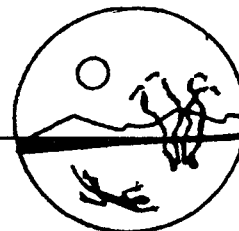


# High on the Desert

Cochise County Master Gardener

## Newsletter



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

### The Year in Review

WELL - wasn't it a great year for growing weeds! Too bad it is not considered a cash crop because we'd all be rich. I discovered this year that there are two ways to handle the weed problem. I was particularly busy this summer and couldn't keep up with weeding the garden, so I just pulled the most obvious offenders, which in my eyes were pigweed, *Amaranthus palmeri* Wats, and Russian thistle, *Salsola tragus*, a.k.a. tumbleweed.

The problem is not so much the weeds but the visitors who come over and their reaction to the garden. The non-gardeners look at the garden in great disdain. "It doesn't look like those well manicured, prefect gardens you see in those fancy magazines and television programs," they exclaim. The excuse that seems to work is to tell them that those types of gardens are passé and the new rage is natural gardens. "See," as I take them through a tour of the garden, "natural gardens attract insects, birds, and wildlife which is far more interesting than a

bland garden," while pointing out the hornworms devouring the tomato leaves as my guests ooh and aah over how huge they are. Nearby a curved-bill thrasher tears at the soil disturbing new penstemon seedlings in its search for insects.

Now it's quite a different story when a fellow gardener visits. Then it is eye to eye combat! "Oh just look at this tumbleweed," I exclaim. "Oh that's nothing, you should see the Bermuda grass that's invaded MY vegetable garden" your friend screams. Then begins the arguing and boasting on who has the most weeds in the garden! One way to end the battle and win is to threaten your good friend that you'll drop off a couple of garbage bags of weeds on their doorstep early one morning on your way to work.

I did have some successes in the garden. I'm constantly amazed at *Penstemons*, and they remain one of my favorite wildflowers. If you aren't growing them I urge you to make a New Year's Resolution to buy just one this year and enjoy it. My beloved collection of Texas Rangers, *Leucophyllums*, rewarded me with repeated blooms all season.

In the vegetable garden, I had great success growing Silver Queen sweet corn. I have been trying to grow cosmos and finally hit the jackpot by dispersing the seeds in the corn bed. I think the regular watering schedule suited their fancy. And for the first time I grew cantaloupes. Ambrosia and Charantais performed very well. The fruits are small but fragrant and incredibly delicious. I harvested so many paste tomatoes that I got sick of them and the two artichoke plants, which are in their second year, supplied us with over 30 buds.

My heartbreaks came in the guise of a pest, which killed my prized Claret-Cup cactus, Texas Rainbow Hedgehog, Arizona Rainbow Hedgehog, and Fender's Hedgehog. Interesting, this pest did not damage the nearby Coryphantha's. Cathy Wertz, of Chulo Canyon Seed, passed along this information to me. She uses rose food & systemic around her prized cacti to protect them from pests.

Wishing you a Happy New Gardening Season!

Cheri Melton, Master Gardener

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# Sunset Book Review

Sunset has come out with two new books worthy of space in the garden library. The first is the *Sunset Western Garden Problem Solver*. Touted as a companion to the *Sunset Western Garden Book*, the 320 page book allows you to track problems in the garden by plant type, symptom, or pest. There are over 600 photos and illustrations including nice close-ups of pests, diseases, and weeds common to western states. Page edges are color coded so once you memorize that green covers problem solving by plant type or dark brown covers damaging and beneficial creatures, it makes looking up a problem a snap.

Contents covered include Gardening in the West, Solving Garden Problems, Problem Solving by Plant Type, Symptoms and Causes at a Glance, Encyclopedia of Damaging and Beneficial Creatures, Encyclopedia of Plant Diseases and Cultural Problems, Encyclopedia of Weeds, and a Resource Directory. Under each entry is a brief description of the subject, target, damage, life cycle, symptoms, prevention, and management.

What's nice about this book that sets it apart from others is that its geared towards IPM, Integrated Pest Management, which relies more on organic means of control than a reliance on pesticides. I



Robert E. Call  
Extension Agent, Horticulture

Carolyn Gruenhagen  
Newsletter Editor

believe that this book is also on CD-ROM but have not had the opportunity to look at it.

The second book is *Sunset Vegetable Gardening*. Contents cover Creating a Garden Plan, Encyclopedia of Vegetables, Growing Berries, and Vegetable Garden Basics. Vegetables are listed in alphabetical order, which simplifies looking something up. Each entry has a detailed section about the vegetable or berry and a great side bar that covers the type of vegetable, edible parts, soil preference, when to plant, how to plant, yield, care, pests & diseases, when to harvest, how to harvest, and how to store. AND if that wasn't enough it also covers techniques on watering, mulching, fertilizing, weeding, combating pests, AND covers special situations for container gardens, hillsides, and small spaces. I highly recommend both books as they are easy to read, understand and chock-full of useful information.

