



High on the Desert Cochise County Master Gardener Newsletter

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

Lo How The Broom Does Bloom

It snows here every November. Guaranteed. Well, technically it isn't precipitation, but it sure looks like it. The white stuff floating all over are seeds from the female plant *Baccharis sarothroides* or more commonly known as "Desert Broom." Now before you say "Augh! Desert Broom—get rid of it!!" let me shed a little light on this under appreciated plant.

If you look carefully at the shrubs, you will notice that the flowers (or what's left of them now) are different. Some plants have fluffy seeds and some have small dried cup-like discs. It is because these plants are dioecious—meaning there is a male and a female plant. Now, at the risk of sounding sexist, the females are the ones that are troublesome. The female plants are the ones with all the fluffy (and prolific) seeds. The male plant flowers in October and is really quite a nice plant.

When the male plant flowers, you will see that it is covered in insects: beetles, butterflies and other assorted flying beauties. Which leads me to this question: If the male plant produces pollen in October and is covered in insects, doesn't it imply that the plant is insect pollinated and not wind pollinated? If only the seeds are released in November, then how can allergies be attributed to the female broom? If the seed fluff caused allergic reactions, wouldn't we then be carving fluff out of our noses? Just a thought.

I hope you can see that the male desert broom has a lot more going for it than you thought. Evergreen, easy to keep lush with pruning, needs no supplemental water. and is a great insect attractor. So before you attack the desert broom in your yard, take a second look. You may just find it is a keeper.

Cado Daily
Water Wise Program Coordinator

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The Virtual Gardener—Marking Contours

Now that the summer growing season has ended and cooler weather has arrived, I'm ready to tackle some of those yard projects I didn't have time to do in the summer or didn't want to do in the heat. Improving my ability to capture and hold rainwater is one of those projects. As I've previously written, I believe the best place to store rainwater for plants is in the ground.

One technique for capturing rainwater is creating berms or swales on contour. Of course to do this you first have to determine contours, or lines of equal elevation on your property. A couple of inexpensive and easily constructed gadgets allow you to do that. One device uses a water-filled tube as a level. This device is sometimes called a *bunyip* after a mythical creature that haunts Australian billabongs (ponds) and preys on animals and people. While a bunyip works perfectly well, its biggest downside for me is that it requires a couple of people to operate it, and I often work alone. For this reason I prefer another device, a simple A-frame and a carpenter's level.



Fig.1 Completed A-frame Contour Finder

The A-frame contour finder is simple and inexpensive to make. If you already have a carpenter's level, you can build one for less than 5 dollars. In addition to a carpenter's level, all you need are three furring strips (nominally 1 ½ by ¾ inches by 8 feet long) from a lumber store and three 1 ¼ in long by ¼ in diameter bolts with nuts. I cut two furring strips to six foot lengths and the third one in half to make an A-frame that has legs that are 6 feet long and a cross bar that is 4 feet long. Construction was simple.

First I stacked the two six foot pieces on top of each other, lined up the ends, and drilled holes through both pieces large enough to accommodate my bolts. The first hole was about 2 inches from one end of the boards and the second hole was 2 feet from the same end. Then I drilled two holes in the four foot piece about 15 inches from each end. Next I assembled the A-frame by

bolting the two six foot pieces together at the holes closest to the end and bolting the four foot cross piece to the legs of the A-frame through the second set of holes. The result is an A-frame with legs that are spread about 5 feet apart at the base. With the base set on the ground, the cross piece is about 43 inches above the ground. Just for the record, none of the dimensions

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Robert E. Call

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Editor

Cuttings 'N' Clippings

* The next meeting of Cochise County Master Gardeners Association (CCMGA) is 5:00 p.m. January 8, 2004, Room 106 at the University of Arizona South campus.

The Agent's Observations

Q I found some type of insect in the core of a rotting desert spoon. They appear like brownish, legless grubs about 3/4 of an inch in length. What can I do to save this plant and get rid of these bugs?

