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The Dirt Desk News



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OUT & ABOUT

**Boyce Thompson Arboretum - Fall Foliage Finale
November 24 - 25**

**Tucson Botanical Gardens - Luminaria Nights December
7 - 9. For more information, call (520) 326-9686 x 19.**

**Tucson Botanical Gardens Butterfly Magic runs October
16, 2007 - March 31, 2008.**

**Tohono Chul Park - Free admission day, Thanksgiving,
November 22. (520) 742-6455**

**Adopt-a-Road clean up will be Saturday, November 17 at 8:00
a.m. on 14th Ave. just off Discovery Park Blvd.**

**Workshops for the Home Gardener - next Workshop is
Saturday, January 12 at the Safford Agricultural Center on
Montierth Lane in Safford. For more information call 428-
2611 or email karent@ag.arizona.edu**

Staff

Extension Agriculture Agent:

Randall Norton, Ph.D.

Newsletter Editor..... Karen Thomson

Send comments or questions by email to:

karent@ag.arizona.edu or call 928-428-2611



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Start Planning Now for Best Christmas Tree Choices

by Craig Wilcox

With Christmas less than a month away, you might want to start thinking about your options for trees. Several choices are available for eastern Arizona gardeners.

Your choices include either a fresh-cut or live tree. For fresh-cut trees, you can go to the local Christmas tree lot run by your favorite charity, the convenient big-box store, or if you're looking for an outdoor adventure, you can cut your own tree; which may be a longstanding family tradition.

For \$10 you can cut a tree from a designated area in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests' Clifton Ranger District. Call (928) 687-1301 for more information. The over-the-counter cut tree sales run November 23 - December 24, 2007. Another choice for a fresh-cut tree is the "You-Cut" farm operations. Just like "You-Pick" vegetables, there are "You-Cut" Christmas tree farms. These are becoming ever more popular in many parts of the country. Often these are associated with holiday festivals. The closest places in Arizona are Scottsdale and Flagstaff.

If you don't want a cut tree, your choice is getting a living tree to transplant in your yard after the holidays. Some folks choose to replant their tree as part of twelfth day of Christmas observation. You can purchase a "wildling" permit and dig-your-own or purchase a potted tree from a nursery. "Wildling" permits are issued for collecting living plants for the purpose of transplanting them, usually trees or succulents. Remember you must have a permit to dig or cut a tree in Arizona.

Call the individual Forest Service Ranger District before heading out as policies and local conditions vary considerably. Check on permit costs, species options, and locations. The permits usually run \$5 with a \$20 minimum.

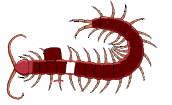
Wildling permits may also be required for mistletoe and pinecone collecting, at least in any larger quantity, about a bushel or more. It is always good to ask.

Don't expect to find a "wildling" Christmas tree that will meet the high standards of a farm-grown fresh-cut tree but, as the years go by, your native tree will bring back those Christmas memories. "Wildling" permits are a good option if you are looking for a native landscape tree.

Piñon, Chihuahua pine, juniper, and Arizona cypress would all make good choices. Piñon is a personal favorite that I acquired during my years in New Mexico. My mom still has one in her back yard that I dug up over 30 years ago; it still reminds me of my days in the Guadalupe Mountains. Piñons make excellent trees for backyard wildlife and, once established, require only occasional supplemental watering. Border piñon (*Pinus discolor*), once lumped in with Mexican piñon (*P. cembroides*), is our local common species but Colorado piñon (*p. edulis*) and Arizona piñon (*P. monophylla ssp monophylla*) are also found in Graham and Greenlee counties. For the best chance of successful transplanting, I recommend that trees selected be less than four feet in height and that you dig up a root ball of at least a cubic foot. Bring some burlap along to contain the root ball and to make it easier to handle. It is a good idea to bring along a buddy to help.

If you choose to purchase live trees from local nurseries non-native Aleppo, Italian stone, Eldarica and Afghan pines will add to your choices for low-water use trees that have proven their tolerance for this area. Finding the native conifers may require you to go to a specialty nursery in Tucson or Boyce Thompson Arboretum. Be sure to check the planting zones before you buy, just because they sell it here doesn't mean that they will grow here. Our USDA zone is 8.

WHAT'S BUGGING YOU?



Praying Mantis

by Karen Thomson



The beneficial praying mantis is usually found in gardens or grasses that are free of insecticides and have other insects around. They do not distinguish between other beneficial or harmful insects, eating whatever crosses their

path. They will even eat each other.

Females are usually larger and have a heavier abdomen than males. After or during mating, the female will eat the male.

