



# High on the Desert Cochise County Master Gardener Newsletter

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

## The Virtual Gardener—Ask a Master Gardener

According to their mission statement, Cochise County Master Gardeners support the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program by providing to citizens researched-based horticultural information appropriate for Cochise County environments about gardening, food production, landscaping, native plants, and environmental stewardship. One of the principal ways Master Gardeners provide this service is by answering questions on these topics.

There are basically three ways you can contact a Master Gardener with your question: you can call the Extension Office (520-458-8278 Ext. 2141) and talk directly to a Master Gardener volunteer; you can drop by the Extension office at the University of Arizona South campus, 1140 N. Colombo in Sierra Vista and talk to a Master Gardener face to face; or you can e-mail your question to the Master Gardener office at

<http://ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/question.htm>.

Of course Master Gardeners will answer general questions about plants, bugs, watering, fertilizing, and such, but

where they really shine is in diagnosing plant problems and suggesting solutions to them.

Understand, however, that the description of the symptoms of a problem alone are seldom definitive enough to allow a comprehensive diagnosis. Your doctor can't tell you what's causing your stomach ache unless he knows some additional information such as what you've been eating, exactly where the pain is, what you've been doing lately, and so on. Similarly, the Master Gardener usually won't be able to diagnose the cause of your plant problem unless he or she has some additional information, so be prepared to offer as much background information as possible to allow a proper diagnosis.

If there is damage to your plant, be able to describe it in detail. Exactly what does the damage look like? Where is it on the plant? How long has the damage been evident? Is the condition confined to a single plant or several? Are any insects present? What do they look like? *Etc.*

Be prepared to discuss the conditions under which the plant is growing. How

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## Cochise County Cooperative Extension

[www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/](http://www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/)

1140 N. Colombo, Sierra Vista, AZ 85635

(520) 458-8278, Ext. 2141

450 S. Haskell, Willcox, AZ 85643

(520) 384-3594

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often does the plant get watered? How much? Has it been fertilized? What kind of fertilizer was used? How much? Has it been sprayed with a pesticide? What kind? What kind of soil is it growing in? How much sun does it receive? *Etc.*

These are just a sample of the kinds of questions the Master Gardener may ask to get the information necessary to diagnose your plant problem and suggest a solution. If you are submitting your question by e-mail, the form on the Web site prompts you to supply the additional information. Be sure to supply all that is requested and appropriate.

Sometimes the Master Gardener may also request you bring a sample of the plant into the office. A few conditions cannot be properly identified without microscopic or even chemical analysis. If it is an insect or bug problem they may request you bring it into the office also.

Most of the time your questions can be answered immediately but sometimes the Master Gardener needs to research them and get back to you with an answer. If Master Gardener volunteers can't answer the question, they will pass it along to Rob Call, the Cochise County Horticultural Extension Agent. And if he can't answer it, it will be passed on to a specialist at the University of Arizona or elsewhere. In any case, you will get an answer.

Before I wrap this up, I would like to give you a tip for searching past Cochise County Master Gardener newsletters. If you would like to search for a particular topic in the newsletters



and are using Google as your search engine, here's how to do it. Type the words you want to use as your search terms in the search box followed by a space and then this phrase:

[site:ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/pdf](http://site:ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/pdf). Note that you shouldn't leave a space after the colon.

Until next time, happy surfing.

Gary A. Gruenhagen, Master Gardener

## February Reminders

- ◆ Winter prune
- ◆ Prune roses
- ◆ Cold-moist stratify seeds
- ◆ Plant bare-root trees
- ◆ Prepare spring planting beds
- ◆ Clean and repair drip irrigation systems
- ◆ Finalize spring garden plans
- ◆ Keep watering!

*Robert E. Call*

Robert E. Call  
Extension Agent, Horticulture

Carolyn Gruenhagen  
Editor

## What is a Master Gardener

The Master Gardener program began in King and Pierce Counties of Washington state in 1972 when an over-worked Horticultural Extension Agent, Dr. David Gibby, began training volunteers to assist him in providing support to the community. Dr. Gibby's program was simple and effective. In exchange for a promise to donate a certain number of hours service, he gave volunteers specialized, university-level training in horticulture. Word of his success in recruiting volunteer support soon spread to other communities and today Master Gardener programs are flourishing throughout the United States and Canada.

In 1987 Horticulture Extension Agent, Dr. Deborah Young, started the Master Gardener program in Cochise County. The current agent, Robert Call, continues the program, teaching the thirteen week Master Gardener course yearly. Prospective Master Gardeners who take the course study such topics as soil, pest management, botany, gardening, landscaping, and environmental stewardship. Upon completion of the course the person provides educational leadership to the community by donating fifty hours of volunteer time.