*Cheri Melton, Master Gardener*

## Cuttings 'N' Clippings

➤ Congratulations! Carl Brooks, Helene Wingert, Sal Valverde, Angel Rutherford, Robert Carroll, and Clyde Russell have completed their volunteer hours and are now Cochise County Master Gardeners! ➤ Listen to "Valley in the Mornings" on KTAN 1420 AM, Tuesday, January 26 from 8:00-9:30 am for information on the High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference and other sponsored Cochise County Master Gardener events.

➤ The Cochise County Master Gardeners Association newest endeavor is The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners Column found in the Sierra Vista Herald/Bisbee Daily Review Newspaper on the first Sunday of each month.

➤ Cochise County Master Gardeners Association meets the first Wednesday of the month at the Mona Bishop Room, Sierra Vista Library at 5:00 pm.

➤ There is still time to apply for a scholarship to the High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference in February. Call the Sierra Vista office for information.

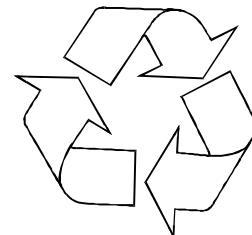
➤ The Sixth Annual Wings over Willcox Sandhill Crane Celebration is set for January 15-17. For more information contact the Willcox Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture at (520) 384-2272 or 1-800-200-2272 or at <http://www.ssvvec.org/events.html>

➤ The Sierra Vista Area Gardeners Club will meet on January 21 at the Mona Bishop Room, Sierra Vista Library, from 2-4 pm. Guest speaker will be Ron Murray who will speak on pre-Colombian gourds from Peru and Mettecup, Argentina.

➤ The 6th Xeriscape Conference will be held in Albuquerque, NM on March 5-6, 1999. For information see: <http://www.xeriscapenm.com>

➤ The first-ever wildflower Photo Contest is being sponsored by the Tucson Botanical Gardens and the ANPS. For guidelines, call (520) 326-9686, Ext. 10. Deadline for entries is February 12, 1999.

➤ Don't forget to recycle your old telephone books!



# What to do - - - January

This is great weather for some winter gardening clean-up. The sun is shining, the sky is blue, and there is a slight nip in the air. So, throw on a sweatshirt and grab those pruning shears—we have gardening to do!

**Winter pruning:** This is essential for fruit trees; less so for shade and ornamentals.

**Protect frost-tender plants:** Remember, cold air settles in the lowest spot which is why Willcox may get a heavy frost but not Bisbee. This also holds true for low areas in your garden.

**Remove old mulch from trees and planting beds:** Apply fresh mulch to protect plants from frost and to retain moisture. Bag or burn old mulch. This gets rid of insects that may have laid eggs or pupated under the mulch, planning to overwinter in this nice moist environment you have provided. Follow this advice and you'll have fewer problems with pests in the spring.

**Dig tree holes:** If you are planting bare-root trees this winter, it is best to start digging the holes early and working on it over a week or so—it will make it alot easier on your back.

**Preparing soil:** If you have a dormant garden or an undeveloped area that you'll be planting in spring, now is a good time to add manure to the soil. This will increase the organic matter content and improve soil structure. As a rule, manure should be added at least three months prior to planting.



**Plant that tree:** Remember to dig the hole before buying the tree. Keep the roots from drying out by wrapping them in damp sawdust or sacking and tying a plastic bag around them. **KEEP THOSE ROOTS DAMP!**

**Water periodically:** Even though your tree's top growth has stopped, its roots will continue growing during the winter as long as soil temperatures are above 45°F. In order to remain healthy, your tree's roots depend on a winter water source such as winter rains and supplemental watering. During wet, cold winters (soil temperatures below 45°F) trees will get enough dormant time to recover from the previous year's growing season. But, if the winter is mild, trees may not get enough rest or enough water and will produce small leaves and a light fruit crop in spring. There is little you can do to prevent this. Withholding irrigation to delay budding will only increase the stress on your tree, not slow down budding.

**Stratify seeds:** Some seeds, such as salvia and gayfeather, require a cold-moist pretreatment to germinate. This is best accomplished by planting outdoors in fall and keeping the planting bed moist throughout the winter. In mild winter areas, however, the weather

may not stay cold long enough for cold-stratification. In these areas, seeds should be cold-stratified in the refrigerator for 1 to 3 months depending on the type of seed.

**Fertilize asparagus:** If you're lucky enough to have an asparagus bed and it is dormant, fertilize it lightly. The asparagus plants will not break dormancy, but will store the nutrients in their roots for vigorous spring growth.

