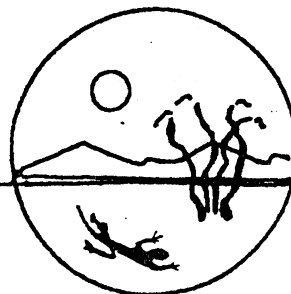


# High on the Desert

Cochise County Master Gardener

## Newsletter



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

### PLANT PROFILE— Cactus, Holiday style!

**Botanical name:** Schlumbergera species  
(formerly Zygocactus)

**Family:** Cactaceae

**Common names:** Christmas cactus, crab or Thanksgiving cactus, Easter cactus

**Range:** Tropical jungles of South America, grows on trees (epiphytes)

Of all the holiday plants that are on display this month, my favorite is the holiday cactus. Because they have been heavily hybridized among themselves there is much confusion in the garden books and nursery trade alike. Here's the latest on how to tell them apart.

The Christmas cactus, *S. russelliana* (also sold as *S. bridgesii* and *Zygocactus truncatus*—both outdated names), has bright green, smooth scalloped-edge joints that measure one and a half inches long. Flowers may have many petals, are long-tubed and three inches long, unless it is a modern hybrid, which have more compact flowers than the old-fashioned ones. The branches droop gracefully, especially when in bloom. On *S. truncata*, Thanksgiving or crab cactus, the stem joints are longer and narrower and are sharply toothed (hook-like appendages), with two large teeth at the end of the last joint. Flowers are short-

tubed with spreading, pointed petals. Easter cactus, *S. gaertneri* (also known as *Rhipsalis gaertnerii*) droops less and has sharp-tipped, upright or horizontal flowers.

Still confused? More confused? Give up? Luckily, these plants are very easy to care for so your best bet is to forget what kind it is and decide what color you want! Over the past few years breeders have increased the translucent color range from red and pink and now includes orange, yellow, white, salmon, cerise, and purple. Blooms usually last about a week but the display can often last a month. I worked in an office where a holiday cactus thought it was Christmas all year long! My co-workers would pour their cold, day-old coffee in the pot and it bloomed nonstop.

Schlumbergeras love rich (leaf mold), acidic (coffee), porous (perlite) soil that is kept evenly moist, and bright indirect light. You may keep them outdoors spring thru fall provided they are in a shady spot. To initiate flower buds stop fertilizing in September and keep them in a cool environment (nighttime temperatures at 50-55°) with 12-14 hours of uninterrupted darkness every night for at least 4 weeks. Little buds will form and then the absence of light is no longer critical. My grandmother kept her very old and huge

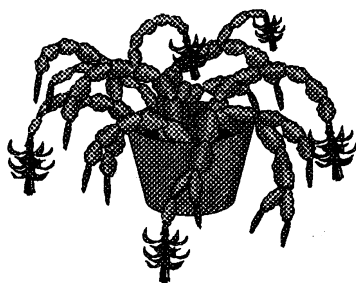
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#### Cochise County Cooperative Extension

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450 Haskell, Willcox, AZ 85643  
(520) 384-3594

holiday cactus outdoors during the fall and the cool nights induced the biggest and most intensely colored flowers I have ever seen.



Schlumbergeras – a holiday plant that's just not for the holidays anymore!

Cheri Melton  
Master Gardener/Staff Writer

## Cuttings 'N' Clippings

➤ The Sierra Vista Animal Shelter located at 1124 North Avenue is collecting redemption seals from GAINES and KEN-L RATION dog food bags, packages, and cans. They are also collecting aluminum cans. These items mean cash and could save a dog or cat's life. The shelter can be reached at 458-4151.

➤ Why not try a living Christmas tree this year?

➤ The December meeting of the Sierra Vista Area Gardener's Club will be held on the 19th – a member Christmas party. The first meeting of 1997 will be held on January 16, 2:00 pm at the Mona Bishop Art Gallery. Jena Barnett will present a program on "How to Plant Bare Root."

## GAMBEL OAK Beech Family– Fagaceae

GAMBEL OAK–*Quercus gambelii* Nutt

Gambel oak leaves are a good forage for cattle and deer throughout most of the year; acorns are available in the fall. Unfortunately, all oaks contain tannic acid which can lead to livestock poisoning if the overall food intake of the animal amounts to at least 50% of oak leaves over a long period of time (which usually occurs in the spring when other forage is lacking).

Symptoms of chronic poisoning in livestock include the following: dry, scaly nose, emaciation, and dark, dry feces (may be bloody or mucous-coated in the beginning, and later watery and still dark).