In the summer of 1996, Cochise County Master Gardeners formed a non-profit organization to support the educational mission of the Cooperative Extension. The goal of the Cochise County Master Gardeners Association is to promote food production, landscaping with native plants, and environmental stewardship.

For more information call the Cooperative Extension offices in Sierra Vista (520) 458-8278, Ext. 2141 or in Willcox (520) 384-3594.

## In a Desert Garden

### Arizona Blue Eyes – *Evolvulus arizonicus*

Another little plant I really like, in the morning glory family, is Arizona Blue Eyes (*Convolvulaceae*). It is nothing like a morning glory. The plant is not a vine. It is really very small, and only grows to one foot tall and wide.

When our house was built many years ago here in Arizona, I inspected the yard to see what would grow there naturally. Of course, the developer had the lot scraped down to the red earth but several plants were already coming back. There were several stands of that little beauty in my yard and I marked the spots that I remembered where there were.

One cannot help to fall in love with this little guy. Its sky blue flowers stood out so much in my red clay, and it seemed to be really hardy, surviving the harsh treatment it received. The flowers are about  $\frac{3}{4}$ " wide

and look like tiny flattened morning glories. They appear on the end of the slender stalks, and there are lots of them. The plant starts blooming around the beginning of April and the flowers last till October. In winter it freezes back. I leave the dried up seed stalks until it warms up, and then I cut it back. The plant does self-seed and I never know where it is going to pop up. It's usually in areas I don't like it to be, like my walks. That tells me it likes compacted soil. Because it is so small and my yard is kind of wild and natural, that really doesn't bother me. Actually, I have dug it up and transplanted it on occasion. It is successful if you soak the soil the day before and take the plant out with a clump of soil attached.

Of course the plant is very drought tolerant and practically maintenance free. The only downside is as usual, it is not available in the nurseries here, but you might find it at the Farmers Markets in Bisbee and Sierra Vista.

*Angel Rutherford, Master Gardener*



*Evolvulus arizonicus*

## Cuttings 'N' Clippings

\* The next CCMGA meeting is 5:00 p.m. Thursday, **February 5** at the University of Arizona South Campus Public Meeting Room. An overview of the Cochise County Master Gardeners will be presented by Gary Gruenhagen.

\* The 16<sup>th</sup> High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference will be held at the Windemere Hotel & Conference Center on **February 12 & 13, 2009**. There is still time to register!

\* Congratulations to Bret Galloway who has been awarded a scholarship to the conference. His winning essay will be published in an upcoming Master Gardener Newsletter.

\* A free fruit tree pruning workshop will be given **Saturday, February 14** from 10:00 a.m.—Noon by Extension Agent, Rob Call. The location is 3401 E. Navaho, approximately 3 miles South of the Mall of Sierra Vista. Turn right on Choctaw, left on Pueblo, and right on Navaho to the address.

## 2009 Master Gardener Class

The new Master Gardener training class is scheduled to begin February 25 and continue through May 27, 2009. It will be held at the University of Arizona South, Room 508 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The fee of \$120 includes the Master Gardener Manual and a Master Gardener t-shirt. For more information, please call the Cooperative Extension Office at 458-8278, Ext. 2141.

## Cacti 101: Chapter 5—Some Other Opuntia

Last month's *Virtual Gardener* article by Gary Gruenhagen raised some very interesting and timely thoughts on how to protect our gardens during cold weather. On the subject of protecting cactus, Gary's suggestion to cover the growth point in columnar cacti with styrofoam cups is both effective and inexpensive. The beauty of this approach is the cactus itself holds the cup in place with its spines. On larger diameter cacti the author has used empty one and five gallon garden containers to cover an entire cactus. If you use this approach a brick or garden stone on top of the container will usually withstand the winter winds.

Many of the so called golden barrel cacti are at risk from the really hard frosts expected in Cochise County. While many have survived for years in local gardens, important specimens in our gardens need and deserve winter protection. Since cacti tend to be dormant during our cold weather season many cactus gardeners put protection in place in November and leave it there until late March or early April.

One of the blessings of winter in our cactus gardens is the interesting change in color we can observe as the weather turns cold. In addition to the purple prickly pears we discussed last month several other *Opuntia* including *Opuntia aciculata*, commonly known as 'chenille' or Bristly Pear, takes on a deep red color in winter. See Figure 1.



Figure 1

### Bristly Prickly Pear

The *Opuntia aciculata* is not a Cochise County native but does very well in our climate. This low growing cactus is a delight to look at but not one to get too close to. It tends to reach only about three feet high but will sprawl to eight to ten feet wide. The attractive dark green pads are covered with numerous clumps of dark red glochids, some reaching a half inch in length. See Figure 2. It grows



Figure 2

readily from cuttings and is available in local nurseries. One in the author's front garden has grown to three feet wide by two feet high from a one gallon, three pad specimen planted two years ago. A cutting from this specimen planted less than one year ago now has ten pads. *Opuntia aciculata* has yellow flowers up to four inches in diameter and pear shaped dark reddish purple fruit.