**Peruse those seed catalogs:** By the end of this month your seed catalogs should be dog-eared and your seed orders ready for mailing. If you haven't requested seed catalogs yet, hop to it—time is running out!

**General garden clean-up:** Keep at those winter weeds and remove piles of leaves and debris from your garden.

**Gloat a little:** Turn on the news for the weather in the Midwestern region and be glad you live in warm and sunny Arizona!

*Jackie Dillon-Fast  
former Cochise County Master Gardener  
(Reprinted from the Cochise County  
Master Gardener Newsletter, January  
1990)*



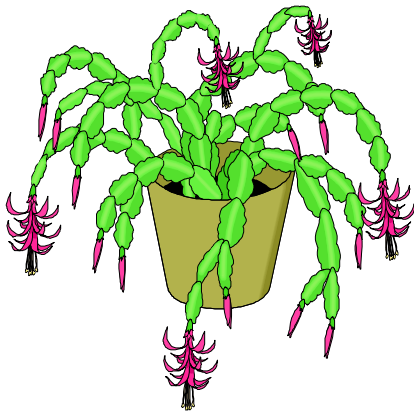
## Did you know . . .

Plan to be away from home for a few days? You can make your own self-watering device by setting a pail of water in the center of a circle of pots, burying one end of an old nylon stocking in each pot of soil and placing the other end in the pail of water.

## The Agent's Observations

Q

My Christmas cactus did not bloom this year. What happened?



A

There are several "holiday" cacti. They are Christmas cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) with smooth leaf margins or edges; Thanksgiving cactus (*S. truncata*) which blooms earlier and has saw-tooth leaf margins and two oppositely pointed tips at the end of each leaf; and the Easter cactus (*S. gaertneri*) which blooms naturally in the spring and has smooth leaf margins. These cacti species originated from the Brazilian jungle and grow naturally as epiphytes in the branches and bark of trees.

These plants are short-day plants, like poinsettias. Flowering is initiated by cool temperatures (45 to 55°F), drier soil, and the naturally shorter days of spring or fall. The Christmas cactus did not bloom because one or more of these conditions were not met.

To induce flowering, determine what type of cactus species you have. Ten weeks before blooms are desired place the plant in a cool

closet or dark cupboard from sun-down to sun-up, never letting any light reach the plant during seclusion. Keep the soil drier than normal. Once flower buds are set you can cease this practice and increase watering.

**Source:** *Houseplants*. The American Horticultural Society, 1980. pp.81 and 85.

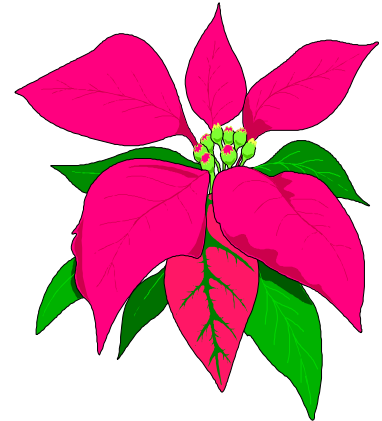
Q

What should I do to keep my poinsettia blooming and growing through the year?

A

Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) is a tropical plant that originated in Mexico. As a member of the Euphorbia family they have white latex sap. They require bright but not direct sunlight. Dim light or darkness will shorten its life. These plants should be watered when the soil surface feels dry to the touch. If a poinsettia is allowed to wilt its life span will be shortened. Watering should insure that the entire root ball is moistened. Poinsettias should not be allowed to sit in water because their roots are very prone to root rots. Ideal temperatures should never exceed 72°F during the day or 65°F at night. Plants do well in high humidity environments. Low humidity and temperatures over 75°F are detrimental to the plants. Beware of placing plants near heat vents, on top of televisions, or in areas that are drafty or have sudden changes from hot to cold. Concentrations of 1/8 to 1/4 of recommended strength houseplant fertilizer applied at each watering will "spoon-feed" the plant and help maintain a healthy plant during the holidays. During the

winter months with less sunlight and cooler indoor temperatures plant growth will be slowed, therefore the amount of fertilizer should be decreased as well.



After the colorful bracts (we think of them as flowers) fall, place the plant in a cool room and let the soil stay nearly dry until spring. Repot the plant in new soil and cut back the stems to six inches above the pot rim. Then move to a sunny location, water well, and watch for new growth. Increase fertilizer 1/4 to 1/2 strength each time you water. Pinching back terminal growth encourages branching and more blooms. Poinsettias are short-day plants; meaning that flowering is induced as day lengths shorten. To insure return holiday blooms keep in absolute darkness from sun-down to sun-up for 10 weeks beginning in October. If this is too much work, the old plant can be discarded and a new one purchased for the next holiday season.

