



High on the Desert Cochise County Master Gardener Newsletter

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The University of Arizona and U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating

Cochise County Master Gardener Newsletter is 15 years old!

On this date . . . December 1989

Jackie Dillon-Fast, former Cochise County Master Gardener wrote:

If you're interested in gardening, landscaping, or growing vegetables; if you have questions on what to plant, when to plant it, how much to water it, fertilize it, or prune it; if you want to know why all the leaves fell off your olive tree, or what that bug is that keeps eating your tomatoes and what to do about it, call the Sierra Vista Cooperative Extension office. If we don't have the answer, we'll try to find someone who does.



On this date . . . December 1991

Elizabeth Riordan, former Cochise County Master Gardener wrote:

According to the memories of some longtime residents of Cochise County, before the time of the wood-burning smelter, pine trees were abundant on our mountains and foothills.

Choosing a live Christmas tree is one way to help replace those missing pines. The trees which have the best chance of surviving when planted outside have been growing in a container all their lives. Pines which were recently harvested from a field will probably die within the year. They have lost many crucial roots.

Pot grown specimens will be firmly anchored in their pots and may have

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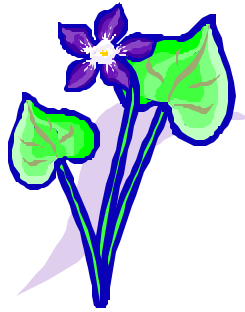
On this date . . . December 2004

Angel Rutherford, Cochise County
Master Gardener wrote:

In a Desert Garden

Violets in the desert

Several years ago a friend from Bisbee gave me a start of the plant Sweet Violet—*Viola odorata*. I planted it under a big rose bush in my rose garden. There it receives very little sun all summer long, in spring, fall and in winter it gets full sun. The charming little plant took right off and has thrived ever since. In spring and fall and most of the winter the plant is covered with pretty little flowers in deep violet nestled between heart-shaped, dark-green leaves. The plant spreads by above ground runners and it reproduces by seeds. It has the loveliest perfume. It has taken over my rose garden, gotten out of the raised beds, and has self-seeded itself into the compacted heavy clay soil of the little patio there. It happily sits under the chairs and the little tables where it gets practically no irrigation but plenty of shade in summer and maybe a little run-off. I have already spotted it in the drier parts of my garden.



What an invasive little plant and quite drought tolerant, but in my garden I don't mind invasive plants. Every plant I do not have to plant is a bonus. There are pink and white varieties of the plant, but I have never come across them yet. Violets and Pansies are perennials and belong to the genus of Viola and come from places with cool summers. They have two kinds of flowers; those which are showy and can be pollinated and set seed and some on short stems one hardly notices. These are cleistogamus, Greek for closed mouth, and set seed without being pollinated.

“He who plants a garden plants happiness.”

-Unknown

Robert E. Call

Robert E. Call
Extension Agent, Horticulture

Carolyn Gruenhagen
Editor

Cuttings 'N' Clippings

* The next meeting of CCMGA is 5:00 p.m. Thursday, December 2, 2004 at the University of Arizona South campus, Room 508 (formerly Room 100). Extension Agent, Rob Call, will tell of his October adventures in Tajikistan.

* There will not be a *Water Wise* workshop in December.

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roots growing out the drainage holes. They will be in good soil, not clay, and will not need fertilizer for about a year.

Live trees should be kept indoors for only two weeks. A good way to water them during that time is to put ice cubes in the pot on top of the soil. You won't have any spills, and the tree will get a slow, deep watering.

the types of trees that make living Christmas trees are numerous. If you know where your tree will be planted, choose it with that particular microclimate and size of space in mind. Don't pass up cedars, junipers, or cypresses when you are looking for a tree. They may be unconventional, but may also be priced well, and I can tell you from experience, make lovely Christmas trees.

On this date . . . December 2001

The Virtual Gardener, Gary A. Gruenhagen, Cochise County Master Gardener, gruenha@sinosa.com, wrote:

Christmas Cactus

The Christmas cactus, like the poinsettia, is an icon of the holiday season, so I thought it might be interesting to see what I could find out about it on the Web. As it turns out, there is lots of information.

One of the things I discovered is that the nursery trade and the taxonomists are not in full agreement on what Latin name should be applied to the Christmas cactus. The older name, *Zygocactus truncatus*, has been around since the late 1800's and is still widely used in the commercial trade. *Schlumbergera bridgesii* is the newer name preferred by taxonomists. Although you may run across the cactus in a store under either name, the most likely name will be *Zygocactus truncatus*. Its common name refers to the red flowers it bears around Christmas time. To further add to the confusion, there is yet another cactus that is sometimes called the Desert Christmas cactus (AKA Pencil Cholla). This one is a cholla with the Latin name of *Opuntia leptocaulis*. It is called a Christmas cactus because of its bright red fruits that appear during the winter.