### 'Dinner Plate' Prickly Pear

*Opuntia robusta*, known by many common names including 'Dinner Plate' and 'Clock Face' prickly pear, is a very elegant cactus. It is very large, growing to ten feet high and as wide. The pads are huge, some up to twelve by twelve inches, and up to two inches thick. They are well spined with spines reaching as long as two inches. The specimens in the authors garden have many relatively flat pads, hence the name 'Dinner Plate' cactus, but also many curved or wavy pads. See Figure 3.



Figure 3

*Opuntia robusta* grow readily from cuttings. In just over two years the *O. robusta* in Figure 4, has grown from a single pad cutting to over four feet high and nearly as wide. Bright yellow flowers up to two inches in diameter are followed by deep red fruits up to three and a half inches long.



Figure 4

## The Agent's Observations

**Q** We brought some furniture in from a storage shed. There were some pea-sized balls attached to some of the furniture with some cobwebs. Are these scorpion eggs?

**A** No, these are most likely spider egg cases. Scorpions bear their young alive, developing within the female. After birth the young are carried on the backs of their mothers. She will carry them around until they can survive on their own. Immature scorpions molt seven times to reach maturity in about a year. Adults may live for several years.

**Source:** *Venomous Animals of Arizona*. 1992. Robert L Smith. Cooperative Extension, University of Arizona, pp. 3-4.

**Q** The neighbor's horses ate the bark all around some of our trees. Will they survive? The insurance company wants to know so they can pay our claim.

**A** If the trees have been completely girdled, all the bark removed from an area all around the trunk, they will not survive. The cell division area, called the vascular cambium, is located right below the bark. If it is destroyed then no water and nutrient

conducting tissue will be produced next growing season. This type of damage severs the connection between the roots and the tree top. You may want to leave them in the ground until this spring to see if anything grows. If not remove the trees and prepare for planting new trees. The fall is the best time to plant containerized plants in the high desert. (For planting guidelines see:

<http://cals.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/az1022.pdf>)

**Q** Would you please tell me the proper time and way to trim the Fan-Tex ash tree? We have two that are getting a little too large for our backyard. Anything you can do to help us would be greatly appreciated.

**A** When pruning ash it is good to remember that they do not grow back as vigorously after pruning as some other trees. Pruning should be done in the dormant season, *i.e.* winter. Be careful not to remove too many limbs. The general rule of thumb is to remove no more than 1/4 to 1/3 of the total branch diameters of a tree in one pruning season. Remove limbs from the lower canopy only if you have to. With ash if pruning is not needed don't. If you want to lower the

height of a tree use a technique arborists call "drop crotching" and avoid topping. Topping is cutting trees limbs all at the same height straight across and is not good for any tree. This leaves tree "stubs" that, in the case of ash, will either not grow back or grow back poorly. Instead select the tallest limbs and remove them where they are attached to another limb that is lower. In removing this taller limb, it leaves behind the lower one without leaving a stub. Removal of a couple of the taller limbs can be done in this way. The remaining limbs will have smaller branches that will produce leaves in the spring. They will grow at the newly established lower height.

**Q** We have a peach and nectarine tree that has leaf curl. How do we treat for this problem?

**A** First of all you need to make sure that the trees have peach leaf curl. Some cultivars of peaches have leaves that curl naturally. Be sure that the leaf curl was not caused by aphids feeding on the underside of the leaves. If the peach leaf curl is caused by the fungus, control is done with a fungicide. This fungus is one of the *Taphrina* species. Apply a copper-containing fungicide like Bordeaux mix or the broad spectrum fungi-

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The University of Arizona  
Cooperative Extension  
Cochise County  
450 S. Haskell Avenue  
Willcox, AZ 85643-2790

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cide chlorothalonil in the spring just as the buds start to swell. If symptoms persist perhaps another treatment will be needed in the fall after all the leaves have fallen.

**Source:** *Plant Pathology* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 1988. George N. Agrios. Academia Press, Inc. San Diego, CA. pp. 335-337.

*Robert E. Call*  
Extension Agent, Horticulture



Cochise County Master Gardeners Association in conjunction with  
The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension presents . . .



the 16<sup>th</sup> annual  
**High Desert Gardening &  
Landscaping Conference**



*High on the Desert*

February 12 & 13, 2009  
Windemere Hotel & Conference Center  
Sierra Vista, AZ

An educational experience for everyone with an interest in gardening. For information contact  
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