



The Virtual Gardener—Fall Gardening

In May of 2003 (reprinted in May 2009) I wrote a tongue-in-cheek [article](#) about a mythical hormone that causes gardeners to go into a planting frenzy in the spring. Further research has shown that for many gardeners the effects of this hormone are synchronized with the equinoxes, peaking with the vernal equinox and reaching a minimum with the autumnal equinox. This is a shame because fall is a great time to plant, especially in the high desert.

According to the [Arizona Community Tree Council](#), fall is absolutely the best time to plant trees in Arizona. Air temperatures are cooler (especially at night), relieving heat stress on newly installed trees, but soil temperatures remain warm and encourage root growth. In addition, the soil still retains moisture from the summer rains, but the tree requires less water because of the shorter days and cooler temperatures.

When planting trees, keep [Tipton's rules](#)¹ in mind. Water the planting site a day or two ahead of time to

soften the soil and provide extra moisture to the newly installed tree. Loosen the soil in an area 4-5 times the diameter of the root ball. Do not dig the planting hole deeper than the height of the root ball to keep the tree from subsiding as it grows and gets heavier. And make sure the hole has good drainage. Further information about tree-planting can be found in this [article](#) by Jeff Schalau, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Agent for Yavapai County.

If planting trees is not your thing, how about a vegetable garden? After all there is more to vegetable gardening than hot weather crops like tomatoes and zucchini, especially in sunny Arizona. According to an [observation](#) by Area Horticulture Educator/Agent, Robert Call, with the exception of peas, cool season vegetable crops are those that do not produce fruits. That means leafy vegetables such as spinach, cabbage, and lettuce; plants whose edible parts grow underground such as

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carrots, radishes, onions, turnips, and other non-fruiting vegetables such as broccoli. Peas may also be planted in the fall. But the great variety of cool season crops is not the only advantage of a winter vegetable garden. There are other advantages as well.

One of the major advantages for me is the sheer pleasure of working outside when the humidity is down and the temperatures are cooler—for those of us who wear glasses, there is nothing more frustrating than having to stop work every few minutes in the summer to clean the drips of sweat off our glasses. In addition, many of our insect pests will have succumbed and the diseases they vector will have disappeared. Summer weeds will disappear and be replaced by a new set, but they won't grow as rankly and quickly. And finally, you will get more bang for your bucks for water. The cooler temperatures mean that soils will stay moister longer and plants won't transpire as much water as in the summer. You can find a really great [article](#) on winter gardening in the high desert on the National Gardening Association website.

OK, so you're not interested in planting trees and you don't want a vegetable garden. What's left? How about flowers? There are a

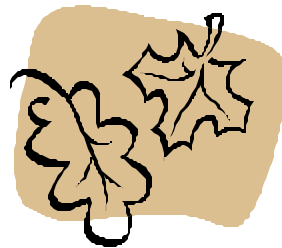
number of cool season annuals that will do well here in the winter. A few years ago I wrote an [article](#) about pansies (*Viola sp.*), one of my favorite winter flowers. Although not as big as some other flowers, they come in many different colors and add a splash of interest to the otherwise drab winter landscape. They even survive after the leaves and flowers have frozen solid overnight. Another favorite of mine is the Iceland poppy (*Papaver nudicaule*), a native of northern latitudes in Europe. The flowers are large and colorful, and best of all, they appear when the weather gets cold.

For more winter flower suggestions, check out the [article](#) on winter flowers for Arizona at the InfoBarrel.com.

Until next time, happy surfing

Gary A. Gruenhagen, Master Gardener
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¹ Dr. Jimmy Tipton, University of Arizona plant researcher.



October Reminders

- ☼ Be ready for the first frost
- ☼ Thin seedlings
- ☼ Overseed lawns
- ☼ Plant spring bulbs
- ☼ Divide perennials
- ☼ Don't let weeds go to seed

Cuttings 'N' Clippings

☼ The next CCMGA meeting is 5:00 p.m. in the Public Meeting room of UAS, **Thursday, October 6**. Dr. Cecile Lumer, Curator of the Cochise County Herbarium located in the PSC on the University of Arizona South Campus, will discuss her research in Chiapas, Mexico, in the mountains bordering Guatemala. This was a pollination study and birds are the pollinators. Dr. Lumer tells us the research contains some remarkable surprises. So you won't want to miss this talk. On top of that, we know from past talks, Dr. Lumer's slides are beautiful.

☼ **Saturday, October 1** from 9:00—11:30 a.m. at the UAS Public Meeting Room the FREE Water Wise workshop is *Trees—Selection, Planting, and Care*. The presenter will be Carmen Miller, a IAS Certified Arborist. Choosing good tree stock and digging a million dollar hole in the right place can give you a blue-ribbon tree for years to come. For information call Joyce at 458-8278, Ext. 2141 or email jwilliam@ag.arizona.edu

☼ The **Arizona Highlands Garden Conference 2011** will be held **October 22** in Prescott. General information, registration information, trifold brochure, preconference activities, and other details are available at:

<http://ag.arizona.edu/yavapai/ahgc/>

Robert E. Call

Robert E. Call
Area Horticulture Educator/Agent
Carolyn Gruenhagen
Editor

Cool Weather is Coming—Amen!

When we first moved to Sierra Vista from Mesa in mid-2007, I was amused at the locals who thought that temperatures in the 90°F—95°F range were uncomfortable. Hey, just try 110°F for weeks on end, then you'll know what hot really is. I worked outdoors a good part of the day that Sky Harbor Airport in Phoenix recorded its all-time high temperature of 122°F. That's hot, and it didn't help that it was a dry heat! Well, four short years later and I'm now a local who thinks our summers are sometimes uncomfortably hot—how quickly the blood “thickens.”

At any rate, I'm very glad that October is coming, bringing with it cooler weather and the possibility of our first frost or freeze of the year. While many Octobers don't have sub-freezing days (that honor is more often reserved for November and, some years, even December), it is nonetheless possible to get pretty chilly on an October morning, so be prepared for it.

Most folks know covering plants with an old sheet or such on a chilly night is a good idea, but some don't understand the science behind this idea. The basic concept of covering a plant on a chilly night is to help conserve, or trap, the heat that is in the soil around the plant(s). Of course, if the temperature stays low enough for a long enough period of time, the trapped heat will eventually be lost to the atmosphere and the plant will freeze no matter how many blankets you've used. That's why you don't see North Dakotans covering their plants in the dead of winter. In the frigid north, cloth covers might help in September or October, but once the real cold sets in, they either move cold sensitive plants indoors or kiss them goodbye.

In a climate like ours, it's pretty rare that the daytime temperatures won't warm into the 40°F-plus range at least, and usually we get much warmer than that. So, unlike those poor Northerners who can go days, even weeks, without so much as an hour spent above freezing, our soils typically get rewarmed everyday. Moist soil will hold more heat than dry soil. The idea then, is to cover your plants a bit before the sun goes down and the temperature starts dropping. As you cover the plant, cover as much soil around it as you can—that will maximize the heat you trap. For instance, let's say you're covering a small shrub. Drape the cloth over the top of the shrub, then spread it out to form as wide a “tepee” as practical. Don't bunch the bottom of the cloth around the trunk at the base of the shrub because you'll trap virtually no heat that way. Do secure the bottom of the cloth to the ground well. It's my understanding that we can sometimes get a stiff breeze in these parts...

Once the morning temperatures get above freezing, uncover your plants to allow the sun to directly warm the soil. Even on a cloudy day, the sun will do some warming. If extra cold temperatures or extended sub-freezing times are expected, you can boost your plant's odds of survival by placing an incandescent trouble light or old string of Christmas lights under the cloth with your plant. Use the old fashioned kind of Christmas lights (be sure they're rated for outdoor use), not the little twinklers or newer LEDs or CFLs, which generate very little heat. Place your lights carefully so they won't start a fire or burn your plant. The heat the lights generate is surprisingly significant.

There's a frost protection bulletin by the U of A Cooperative Extension that addresses frost protection in much more detail at:

<http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/az1002.pdf> Check it out—it's an informative read.

As for “thin” and “thick” blood, that's just a myth. Blood viscosity in the human body doesn't change with outdoor temperature, although there is some evidence that people who live at very high altitudes do have “thicker” blood since they have more red cells (the oxygen carrier in blood) to compensate for the thinner (reduced oxygen) environment. Thicker blood or not, I'll now admit that it's darn hot & muggy here in the summer. In fact, I believe it's time to swap out the evaporative cooler for an air conditioner...and be thankful I'm not a North Dakotan!

*Bill Schulze, Master Gardener
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**Just a
thought...
from a
reader**



Within a year, all of us who cover our precious plants in the winter with a sheet and add a light bulb for warmth may not be able to do so due to the government halting the production of the old bulbs. It would be advised that anyone who cares for his landscaping plants or vegetable garden, should hit up all the stores now to stock up on incandescent light bulbs.

In a Desert Garden

Ah, the weeds!

Camphor weeds – *Heterotheca subaxillaris-asteraceae*

Just when I thought I had run out of subjects to write about, another one came around. All I have to do is to take a little stroll around my garden and “voila” there is a plant I have not written about.

Everywhere I look, I can see the weeds have taken over, up and down the streets, but to me a weed is just a plant in the wrong place, and I absolutely love the saying “It is not a weed until I say it is a weed.” and I live true to these words. In my backyard I really do not have any “weeds.” What we consider to be truly weeds, I have eradicated a long time ago. My weeds are mostly ornamental plants that grow in places I don’t want them. As I cannot destroy anything, I try to dig them up, pot them up, and give them as gifts or donate them to the plant sale of the garden club.

From time to time, a true weedy plant invades my backyard, and depending where it grows, it can be an asset to the garden. Such a plant was the camphor weed that grew outside my pond. Even though I had the honor to have this year’s fall Xeriscape tour come to my yard, I left it standing. It was such an impressive plant, growing to about 8 feet, and had finally started to flower as well. The flowers are visited by honey bees, solitary bees, and butterflies. Every plant has its reason for being, let’s not forget that. It is funny, in my front yard, I pull this plant as soon it shows up, but this one was special. I know I



will probably regret letting this one grow, as this plant is really prolific.

Camphor weed is also called telegraph plant and for mine the name was well suited. It is found throughout most of the southern USA and here in Arizona it is considered a native wild flower. It likes to grow in disturbed areas and along the roadsides. It is also called a golden aster. This is a good name as the flowers are yellow or golden and remind me of an aster. The flowers are loosely clustered at the tips of the upper branched stems, the leaves are grayish green and hairy, and the foliage smells of camphor.

An interesting fact—in South Carolina this plant is considered endangered.

Angel Rutherford, Master Gardener



October Plant Sales

Tohono Chul Park

7366 N. Paseo del Norte
Tucson
520-742-6455
October 12, 4-6:00 p.m.
Members only
October 15-16
General Public Plant Sale

Desert Survivors

1020 W. Starr Pass
Tucson
520-791-9309
October 1, 8:00-5:00 p.m.
Members only
October 8 & 9, 10-5:00 p.m.
General Public Plant Sale

Tucson Botanical Garden

2150 N. Alvernon Way
520-326-9686
No information available

Assistance for Small Acreage Land Owners Classes

Cochise County Cooperative Extension and Cochise College’s Center for Lifelong Learning are sponsoring two classes on *Assistance for Small Acreage Land Owners*. They will be held on two consecutive Wednesday evenings, October 19 and 26th, from 6 – 8:00 p.m. at the Sierra Vista Campus of Cochise College. The registration fee is \$29 for both classes. The focus of these classes is to help small acreage land owners inventory the physical and human resources and assets, develop goals, and understand the physical and legal constraints of their property. To register for the two classes, call 520-515-5492 or go online at www.cochise.edu/ccl and click on classes.

Mark Apel
Associate Area Extension Agent

The Agent's Observations

Q We have several Italian cypress trees with brown areas that are dead or dying. The trees are over twenty years old and line our dirt driveway. We have applied fungicide and an insecticide, but the problem persists. What can be done to cure this problem?

A It sounds like you do not have a fungal or insect problem but rather a spider mite problem. Determining the cause of problems is the first step in diagnosis. To test for spider mites take a white sheet of paper and place it under a branch that is browning. Tap the branch. If dark spots move on the paper then you have spider mites. Smearing the mites will confirm their presence with streaks on the paper.

Control: Spider mites are not insects but in the arachnid group and produce silk-like webbing that can be seen on close examination of damaged plants. Therefore, using an insecticide will not control spider mites, but will most likely kill predatory insects and mites that feed on the spider mites. Acaricides (miticides) are not readily available to homeowners so other measures must be used. Spider mites like hot, dry, dusty plants. Disrupting their environment will aid in their control. Spray the cypress trees down with a hard stream of water. This will wash off

many of the mites, remove the dust and get things back in balance. Predators of spider mites can gain the upper hand if mite populations are reduced by spraying water every couple of days until things clear up and new growth appears.

Q We have several apple trees that are six years old. They are not doing well. Some of the upper limbs have a few small leaves and the small branches have dried out areas. Some areas look burned. What is the problem and what can be done to remedy it?

A After looking at some sample branches it was determined that there were few leaves because of poor watering and fertilizing practices. This will produce small leaves and few will be found on the shoots. Without adequate leaf cover the branches will sunburn, and that has happened. Watering at the drip line is important as well as proper fertilizing with nitrogen containing fertilizers.

A fall application of 1/3 the amount of the annual requirement should be applied the first or second week of October. This fertilizer will be taken up and stored in larger roots or trunk. Current research shows that early spring growth will use this stored, fall applied nitrogen, for early growth.

Fertilizer recommendations can be found on page six in the Extension publication, *Backyard Fruit Production at Elevations 3500 to 6000 Feet*. It can be accessed at:

<http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/az1162.pdf>

Q Surflan is called a preemergent herbicide. What does that mean, how, and why are they used?

A Preemergent herbicides are a class of weed killers that are applied to the soil before weeds emerge from the ground. The activity of these compounds usually kill germinating seedlings. The new roots and/or shoots absorb some of the material and the little plants die. The herbicides are applied to the soil and are usually incorporated into the soil by tillage or irrigation after application. This is necessary because environmental factors such as sunlight cause these products to degrade over time.

With pesticides there are several names of each compound that must be understood to avoid confusion. For a single pesticide compound there are three classes of naming. The first is the long chemical name from which a good chemist can reconstruct the

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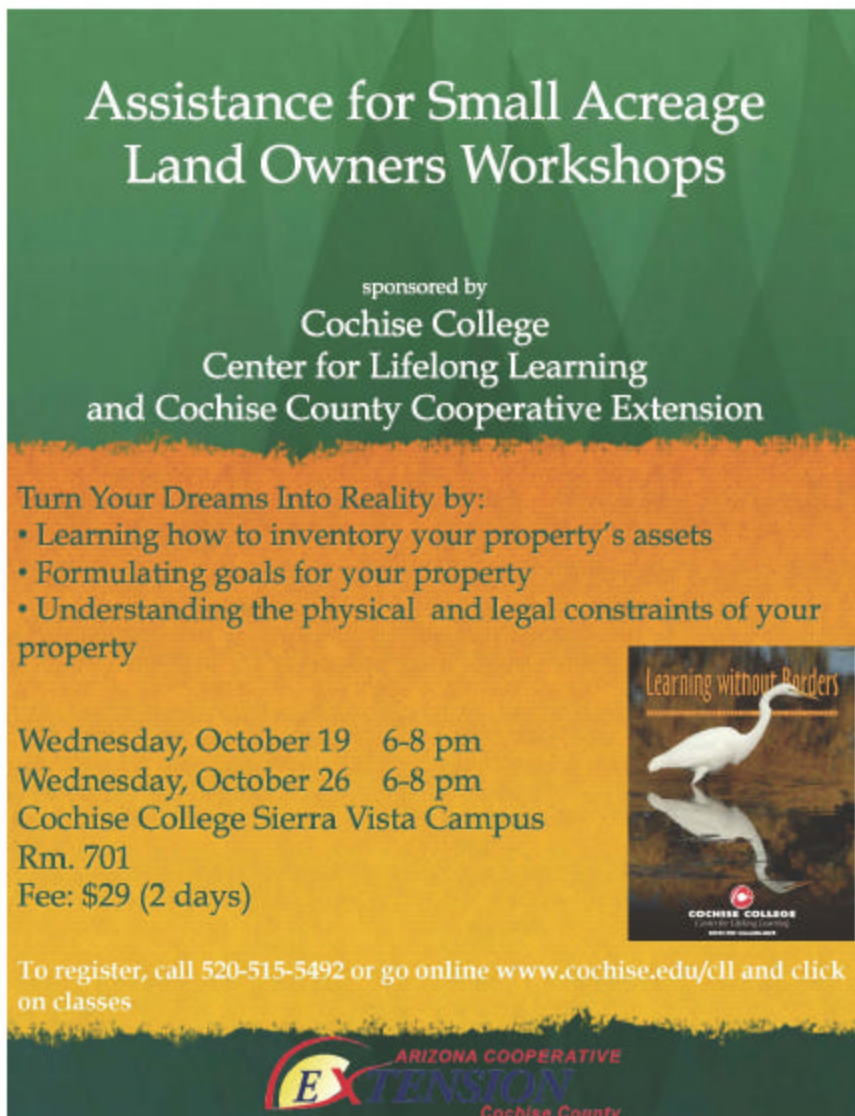
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molecular structure. The second is the common name, which is registered and approved by the EPA, and is peculiar to that compound no matter the manufacturer. This common name is analogous to a scientific or Latin name of a plant. The third name is the trade name. This name is usually copyrighted by the seller, but the same chemical can have many trade names. This is similar to common plant names. After patent rights expire on the compound anyone can manufacture the chemical and give it any name they choose. By law all of this information must be found on the label. For example a common preemergent herbicide has a chemical name of: 3,5-dintro-N4, N4-dipropylsulfanil amide. The common name is oryzalin. Trade names, (used by manufacturers to distinguish their products), are Surflan, Monterey Weed Stopper, or Weed Blocker. The manufacturer may sell compounds to others who package in smaller home use size containers and give their packaged material a name. Oryzalin (Surflan) and several other preemergent herbicides are in the dinitroaniline chemical family. Surflan, for example, is bright orange and trifluralin (Treflan or Preen) is yellowish orange in color. These bright colored compounds were discovered and synthesized by the German dye industry. By accident they were found to have herbicidal activity. When these products are being applied by farmers, city, school, or pest control company employees the uninformed are concerned. For example, on road median islands or in park landscapes, people have become irritated thinking "agent orange" was being applied! This is not the case. The two are not re-



Assistance for Small Acreage Land Owners Workshops


sponsored by
Cochise College
Center for Lifelong Learning
and Cochise County Cooperative Extension


Turn Your Dreams Into Reality by:

- Learning how to inventory your property's assets
- Formulating goals for your property
- Understanding the physical and legal constraints of your property

Wednesday, October 19 6-8 pm
Wednesday, October 26 6-8 pm
Cochise College Sierra Vista Campus
Rm. 701
Fee: \$29 (2 days)

To register, call 520-515-5492 or go online www.cochise.edu/c/ll and click on classes

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lated. The best time to apply Surflan herbicide is in the spring and/or again in the fall. Surflan persists from four to six months, depending on environmental conditions and concentrations applied. It works well over crushed granite or gravel that does not have plastic under it and is best controlling grass weeds. Surflan can also be applied to established lawns, flower beds (where flower seed is not planted), or transplanted into, as long as the plant roots are below the preemergent herbicide "band."

Surflan must be watered into the soil a half an inch within 30 days of application. If not it will be broken down by sunlight. In the high desert it is best to water it in within the first week. With proper and timely application a "weed barrier" is formed and many grasses and some broadleaf weeds will be controlled.

Read and follow all pesticide label instructions.

Robert E. Call
Area Horticulture Educator/Agent