The traditional Christmas cactus is a native epiphyte of the South American jungles and therefore has the characteristics of a tropical plant. It is cool, but not cold tolerant, and requires more water than native cacti. It is an indoor plant. The Desert Christmas cactus, as a native of the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts is not too

sensitive to cold temperatures and requires little water. It is an outdoor plant.

It is easy to get a Christmas cactus to bloom for Christmas if you have just purchased it because the nurserymen have made sure it was treated in just the right way to get it to bloom. Getting it to bloom for the next Christmas is a little trickier.

Blooming is controlled by the length of the day and temperatures in a complicated sort of way. The plant will bloom if, for a period of six weeks, it is never exposed to temperatures that exceed 55-60°F no matter how much daylight it receives. If it is exposed to higher temperatures, you will need to keep the plant in complete darkness for at least 13 hours a day in order for it to bloom. This means you need to start the treatment early in order to get blooms by Christmas.

The Christmas cactus does not need any other special treatment throughout the rest of the year. It can be exposed to lots of light in the summer but should be partially shaded to keep it from cooking in our intense high desert sunshine.

You can keep it indoors all year around or put it outside when the temperatures are warm. It needs enough water to keep the soil moist but not saturated. The rule of thumb is to water the plant only when the top half of the pot has dried out. It grows well in a good potting soil or mixture of half sand and loam and can be fertilized with a weak solution of liquid fertilizer. It likes to be a little cramped in its pot, so don't put it in too large of a container.

Until next month, happy surfing!

On this date . . . December 1997

Cheri Melton, Cochise County Master Gardener wrote:

Late Bloomers

One of the challenges of gardening is having color all year long. This is easily accomplished from spring to late summer, but the landscape can look bleak and sparse during fall and winter. Here are three great plants that will fill the void:

Anisocanthus thurberi, Desert Honeysuckle, blooms in spring, summer, and late fall, and its long tubular orange flowers make it a great plant for early and late migrating hummingbirds. It has an upright form spreading to 3 feet wide and 4 feet high.

Anisacanthus quadrifidus, Cohila Honeysuckle, has brilliant red-orange flowers from June to late November. Butterflies love this plant! Height and spread is similar to Desert Honeysuckle. Trademark varieties from Mountain States include *A. q. brevifolius* (Mountain Flame) and *A. q. wrightii* (Mexican Flame). There is also a salmon-colored form called *Anisacanthus purbulis*.

If yellow flowers are what you're after, try Mt. Lemmon marigold, *Tagetes Lemmonii*. An aromatic plant with fine green leaves and one-inch yellow flowers blooming from late

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On this date . . . December 1994

Jan Groth, Cochise County Master Gardener wrote:

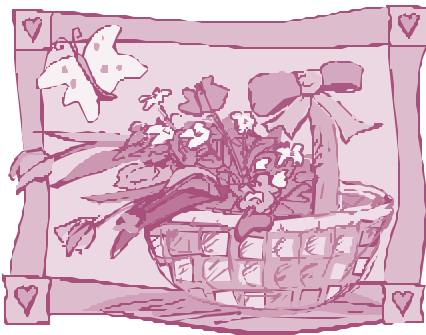
The Miracle of Bulbs

Just a quick reminder that it's not too late to get those fall bulbs in the ground for that first glorious burst of color in late winter-early spring. Bulbs are a most fascinating perennial, a total unit of a self-contained plant that regenerates year after year with minimal proper care.

A wide variety of bulbs, corms, and tubers will do well in our high desert: hyacinths, daffodils, ranunculus, paperwhite narcissus, crocus, alliums, and more.

Your soil should drain well, but also be able to maintain moisture. Dig the holes about three times as deep as the bulb's greatest diameter. Place one teaspoon to one tablespoon (depending on the size of the bulb) of bone meal or bulb food (high phosphorous for root and flower development) in the bottom of the hole. Cover this with a layer of dirt and then plant the bulb. Once the bulbs are placed and covered with dirt, soak the area thoroughly. With occasional winter rain, this should be enough moisture. But, if our air stays dry and the winter is without rain, soak the area periodically throughout the winter and into the blooming season.

After the bulbs bloom, spent flowers may be cut off, but DO NOT cut the leaves. This foliage is manufacturing food and sending it back to the bulb for storage for next year's growth!



This period after the blooms fade is also a crucial time when you can add bulb food (high in phosphorous and potassium) to the ground around your bulbs for next year's performance.

An established bulb bed which has given multiple performances may benefit from a nitrogen fertilizer application at the beginning of the growing season.

Don't forget—bulbs are also great in containers and do well with occasional soil regeneration and regular fertilization. Container gardening allows you to showcase your bulbs as they bloom and then remove them when the bloom is completed. Just remember—bulbs need a winter chill, so the containers need to be placed outside for the winter in a cold, shady place and covered to maintain coolness and moisture.

So, hurry and get your spring-flowering bulbs into the ground and watch what happens in a month or two! With just a bit of care you can enjoy their performances for years.

Did you know???

