

AROUND MY DESERT GARDEN

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With many days over 110F and with no rain for a long time, there is still some color in the yard. Red birds are flowering (especially in some shade) along with *Acacia millifolia* with its two-inch long cream colored spikes and San Carlos hibiscus (*Gossypium harknessii*), pretty yellow flowers on a leafy bush. Since the last article (May 12) there were lots of flowers including *Acacia aneura*, *Cordia boissieri*, Mexican bird of paradise, Texas ebony, desert willows, ironwood, *Tipuana tipu*, and Mexican palo verde (*Parkinsonia aculeata*). If you've never seen a smoketree (*Dalea spinosa*) in flower, you want to. There are a couple in the Goldwater Memorial on the corner of Tatum and Lincoln which looked great on June 20. A ceiba (*C. aesculifolia*) started leafing out very slowly in May. Most of that gave up after an extended heat spell, and it looks like the time has come to replace it with something that actually grows here. On the plus side, a small *Dracena draco*, which was seriously damaged by last year's hard freeze, is finally coming back. The place to see this striking plant is coastal southern California as it struggles here.

Most of the large cereus are flowering now and not all of the flowers are white. *C. huntingoniana* has very colorful large flowers and an unusual angular appearance. *C. aethiops* from northern Argentina is also a little different and worth having. You've seen large *Stetsonia coryne* at the Desert Botanical Garden, but it looks good at all sizes flowering at about six feet. Ferocacti flowering now include *F. schwarzii*, *F. gracilis* (Baja fire barrel), *F. rectispinus*, *F. cylindraceus*, and *F. stainesii*. While cereus and barrels are the main source of flowers now, there is also some color from notocacti, astrophytums and *Matuacana madisoniorum* which are bright orange-red.

Some of the smaller aloes flowering recently include the dark green *A. nobilis* (red) and *A. brevifolia*, which forms a nice, ground cover in milder climates. *A. rauhii* (from Madagascar) and *A. sladeniana* (Namibia) do well here. *A. pirottae* continues to flower and one of the best mid-sized aloes, *A. karasbergensis*, is getting started. A large aloe with recurved, snakelike leaves has finally been identified (I hope). Purchased as an unlabeled clearance item from Home Depot years ago, the plants have gotten large and stayed single in shade under desert trees. It has red flower spikes in spring. It is probably *A. vanballenii* from eastern South Africa, an area without frosts. However, these plants endured the hard freeze last winter without damage while many other aloes were affected. The books say this plant will develop a coppery-red color in sun. Time to find out!

A small cluster of golden barrels was brought back from the San Diego CSSA sale in early June. Left in a tree-shaded location, it nevertheless got about an hour of late afternoon direct sun on a hot day and sunburned. That's right, a spine covered cactus sunburned with just brief exposure. Of course, in San Diego it was "comfortable" with maximum temperatures below 80 F, often overcast days and maybe even grown in the shade. This little episode reminded me that the first of these articles had some comments

about temperatures experienced by soil in one gallon black plastic pots here in summer. That is, even if you bought the plant here, where you place the pot and how you water it can quickly lead to problems or disaster. If the usual one gallon black plastic pot that lots of succulents are sold in are inadvertently set down in full sun, the temperature for dry soil can go substantially higher than the air temperature (for example, more than 130 F on a 110 F day). The plants' roots can't withstand these extreme temperatures for very long. If you brought the plant home from a nursery the day before, it was probably wet but will totally dry out in a day or two. While wet, the soil temperature will mostly lag below the air temperature. When you do water the pot try to saturate the soil. Just a little bit of water added to very hot soil will tend to "steam" the roots. Therefore, it is probably best to set the pot in a shaded spot where the dry soil temperature won't be much different from air temperature and you won't need to water every day.

If you are new to collecting cacti and other succulents the variety of names for a given plant can be frustrating. For example, in *Cacti* by Vening (one of the first books I had) the Arizona organ pipes were called *Cereus thurberi*. Borg's *Cacti* (one of the early comprehensive books) had it as *Lemaireocereus thurberi*. In a good picture book by Innes and Glass it is *Stenocereus thurberi* (There were no stenocereus in Borg). The other large organ pipe-like cactus native to southwestern Arizona is the senita. It was *Cereus schottii* in Vening, *Lophocereus schottii* in Borg and *Pachycereus schottii* in Innes and Glass. So to some degree, the name you learn will depend on the book you use or, what someone tells you it is or just the common name or local trade name. As you get to know the plants, you will see the similarities and identification will get easier. The examples here are simple ones. Some people keep up with the latest nomenclature others don't. Get some books you like and learn the botanical names for your favorite plants it will help.

CACTI F.D. Vening 1974

CACTI J. Borg 1951

THE ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CACTI, C. Innes & C. Glass 1991