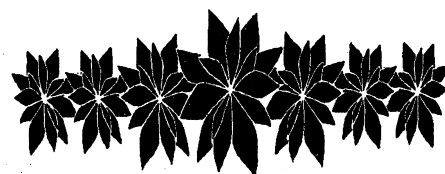
Gambel oak may occur as a shrub, often found in thickets, or as trees, commonly over six feet tall but perhaps reaching a height of 50 feet. A common oak in most of Arizona in areas from 5,000 to 8,000 feet in altitude, it may be found in canyons, on slopes, and plateaus.

This oak possesses bright green lobed leaves, up to six inches in length, while its acorns are approximately one-half inch in length.

Peggy Dierking  
Master Gardener

## SAVE WATER SAVE \$\$\$

Make your home or business Water Wise. A water conservation specialist is available on request to help conduct a Water Wise audit and suggest water saving alternatives. This service is available to residents of the upper San Pedro River watershed. Call the Cooperative Extension at 458-8278, Ext. 141 with your questions or to make an appointment—ask for Cado Daily. Water Wise bulletins containing practical, low-cost tips for reducing water use and conserving natural resources are also available.



## Happy Holidays!

### Newsletter Staff:

Carolyn Gruenhagen  
Barbara Kishbaugh  
Cheri Melton  
Virginia Westphal

*Robert E. Call*

Robert E. Call,  
Extension Agent, Horticulture

# The Agent's Observations

We conclude our four-part series on termites answering your questions about wood infestation reports, disclosure, and buying a home in Arizona. Thanks to Dr. Robert Smith, Department of Entomology, University of Arizona, for this valuable information.

**Question:** How do I find out about the termite infestation/treatment history of a house I am interested in purchasing?

**Answer:** Ask the seller and the real estate agent about the termite history of the house. The seller/agent is required by law to make full disclosure of the termite history to the prospective buyer. Carefully read the wood infestation report and call the inspector with any questions you have. If the structure has been treated by or is under contract to a pest control company, ask the company if they will allow you to see their records. If the seller/agent does not make a full disclosure prior to the sale, you have legal recourse. If you ask specific questions about the termite history of the house in the presence of witnesses, your position is greatly strengthened should problems later arise.

**Question:** What is a Wood Infestation Report (WIR)?

**Answer:** A WIR is a form that is filled out by a pest control company inspector after inspecting the structure for termite and fungus damage. Evidence of an active or past infestation by termites, evidence of past treatment for an infestation, and conditions conducive to infestation by wood destroying organisms would be reported.

**Question:** What are "conditions conducive?"

**Answer:** Conditions conducive are features of the structure or grounds that facilitate and encourage infestation of the structure. These include wood-to-soil contact, excessive moisture, wood scraps *etc.*

**Question:** Is the WIR a guarantee about the termite history of the structure?

**Answer:** No! The inspector who fills out a WIR is not required to move heavy objects to inspect behind them. He is only required to report what is observable to the trained eye or damage that can be detected by lightly tapping on wooden parts of the structure.

**Question:** Can a seller/agent deceive an inspector who has been hired to do a WIR?

**Answer:** Unfortunately yes, and it happens frequently. The owner/seller will remove all visible evidence of an infestation and do superficial cosmetic

repairs with wood putty and paint just before the inspector makes his visit to examine the structure. The inspector sees no evidence of the past or current infestation and has nothing to include on the WIR. Buyer beware!!!!

**Question:** Should I decline to purchase a house with a history of termite infestation?

**Answer:** Not necessarily. There are many factors to consider when confronted with this situation. For example: How extensive is the infestation/damage? How old is the house? Can you get a substantial discount from the seller because of past termite damage or an active infestation. Is the house made of frame stucco or of masonry construction? How much will it cost to keep the house under contract to a pest control company for regular inspection/treatment?

**Question:** What can I do to investigate the quality of the pretreatment on a new home I am considering for purchase?

**Answer:** Find out what company did the pretreatment and ask them questions about what they did, what chemicals they used and what concentrations of A.I. and at what rates did they apply the termiticide.

*Robert E. Call  
Extension Agent, Horticulture*

## Call's Comments . . .

Fertilizing of trees and shrubs during the winter in the high desert should not be done. Fertilizer could stimulate plants to come out of dormancy and start to grow and winter damage could occur. These plants are "resting" above the ground but do have activity in the roots if soil temperatures are warm. Normally trees and shrubs that go into winter with adequate soil moisture do not need watering during the winter. Usually winter rains or snow provide enough water. Deciduous plants do not need much water because the leaves, where transpiration occurs, are gone and nutrients needed for growth are not required because there is no shoot growth. The same holds true for most evergreen plants such as pines, junipers, and native oak trees. When the soil

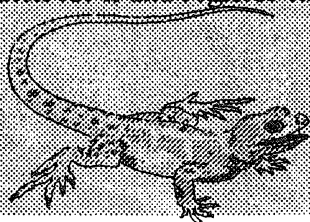
and air temperatures are cold and sunlight is reduced, why grow? That is what spring, summer, and fall are for!