The female lays between 12 - 400 eggs and covers them with a foamy, Styrofoam looking substance "ootheca" that turns hard and protects the eggs over winter. The nymphs emerge in spring, looking like the adult, only with color variations and patterns, depending on the plants they live on. The camouflage facilitates their predaceous behavior. Barbs on the front legs hold prey tightly after a fast grasp. The mantis has a set of three simple eyes and two compound eyes made up of hundreds of facets, constructed with two lenses. They can move 180 degrees and see movement 60 feet away. They have ultrasound ears along with antennae that alert them to prey and predators which include bats, birds and spiders. Young may also be eaten by fish and aquatic insects.

There are nearly 2,000 species of mantises in the temperate portions of the world, ranging in size from 2/5 - 12 inches long. The U.S. has three types, the European mantis (*Mantis religiosa*), Carolina mantis (*Stagmomantis carolina*), and the Chinese mantis (*Tenodera aridifolia*).

Bulbs for the Southwest

by Aaron James Schnebly

Every year glossy catalogs full of gorgeous flowers entice gardeners to try growing bulbs that aren't suited to their climate. Many tulips, for example, won't come back and bloom a second year. They just can't take the heat. Most fall bulbs come from Holland where the weather is cool and cloudy. Here in Arizona, highs in the 90's and sunny days are the norm from March on.

There is hope, however. Many bulbs come from warm climates, and others can be planted in a cool, protected microclimate. Here are some suggestions for our area.

Tip #1 Plant in Shade

All of those "full sun" recommendations are made for gardeners who get half the sunshine we do. Shade makes it possible for bulbs to flourish despite our hot climate, and helps their flowers last longer. Afternoon shade and shade from trees is especially helpful. As a general rule, the colder the climate where the bulbs come from, the more shade they need. I like to plant tulips in full shade on the northern side of my house.

Tip #2 Don't Plant Too Deep

When I first started growing bulbs, I would remove 6 inches of soil, place the bulbs carefully at exact spacing, and put all the dirt back on top. This was exhausting work. I have since discovered that planting 1-3 inches deep is perfect for most bulbs. Recommendations to plant 6 inches deep are for areas where the soil freezes hard. The only reason to plant deeply here is to keep the bulbs from getting hot in the summer. Heat and moisture can cause bacterial rot and destroy the bulbs while they are dormant. Shade and a thick layer of mulch can keep your soil cool.

Tip #3 Choose the Right Variety

This can make all the difference. Quite a few bulbs come from South Africa, Iran, and other desert climates. The good news is that you aren't limited to spring blooming bulbs from Holland. Here are some suggestions, categorized by season:

Spring:

It is hard to go wrong with Daffodils, but some varieties are more resilient than others. Multi-flowered types do especially well. I also recommend Species Tulip, which bloom and multiply year after year (unlike the wimpy hybrids). Dutch and Bearded Iris can be glorious in mid spring. Freesia bloom and smell heavenly in April. Allium, Grape Hyacinth, and Amaryllis are also good choices.

Summer:

Tropical Bulbs such as Canna Lilies, Crinum, and Gloriosa Lilies grow well in our summers. Rain Lilies multiply quickly and bloom repeatedly during the hotter months. They are most likely to bloom when watered after a good dry spell.

Fall:

Many bulbs have winter foliage and fall flowers. These include Lycoris, Nerine, Oxblood Lilies, and Saffron Crocus. Dahlias survive through the summer, but put on their best show when it cools down in the fall.

Winter:



Narcissus Erlicheer
Blooms from Nov - Feb

Paperwhites start blooming in late fall and go through early spring. It really just depends on when they get water. I start watering them 1-2 months before I want them to bloom. Crocus and mini Iris Reticulata bloom as early as January.

Some of these are specialty bulbs that you can't buy locally, but they are readily available online. With the right planning you can have something blooming year round.

About the Author: Aaron sells bulbs on eBay.

His current site is www.azbulbs.com You can contact him by email at ajschnebly@yahoo.com

Featured Noxious Weed: Sahara Mustard

by Kim McReynolds



Sahara mustard (*Brassica tournefortii*) is an annual herbaceous plant native to Africa, Asia and Europe. Like many noxious weeds, Sahara mustard probably arrived in the United States as a contaminant in crop seeds. The first record of the plant was in 1927 from the Coachella Valley, California. Since then it has spread widely throughout southern California deserts into Arizona's western desert areas. In 2001 it was discovered in the Gila Valley along roadways, irrigation ditches and disturbed land.

Sahara mustard germinates with fall and winter rains. It's size will vary with the amount of rainfall received, and can reach a height of over 3 feet during good years. It can be distinguished from other mustards by the strong branching seed stalks. The plant usually flowers in February and produces many seeds. Seeds are spread in a fashion similar to the tumbleweed by the plant breaking off at the base and rolling with the wind.

