu* again. By the start of October, *Acacia aneura* was loaded again along with *Caesalpinia mexicana* (Mexican bird), desert willow and Cape honeysuckle. Desert asters are colorful, prolific and provide some low shade.

The leather leaf acacia (*A. craspedocarpa*) has a long flowering season, and will be a favorite if you plant it. Of course, *Baja calliandra* and *ruellia* as well as Desert senna and salvias are colorful and dependable. Pomegranates and dates were ripening and at month's end, *A. salicina* had put on its white puff-ball flowers. A small ceiba (*C. acuminata*) which leafed out at 4.5 feet in late June had grown to all 56 inches, and by the end of October was losing its leaves. A large chorisia (*C. speciosa*) which had substantial freeze damage, has survived the summer and even added some sprouts on the west side and higher up to protect itself from the sun. Note that all three of the acacias mentioned are from Australia.

For the succulent plants, cacti have done best with our unusually extreme weather this year. The large cereus varieties have had a great year for flowering...especially those sold as *C. peruvianus* which are still at it. *Cereus aethiops* and *huntingtoniana* got going in early September along with some pilosocereus and trichocereus varieties. The native mammillaria was flowering again, and potted notocacti like *N. warasii* and *N. schumannianus* are intermittent. *Monvillea spegazzinii* is good on a palm trunk and on east facing walls and was covered in flowers by mid September. Later on several coryphantha got going, e.g., *C. poselgeriana* and *C. macromeris* (long tubercles with large deep pink flowers), and then *Ariocarpus fissuratus* and *Astrophytum capricorne*. By mid October, *Euphorbia polyacantha* was covered with yellow flowers on lots of thin upright arms. At the end of the month, *Coryphantha elephantidens* (carmine flowers) and some golden barrels were flowering.

This year has been especially tough on some aloes. The hard freezes took an initial toll (some aloes were gone soon after they were listed in a previous article) and then others continued to show leaf tip die back. Now, after the hottest summer on record a two foot *A. thraskii*, which had grown well for some years in a shaded spot, is gone, and the last of the *A. plicatilis* (which were in an evaporatively-cooled room) have finally given up (another reason for a trip to South Africa!). Hopefully, the conditions in the future won't be quite so severe in each extreme. But to be on the safe side, some aloes that have come through and still look fine include *A. aculeata*, *claviflora*, *variegata*, *sinkatana*, *zebra*, *striata*, *karasbergensis* (in shade) *africana*, *ferox*, *cryptopoda*, *voambe*, *elegans*, *camperi*, and others. The agaves which still show freeze damage include several of the miniatures and also *A. desmetiana*, *guiengola* and the plant recently sold as *A. titanota* (but not the "original" form in the Irish's agave book).