Robert E. Call  
Extension Agent, Horticulture

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*High on the Desert*  
**High Desert Gardening  
& Landscaping  
Conference**  
**February 11-12, 1999**

# THE VIRTUAL GARDENER= *Master Gardener Manual*

Many people sign up to take the Master Gardener training course because they are interested in expanding their personal knowledge about gardening and landscaping. There's nothing wrong with that, but there is far more to being a Master Gardener than just knowing a lot about plants. First and foremost, the program is about volunteer service. The purpose of the training course is to produce a corps of knowledgeable volunteers who can assist the county Extension Agent in educating the public about gardening, landscaping, and environmental stewardship. For this reason, each person who takes the course is obligated to pledge 50 hours of volunteer service back to the Cooperative Extension in return for their training. This month I would like to tell you how you can get access to the textbook used in the Master Gardener training course without obligating yourself to 50 hours of volunteer service. All you need is access to the Internet. The *Arizona Master Gardener Manual* can be found online at <http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/mg/>. It comprises over 700 pages organized into 16 chapters, each authored by an expert in his or her field. Here is a brief summary of what you will find in each chapter of the manual:

- ▶ Chapter 1 contains a brief introduction to basic botany, including discussions of basic plant anatomy and physiology

and lists of essential mineral nutrients.

- ▶ Chapter 2 tells you how to analyze your soil and work around a caliche problem, as well as how to select the proper fertilizers to make your garden thrive.
- ▶ Chapter 3 is about "bugs." Here you will learn to identify many common insects found in Arizona, how to tell the "good guys" from the "bad guys," and how to deal with the bad guys. In addition, you will learn how to identify what's eating your plants from the kinds of damage they do.
- ▶ Chapters 4 and 5 contain diagnostic keys to help you figure out what's wrong with your plants and what to do about it. The key in Chapter 4 is organized by type of plant and gives very specific guidance to solve problems. The key in Chapter 5 is more general and more comprehensive. Here you will learn to read plant damage and abnormal patterns for clues to what's ailing any plant and apply that knowledge to correcting the problem.
- ▶ Chapter 6 discusses how to safely use pesticides. We use various kinds of chemicals to kill threats to our plants when other methods fail. When using these powerful chemicals we should be aware of the dangers involved. This chapter discusses the various kinds of

"icides" that are available, tells how to interpret the labels on these products, and how to safely apply them.

- ▶ Chapter 7 is about plant propagation. In this chapter you will learn the secrets of propagating plants sexually (from seed) and asexually (from cuttings, grafts, *etc.*).
- ▶ Chapter 8 tells you when, where, and why to prune your plants to improve their health, appearance, and the quality of their fruits and flowers.
- ▶ Chapter 9 discusses how to select house plants at the store and how to keep them healthy and happy when you bring them home. Topics covered include soil mixes, watering, environments, containers, and other general subjects as well as specifics about popular plants such as poinsettias, azaleas, gardenias, *etc.*
- ▶ Chapter 10 is all about vegetable gardening. This chapter covers the subject from A to Z including how to prepare a garden bed, what to plant, when to plant, and how to fertilize and water. In addition to general information, this chapter also contains detailed discussions of many specific vegetables including coles, corn, squash, tomatoes (of course), and many others.
- ▶ Chapter 11 tells you everything you ever wanted to know about growing fruit trees in your back yard. Here you will learn which trees do best in this area, how to select a healthy tree at a nursery, and how to care for your tree to get the best fruit.

*(Continued on back page)*

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- ▶ Chapter 12 is about lawns. Although Master Gardeners recommend keeping turf grass areas to a minimum to conserve water, many people still like to have at least a small lawn. In this chapter you will learn which grasses grow best in this area, how to plant a lawn, and how to keep it looking beautiful once it is established.
- ▶ Chapter 13 discusses ornamental trees. In addition to learning about how to select and care for trees, this chapter contains a very valuable discussion of how to properly plant a tree using the new standards developed at the University of Arizona.

- ▶ Chapter 14 is about flower beds. Everyone loves the colors and fragrances brought to the garden by flowers. This chapter discusses how to design an attractive flower bed, select flowers for it that will keep color in your garden throughout the year.
- ▶ Chapter 15, Landscape Design, is a short course in landscape architecture. It not only tells you how to create a professional-looking planning document but also how to use the elements of form and color to produce a stunning design.
- ▶ Chapter 16 discusses water quality and the use of garden chemicals. Here you will learn about the dangers of improper

use of pesticides and fertilizers and how to use them and dispose of them in environmentally responsible ways.

I hope this quick tour through the *Master Gardener Manual* has whetted your appetite to see more of it and given you a better understanding of what kind of training a Master Gardener receives. For those of you who are interested in becoming a Master Gardener volunteer, the next class in Sierra Vista will be starting in the spring. Call the Cooperative Extension Office in Sierra Vista for details.

Until next month, happy surfing!

Gary A. Gruenhagen, Master Gardener  
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