Scientists in the desert regions of the southwest are very interested in Sahara mustard and the impacts it is having on local ecosystems. It is quickly overtaking sandy dune areas and replacing native plants. In some areas, it is suppressing native wildflowers and serves as fuel for wildfires that previously did not occur in desert regions.

The best control for Sahara mustard is mechanical. Pulling plants before they go to seed can help reduce the seed crop for the next year. Like other invasive plants, one year of control will not get rid of the problem. Several years of control will need to take place to reduce the population.

To learn more about Sahara mustard, visit these web sites:

http://www.desertmuseum.org/invaders/invaders_saharamustard.htm
<http://www.issg.org> (search for Sahara mustard)



IN THE GARDEN

In your November Garden

Prune to remove dead or diseased limbs but save heavy pruning until plants are dormant,

Plant beets, carrots, chard, garlic cloves, leaf lettuce, green bunching onions, radishes, and spinach.

Transplant asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and Brussel sprouts. Fertilize two weeks after setting out with a gentle liquid fertilizer.

Direct seed alyssum, sweet peas, and spring wildflowers in the garden.

Set out perennials and cool season annuals, such as, calendula, chrysanthemums, dianthus, daisies, larkspur, pansies, primroses, snapdragons, stocks, and violas.

Divide crowded perennials (callas, daylilies, iris, yarrow, aster, coreopsis, and daisies) when finished blooming.

Plant spring flowering bulbs such as iris, tulips, daffodils, crocus, and hyacinth.

Plant strawberries.

Best time to plant trees and shrubs.

Control aphids and whiteflies by hosing them off of your plants or spraying with insecticidal soap.

Slowly decrease the frequency of watering for established trees and shrubs.

In your December Garden

Add compost and manure to garden beds as they become vacant. Remove all old fruit (mummies) from trees and all debris from the ground below. Sprinkle granular insecticide to reduce existing insects. This will significantly reduce the codling moth problem next year.

Direct seed alyssum, sweet peas, and spring wild flowers in the garden.

Perennials and cool season annuals, such as calendula, chrysanthemums, dianthus, daisies, larkspur, pansies, snapdragons, stocks, and violas can still be set out.

If you buy spring flowering bulbs, plant immediately.

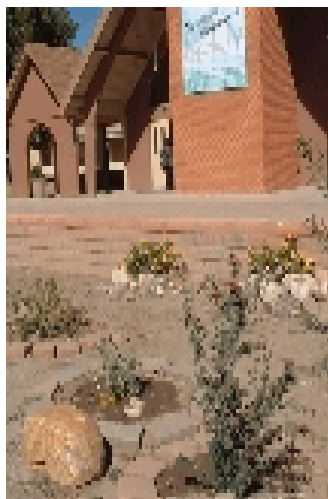
Pre-emergent herbicides can still be applied early this month for winter annual weed control. Follow package directions carefully.

Plant bare rooted trees, roses, and grapes later in the month.

When frost is predicted, protect citrus and other tender plants with cloth, burlap, or rowcovers. Make sure to suspend them so they don't hang on the leaves. Remove or open coverings in the mornings.

Between rains, irrigate deep rooted plants (such as trees) occasionally, but thoroughly,. Shallow-rooted plants require water more often.

AROUND TOWN



A colorful corner in the St. Rose of Lima xeriscape garden includes Red Baja Fairy Duster, yellow lantana, pink desert willow, and red salvia. Dozens of desert-adapted plants have already been placed in the garden. Blocks circling the plants will be removed when the placement desert gravel completes the project.

TIDBIT

Winter plant loss (one or two year old recent transplants) is more often caused by lack of water than freezing temperatures.

Plants Need Water in the Winter, Too!

by Karen Thomson

Even though many plants go dormant in the winter, they still need some water to survive. The biochemical processes of plants continue dissolving sugars and amino acids to make the plants cold tolerant. They need water to do this. Depending on the amount of precipitation and drying wind, water accordingly.

PLANT	FREQUENCY	WATER DEPTH
ground cover desert adapted	21 - 45 days	8 - 12 inches
ground cover high water use	10 - 14 days	8 - 12 inches
shrubs desert adapted	30 - 40 days	18 - 24 inches
shrubs high water use	10 - 14 days	18 - 24 inches
mature trees desert adapted	30 - 60 days	24 - 36 inches
mature trees high water use	14 - 30 days	24 - 36 inches
cacti & succulents	if needed	8 - 12 inches
annuals	5 - 10 days	8 - 12 inches
cool season grass	7 - 14 days	6 - 10 inches

The City of Glendale and Cochise County

Watermark\$

The 4th Annual Gila Valley Gardening & Landscaping Conference will be February 23, 2008. Mark your calendars!