A After looking at a sample it was determined to be the larvae of syrphid flies or commonly known as flower flies. These larvae did not cause the death of the desert spoon, but were laid as eggs in the moist decomposing plant tissue by a "caring" mother fly. Many fly species lay eggs in moist decaying food sources. Syrphid flies are a medium to large sized fly. They are fairly common and frequently hover and dart rapidly over flowers. The wings are often spread open at rest. Most have two large compound "fly eyes." Many species are dark brown with yellow bands. Some common syrphid flies closely resemble bees and wasps in color and shape and may be densely covered with hairs. They are important pollinators. There are about 950 species in North America. Larvae are somewhat slug-like in appearance, wrinkled and pointed at one end. Some species are predators of aphids and other soft bodied insects like thrips. Others live in ant, termite or bee nests and in decomposing vegetation. These flies are seen pollinating fruit trees and other flowers in the spring. They may "dive bomb" plants, feeding on high aphid populations.

Source: *How to Know the Insects*, 3rd Edition. 1978. Roger G. Bland and H. E. Jaques. Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers. Dubuque, Iowa. Page 341.

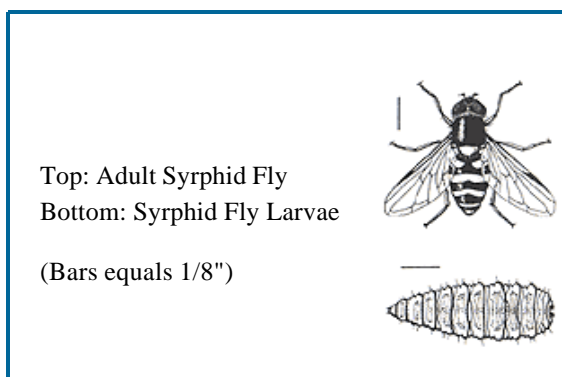
Q I was given a large columnar cactus. When a side shoot broke off a white milky substance dripped out. What is this and will the "bleeding" hurt the plant? Can it be planted outside?

A The plant you have is not a cactus but rather a succulent in the family of *Euphorbiaceae*. This is the fourth largest family of flowering plants with more than 3,000 species. Poinsettias are in this family and are found growing wild in Mexico and Central America. The white milky substance is latex, which was the inspiration for petroleum chemists to make synthetic latex paints, gloves and other products. The bleeding can be stopped by dipping or spraying the injured surface with water. The loss of latex will not hurt the plant, but is a mechanism for wound healing. This cactus-like plant belongs to a

genus containing some 300 species, a large part of which are succulents. *Euphorbia* are widely distributed throughout the world, being found in North and South America, Africa, the Canary Islands, Madagascar and India. They grow in a wide range of climates, but many are from tropical areas and must be grown as houseplants. This is the case with your plant. The plants do not like full sun and should never be allowed to dry out completely, even in winter. Plants can be propagated from seed, cuttings or grafting. Some species are dioecious with male and female flowers appearing on separate plants, so both plants need to be present to produce seed. Cuttings need to scar over before placing in soil to prevent disease.

Source: *A Plant Finders Guide to Cacti and Succulents*. 1999. Keith Grantham and Paul Klassen. Timber Press Inc., Portland, OR. Page 111.

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Euphorbiaceae

rphi

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I used are critical. You can adjust the lengths of the boards to suit your own requirement. The only critical element of the design is that the two holes for the cross piece must be at equal distances from the end of each board (that's why I stacked the boards to drill the holes).

To use the device, place a carpenter's level on the cross piece. You can either hold it in place or, as I do, use a couple of spring clamps to hold the level in place. Once you are set up with the level, place one leg of the frame on the starting location and place the other leg at a second location where the bubble in the carpenter's level is centered. The second point will be at the same elevation as the first. Now mark

both locations and move the frame so the leg that was on the starting point is now on the second point and repeat the process to find a third point that is level with the second. Keep moving across your property, marking each point of equal elevation as you go. When you have gone as far as you want to go, connect all the points you have marked and the resulting line will be a contour line. You can then move up or down slope and repeat the operation to define another contour.

Now that you have constructed an A-frame to find contour lines, check out the following Web site for many examples of water harvesting techniques: <http://www.fao.org/ag/ags/agse/3ero/namibia1/c21.htm>.

Until next month, happy surfing.

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Correction: The authors of *The View from Bald Hill* were incorrectly identified last month. They are Carl and Jan Bock.

High on the Desert

Plans are underway for the 11th Annual High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference. It is scheduled for the evening of March 12 and all day Saturday the 13th at Buena High School in Sierra Vista. CCMGA and the U of A Cooperative Extension are working together to bring you another exciting conference at the new venue. Watch for details in next month's newsletter!!!