- ◆ The Cochise County Master Gardener Program began in 1987 under Dr. Deborah Young.
- ◆ Rob Call takes over as Extension Agent, Horticulture in 1991.
- ◆ The first High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference was held February 17 & 18, 1994.
- ◆ The Cochise County Master Gardeners Association was formed in 1996.
- ◆ The 12th High on the Desert Conference will be held March 4 & 5, 2005.

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summer until the first hard frost. Nice loose mounding habit, 3 feet high and wide. It has medicinal and wildlife value.

Some of the nicest fall/winter blooming plants gaining popularity are the Daleas. They range from ground covers to large shrubs, colors from blue, purple, rose, and yellow. Some are evergreen or deciduous, scented, and rabbit-proof. There are about a dozen on the market. My favorites include *Dalea pulchra*, an evergreen shrub with silver leaves and rose-purple flowers; *Dalea greggii*, a ground cover that's great for slopes to control erosion with clusters of tiny purple flowers, and the elusive *Dalea formosa*, with small violet flowers that are surrounded with feathery plumes and seeds with feathery tails.

On this date . . . December 1992

Robert E. Call, Extension Agent, Horticulture wrote:

Q Should I fertilize and water my trees during the winter? How about my house plants?

A Fertilizing of trees and shrubs during the winter in the high desert should not be done. Fertilizer could stimulate plants to come out of dormancy and start to grow and winter damage could occur. These plants are "resting" above the ground but do have activity in the roots if soil temperatures are warm. Normally trees and shrubs that go into winter with adequate soil moisture do not need watering during the winter. Usually winter rains or snow provide enough water. Deciduous plants do not need much water because the leaves, where transpiration occurs, are gone and nutrients needed for growth are not required because there is no shoot growth. The same holds true for most evergreen plants such as pines, junipers, and native oak trees. When the soil and air temperatures are cold and sunlight is reduced, why grow? That is what spring, summer, and fall are for!

Houseplants are generally tropical in origin and survive best in warm, humid environments. Houseplants need to be watered because of the limited soil volume

they are confined to. House temperatures are warm and allow plants to continue to grow. The best way to determine soil moisture is to stick a finger in the soil one to two inches. If the soil feels dry, water; if soil feels moist, don't water.

Fertilizing houseplants during the winter months is not encouraged because of reduced light from the sun. However, if you are "spoon feeding" your plants, that is giving a little fertilizer at each watering, cut back on the fertilizer by giving 1/4 to 1/2 the normal amount.

Many houseplants need high humidity to be "happy," especially true with ferns. With forced air heating in many homes, house humidity can be lower during the winter than during the hot summer because of swamp cooler use. Humidity can be created by placing the potted plant on top of a pebble filled shallow dish. Fill the dish with water as needed, maintaining the water level near the top. The dish should have a diameter nearly as large as the plant diameter. The pebbles are important so that the potted plant is not sitting in water which will cause soil saturation and thus root rot. As the water evaporates, a humid environment is created in which a tropical plant will grow and thrive. This is much better than using a squirt bottle three times a day to try and humidify the plant.

On this date . . . December 1996

Barbara Kishbaugh, former Cochise County Master Gardener wrote:

Take Another Look at Pyracantha

Red berries in fall and winter are the trademark of this plant. Pyracantha has been around a long time so it may not be considered in a new landscape design. But, take another look. The advantages of using pyracantha as landscaping material are many.

It is perfectly adaptable to the high desert. It comes equipped with thorns and fleshy leaves which can store water for the drought periods. Forget to water? Pyracantha is extremely drought tolerant and can take neglect and abuse and still grow. It is forgiving.

If placed right up against the house it will continue to function under the adverse conditions of the reflective heat and poor soil

Chop it back and it is only encouraged and will push twenty more new starts on the limb you tried to remove. Pyracantha is very fast growing and will produce two to four feet in a season. It is quick to respond when trained as an

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espalier. The new growth is pliable and flexible and can be used to dress up a wall or frame a doorway. It can also be trained upon a trellis or fence.

Pyracantha can be used as a hedge or barrier plant, however it will require frequent trimming to maintain the desired form. It works well as a windbreak or as a control of erosion from a bank or arroyo. Many varieties of pyracantha are available from ground cover size to a specimen that will grow as tall as a house. The trunk of a mature plant can be as large as a small tree.

This plant is quite beneficial to native species. It creates a perfect shelter or nesting place for birds and small animals. The foliage is dense with many small limbs. The curved-bill thrashers and Western mockingbirds feed on the red berries.

The cut branches can become the foundation for a lovely Christmas centerpiece. The contrast of the dark green leaves and clusters of red berries lends itself well to the holiday season.

Pyracantha is adaptable and useful. It is evergreen, drought resistant, and extraordinarily hardy.



High on the Desert

The 12th annual High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference will be held at Buena High School in Sierra Vista March 4 and March 5, 2005. The conference will feature many expert speakers covering “everything you want to know and more” about High Desert gardening. Mark your calendar now and watch for more details in this newsletter in the coming months. The conference is sponsored by the Cochise County Master Gardeners Association in conjunction with the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension.