



The Virtual Gardener—Revised List of Plants Recommended for Sierra Vista (A Tale of Two Lists)

Over a period of several years, the Water Wise Program and Master Gardeners of Cochise County developed a comprehensive list of water thrifty plants recommended for Sierra Vista and surrounding areas. A few months ago Cochise County Master Gardener Deke Descoteaux began revising the list. His revision focused on making the list more user friendly. Plant descriptions in the old list were filled with abbreviations and numerical codes which made them difficult to read. Deke replaced the abbreviations with narrative descriptions and added additional information about the plants. In the meantime, another Master Gardener, Michelle Goodman, began searching the Web for pictures of each of the plants.

When they were finished with their work, Deke and Michelle delivered the revised list and pictures to yours truly, the Web Master, to be posted on the Cochise County Master Gardener website. Since Deke and Michelle had put in so much work to make the list

more user friendly, I decided to see what additional utility I could add.

The old plant list was a 13-page document in Adobe portable document (pdf) format. Because of the expanded plant descriptions, the new list was even longer—16 pages. Although the pdf document is suitable for printing to create a hard copy reference, it is not particularly easy to use online. I decided to create interactive Web pages to compliment the static pdf document.

In the course of creating the Web pages, I discovered some of the plant pictures were copyrighted and would require the owner's permission to use on our website. Checking the copyright status of each of the pictures and contacting copyright holders would be a large undertaking. What to do?

The solution was to provide links to the pictures instead of embedding the images themselves. This would not only provide pictures but additional information about the plants. But then

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another problem appeared. Some of the links would point to commercial websites, and university rules do not permit actual or implied endorsements to commercial products. Hmm!

The only solution was to search for links to non-commercial sites. I limited my searches to sites with domain names that end in *edu* or *org* and was able to find pictures and descriptions for almost all of the plants. Two sources stood out—the Arid Plant List created by Pima County Master Gardeners

(http://ag.arizona.edu/pima/gardening/aridplants/aridplant_index.html) and the Chihuahuan Desert Gardens plant list

(<http://www.utep.edu/leb/chih/gardens/list/species.htm>) produced at the University of Texas at El Paso. For plants that are listed without a species name, I linked to articles describing the genus in Wikipedia.

The list on the Cochise County Master Gardener website is presented in three separate tables, one each for Annuals-Biennials-Perennials, Trees-Shrubs-Groundcovers, and Grasses-Succulents. The introduction to the plant list is on a separate page. Check them out at

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<http://ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/PlantLists.htm>. If you have JavaScript enabled on your browser, you can sort the data in each of the columns to make it easier to find the information you are looking for.

The new plant list is part of a program to incrementally improve the website over time. A couple of months ago I added a site search capability

(<http://ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/mgSiteSearch.html>) and in the future I hope to revise other pages to make them more useful. Stay tuned.

Until next time, happy surfing.

Gary A. Gruenhagen, Master Gardener
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In a Desert Garden

Euphorbia heterophylla—
Desert Poinsettia, Mexican fire
plant
Spurge family

I found the Desert Poinsettia, also called false Poinsettia, at the Farmers Market and fell in love with it. I am always on the lookout for something unusual to add to



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Cuttings 'N' Clippings

✿ The next CCMGA meeting is 5:00 p.m. Thursday, **November 4** in the Public Meeting Room at the University of Arizona South. *Planting Woody Ornamentals* is the topic for this meeting. Fall is the perfect time to plant trees and shrubs. DeForest Lewis, a certified arborist and Master Gardener, will give a talk on the kinds of trees and shrubs that do well in our area and in various situations. He will also give you tips on how to plant and maintain your trees and shrubs.

✿ *Septic Care* is the title of the **FREE** Saturday, **November 6** Water Wise presentation at the UAS Public Meeting Room from 9:00—11:00 a.m. The presenter will be Dr. Kitt Farrell-Poe, Water Quality Specialist, UA. For information call 458-8278, Ext. 2141.

✿ The Pima County Master Gardeners will be holding their 3rd Annual Garden Open House on Saturday, **November 6** from 9:30 a.m.—3:00 p.m. The gardens are located at 4210 N. Campbell Ave. in Tucson. The event is **FREE** to the public. For more information call (520) 626-5161.

✿ On **November 13** from 1:00—2:00 p.m. another **FREE** Water Wise presentation will take place at Ecoasis, Brewery Gulch (just up the canyon from St. Elmo Bar) in Old Bisbee, AZ. Cado Daily, UAS Water Wise Program, will present *How Can I Use Graywater?* Learn how to use a great water source for landscaping—graywater. Cado says, “It’s easy!”

Win a Ribbon at the County Fair!

In late September of each year, the Cochise County Fair happens in Douglas. Typically, the Santa Cruz County Fair is held in Sonoita a week or so earlier. Both of them offer a chance to eat corn dogs, popcorn, and cotton candy, not to mention go on the rides and check out some mighty fine sows and heifers (I'm talkin' pigs and cows here, just to be perfectly clear!). There is also a chance to check out the horticultural bounty produced by your fellow county residents. Yep, your neighbor, coworker, or the guy or gal down the block just might have won a blue ribbon for the biggest pumpkin or the nicest looking zucchini.

Next year, let me suggest that you consider entering some of your garden's produce in one or the other of these fairs. Santa Cruz County kindly allows folks from "the area lying geographically and historically adjacent to" Santa Cruz County to enter, while the Cochise County Fair limits entrants strictly to Cochise County. There are no entry fees, except for the admission ticket to the fair itself.

My first real exposure to county fair horticulture exhibits was courtesy of my dad, who entered his homegrown pimientos in the Gila County Fair in the 1980s. He told me, with a put-on, hang-dog look, that, even though his were the only pimientos entered, he'd only won a red (second place) ribbon for them. We laughed about that for years.

Then last year, my wife and I went to the Santa Cruz County Fair and ended up wandering through the horticulture exhibits. I thought that some of my chili peppers looked every bit as nice

as the ribbon winners, so, the next week, as a lark, I screwed up the courage to enter three different types of peppers (Cascabel, Serrano, and Tabasco) in the Cochise County Fair. To my amazement, my peppers were awarded one blue and two red ribbons, although I'm compelled (reluctantly) to admit that the blue ribbon (for Cascabels) was won in a category with no other entries. As an added bonus, a Cochise County Fair blue ribbon pays a cash prize of \$3 and a red ribbon is worth \$2. The prize money ain't gonna get you to Tahiti, but it'll buy you a deep-fried Mars Bar!

This year, flush with last year's success, I entered three different peppers and a winter squash and won two blue and two red ribbons. Again, I must confess: neither of my blue ribbon entries (including Cascabels again) had any competition.

The real point here is that not a whole lot of folks exhibit at the fair, so if you grow nice peppers, or melons, or tomatoes, or have some nice apples or pears hanging on a tree in your yard, you just might have something of ribbon quality. The basis for the judging is along the lines of what a typical nice piece of produce in the grocery store might look like; you don't need four-pound tomatoes in order to win. There are a large number of non-horticultural categories, too, so you might try entering a nice photo you've taken, or some home canned jams, or your homemade quilt. Heck, even without winning a ribbon, it's a fun experience and a chance to eat a corn dog or carne asada taco on a sunny fall afternoon. When was the last time you rode a Ferris Wheel? Or attended a livestock auction?!

Information on exhibiting at the

Cochise County Fair can be found at: <http://www.cochisefair.org/exhibitor.htm>. The information is nicely laid out in exhibit category links on that web page. To learn about entering the Santa Cruz County Fair, find that information at:

<http://www.sonoitafairgrounds.com/countyfair.html>. There's a link in the lower middle of the page that'll take you to the Fair Catalog, which has all you'll need to know about entering and exhibiting. In both cases, the information is for the 2010 fairs, but it'll give you all the information you need to get started thinking about what you might do to win your own County Fair ribbons next fall. Please, just don't plan on entering anything in the Cascabel pepper category; I'd like to win at least one blue ribbon myself in 2011.

Bill Schulze, Master Gardener



November Reminders

- ☼ A good time to install a drip system
- ☼ Replace summer mulch with fresh mulch
- ☼ Start a winter herb garden
- ☼ Protect plants from frost (Call the Extension Office for a copy of the bulletin *Frost Protection*)

Saving Rainwater—Part 1

For us, there are four main tasks in saving rainwater—collection, distribution, using, and cleaning. We still have many things to learn about saving and using rainwater, but here are a few thoughts on the topic. What we have is no final answer or even the best solution, but it fits our needs very well so that we usually don't turn on our irrigation unless we leave for an extended period or we finally run out of stored rainwater. At my home, we run out about June 1 or a little later in the summer and about mid-November in the fall.

Collection

If you already have gutters and downspouts on your home, this is the easiest way to collect rainwater off your house roof. There are all sorts of diverters and barrels for this. In our system, we have collection tanks/barrels and watering barrels. We have installed gutters on the front of the house and collect about 520 gallons off the garage and front. In back we collect about 980 gallons. For the first task we started with the installation of a 550 gallon tank in our backyard five or six years ago. To fill the 550 gallon tank we ran an overflow line from our downspout barrel after the first wash (more on this later) on a back corner of the house to a pump barrel and this pumps water into the larger tank. In the front we have a 60 gallon barrel under each of two downspouts with a 200 gallon tank attached to each barrel. When a 60 gallon barrel is full, the overflow goes into the attached larger tank. When the tank is full the overflow goes into the yard. Each is near enough to a tree for the overflow to provide water.

Distribution and use

In order to get all our storage full, we have to pump water from the collection barrels and tanks that fill automatically to the five watering barrels we have in the garden and one on the patio that are not connected to the main system. It sounds hard but we do the pumping about three or four times a year and it takes about half an hour each time. The challenge is to judge the best time to pump. We gradually draw down our supply by using it mostly in the vegetable garden in back. We have five 55 gallon barrels for this. They are all tied together at the bottom so if you fill one, you fill them all. We usually pump water from the main tank to these barrels when they get down to about ten gallons in each. We also pump water from the front tanks to these barrels as needed. One objective is to keep the collection tanks at optimum level for their respective collection capabilities. We have two different pumps but both use garden hoses for distribution so it is easy to lug and connect hoses.

You are probably thinking we should automate the distribution, and we should, but that is for another day.

Watering the vegetables in the garden is pretty easy. We do it manually. Very early in the season we water by hand because the cooler weather and the lower number of plants makes it easy. Our garden barrels are all at the same level and raised on blocks to five gallon bucket level. This allows us to put a watering can or any receptacle up to a five gallon bucket on the ground under the spigot and fill it. We have a 2" PVC pipe running underground between two of these barrels. In between these two bar-

rels, which are about 30 feet apart, there is a ¾" PVC pipe branch line running to a pump with a garden hose attached. I can use this pump and hose as the water needs increase with the season. I can throw the switch and water everything out there in about ten minutes.

Cleanup

If you are considering rainwater collection, you will read about "first flush." We have a 55 or 60 gallon barrel at each downspout that collects the first dirty water flushed off the roof as the rain starts. It is dirtiest after a long dry spell, but right after a good rain if it rains again the water can be very clear and free of debris.

You can immediately dump the first flush and probably should but we are lazy. We do get around to it after a time so the downspout barrels can get pretty gross with mold and algae. We scrub them when we empty them. But they are emptied on to trees rather than just draining them to the street. Our sweet gum and ash trees are none the worse. All the water they have ever had in the last five years (and more in some cases) is from those dirty barrels and from dumping our spa and bathtub.

We have an old mop and a couple of brushes we use on the barrels if they really get dirty and we are considering a pressure washer. Any suggestions along these lines will be appreciated. We do a light cleanup of the other barrels but have never cleaned the 550 gallon tank. The water that comes out of it is clear and sweet.

Steven Fletcher

Associate Master Gardener

(Part 2 next month—Hot Tips and Conclusion)

The Agent's Observations

Q We have a nice fescue lawn in our backyard that we really enjoy. Along the fence we have a wind-break of hybrid poplar trees that lose their leaves each fall. My wife and I are having a discussion about the importance of raking up the leaves. I say that we need to rake so that the lawn is not suffocated. She says the leaves will decompose over time and not cause any problem. She contends it is not necessary to rake up the leaves. Who is right?

A The leaves should be removed. If leaves are left on the lawn they will cover the grass, blocking sunlight and may matt together suffocating your cool season fescue. Cool season grasses will continue to grow if the temperatures do not drop too low. The fescue lawn at our home remains green through December and becomes dormant during January and February. It comes out of dormancy sometime during March. If there are leaves blocking the sunlight the lawn will not grow. Over time bare spots will be visible where the lawn has died. Fescues are bunch grasses and will not spread into large bare patches and may need to be re-seeded. Leaf removal is easiest done using a lawn mower with a bag attached. A larger area may

require a lawn sweeper. Lawn sweepers can be the push type or attached to a riding lawn mower. If mechanical aids are not available then a spring-tooth or plastic rake will need to be used. Leaves and grass make good materials for composting. They should be put in a compost pile rather than the landfill. They will yield "black gold" for the coming gardening season!

Q We see some trees that have the trunks painted white. Is there any reason to whitewash the trunk of a tree? What about trees with mature bark?

A White latex paint or whitewash is used to help reduce sun damage during the winter months to tree trunks and exposed branches near the trunk. These areas of a tree may crack and have bark slough off on the south and/or west sides of the tree. This damage is called "southwest winter injury." The repeated heating during the

day and cooling at night cause a cycle of expansion and contraction of the wood and causes cracking. The leaves have fallen and provide no shade protection for the trunk or large scaffold limbs. By painting the trunks and large limbs with white latex paint or whitewash, sunlight is reflected and the trunk does not heat up as much as bare wood, thus reducing or eliminating this problem. Mature trees have larger trunks than younger trees. With more mass, mature trees do not experience much expansion and contraction and therefore less cracking. Trees from one to five years old are most susceptible. It is a good practice to paint the trunks of young trees soon after the leaves fall. If you see cracking on the south and/or west sides of a tree trunk paint it with inexpensive white latex house paint. There is no real benefit in using "tree paint" because it just more expensive white latex paint.

*Robert E. Call
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(*Euphorbia heterophylla* c continued from page 2)

my collection, and this plant got my attention because of its resemblance to the Christmas Poinsettia. While the Christmas Poinsettia can grow into a small tree, the Desert Poinsettia stays fairly small which is perfect for my small garden. This plant, in my environment, even with the plentiful rain we had this season, has stayed fairly small—about 30 inches tall. I have read that in some areas it can grow to 70 inches. This is a Mexican native that has naturalized all over the southern part of the United States, has taken over Southeastern Asia, and has become a weed in India and Thailand. There it has invaded the cotton fields and other agricultural terrain. I can see why because in only a short time it has spread throughout my garden, into the flowerbeds, and the flower pots. I really don't mind, as it is a lovely plant and is easily pulled. I keep it out of my front yard, as my neighbors might not appreciate the plant.

The Desert Poinsettia is the spitting image of the Christmas Poinsettia, only smaller. It has the same intense green leaves and the leaves at the upper end of the stalks, close to the cyathium (false flower), have very red coloration, just like its big cousin, and it forms nice small clumps. If the stalks get injured, it exudes a toxic milky white sap, again like its bigger cousin. The flowers are the small yellow clusters on the end of the stalks.

Most members of the genus *Euphorbia* are toxic, and people who are sensitive to latex should avoid contact.

When some of the off-spring lose the red coloration, I consider them weeds and keep them pulled.

Angel Rutherford, Master Gardener

Protected Arizona Native Plants

Nowhere in the United States are there more rare and unusual native plants than in Arizona. Most of them are many years old and cannot be replaced. Many people desire to use these “wonders of nature” in their landscaping. However, most of these plants are protected by law. Also, all land in the State of Arizona belongs to someone, whether it be a government agency or a private citizen. Plants cannot be removed from any lands without permission of the owner and a permit from the Department of Agriculture. Lessees of State or federal land must obtain specific authorization from the landlord agency to remove protected native plants.

Landowners have the right to destroy or remove plants growing on their land, but 20 to 60 days prior to the destruction of any protected native plants, landowners are required to notify the Department. The land-

owner also has the right to sell or give away any plant growing on the land. However, protected native plants may not be legally possessed, taken or transported from the growing site without a permit from the Arizona Department of Agriculture.

For more information go to: [Arizona Department of Agriculture.gov](http://ArizonaDepartmentofAgriculture.gov)



High on the Desert

The 18th High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference is in the planning stages and will be held February 17 & 18, 2011 at the Windemere Hotel & Conference Center in Sierra Vista.



Last month's puzzle answer . . .

The damage was done by hail!