Houseplants are generally tropical in origin and survive best in warm humid environments. Houseplants need to be watered because of the limited soil volume they are confined to. House temperatures are warm and allow plants to continue to grow. The best way to determine soil moisture is to stick a finger in the soil one to two inches. If the soil feels dry, water; if soil feels moist, don't water. Fertilizing houseplants during the winter months is not encouraged because of reduced light from the sun.

Robert E. Call  
Extension Agent, Horticulture

## High on the Desert

Circle February 13-15, 1997 on your calendar! Those are the dates for the fourth annual High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference! Once again it will be held at the Windemere Hotel and Conference Center in Sierra Vista. Twenty-two speakers are scheduled, including the keynoter, Judith Phillips, author of many books, including *Southwestern Landscaping with Native Plants*. The conference is open to the public - anyone with the love of gardening. Registration forms will be in the January *High on the Desert News Letter* or available at the Cooperative Extension offices after the first of the year. Watch for it and register early!



## Cochise County Master Gardener Association

The Master Gardener program began in Washington state in 1972 when an over-worked Extension Agent, Dr. David Gibby, began training volunteers to assist him in providing support to the community. The program was simple and effective. Today, Master Gardener programs are flourishing throughout the United States and Canada. The Cochise County Master Gardener program started in 1987. At the Master Gardener 1996 Annual Picnic in September, the Cochise County Master Gardener Association (aka CCMGA) became a reality. Monthly CCMGA meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 5:00 pm (call Extension Office for location). All certified Master Gardeners are eligible to become members. Special features/programs or guest speakers are planned. Please join us as we begin our exciting mission to "support the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension by providing to the citizens of the County research-based horticultural information appropriate for County environments about gardening, food production, landscaping, and environmental stewardship."

# The Virtual Gardener—

## An On-Line Bookstore

Like many people at this time of the year, I'm shopping for a few last minute Christmas gifts. As an avid reader, I almost always include a book or two among the gifts I give. A fun place to get ideas for book gifts is the on-line bookstore at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). You don't have to buy a book there to enjoy the Website and get lots of help in finding just the right book for that special person on your list.

This virtual bookstore boasts over a million titles and the beauty of it is that you can search for books by subject, title, or author just like in a library. Searches are fast and result in a list of books that meet your search criteria. For example, searching on the subject, "xeriscaping" brought up the following titles:

•*Dry Climate Gardening With Succulents: The Huntington Botanical Gardens* (The American Garden Guides); Debra Brown Folsom, et al

•*The Dry Garden*; Beth Chatto

•*The Dry Garden : A Practical Guide to Planning & Planting* (Wayside Gardens

Collection) Mark Rumary, John E. Elsley

•*Shade and Color With Water-Conserving Plants*; James E. Walters, Balbir Backhaus

•*The Xeriscape Flower Gardener: A Waterwise Guide for the Rocky Mountain Region*; Jim Knopf

•*Xeriscape Gardening: Water Conservation for the American Landscape*; Connie Lockhart Ellefson, et al

•*Xeriscape Plant Guide*; Rob Proctor, et al

•*Southwestern Landscaping That Saves Energy and Water*/Extension Publication, No 8929; E. Gregory McPherson, Charles Sacamano

•*Xeriscaping for Florida Homes*; Monica Moran Brandies

In addition to a simple list of titles and authors, you also get information on the type of publication (hardcover or paperback), the price, the name of the publisher, the date of publication, the ISBN, and sometimes even a review of the book. One

of the most interesting features of this bookstore is that it gives customers the ability to express their opinions about books they have read and have them displayed for other shoppers to read. Opinions can range from a simple, "loved it," or "hated it" to a full fledged book review. If a shopper-written book review is selected as a winner in the ongoing Book Recommendation Contest, the author can even win a prize. Book authors and publishers are also given space to comment on reader reviews, providing a forum for spirited discussion.

Gary A. Gruenhagen  
Master Gardener

## STOP Weeds before they start...

A good hoe is still the best tool for ridding your yard of weeds, says Celeste Gilbertie, manager of Gilbertie's Herb Gardens in Westport, Connecticut. But, laying a 2-3 inch layer of wood mulch (available in garden stores) around plants can help prevent weeds from cropping up in the first place. Other recommended mulching material includes soft hay and even grass clippings from your yard. Or, you can buy "landscape fabric" and lay it around plants. The porous fabric—a thin, brown or black weave is relatively inexpensive and it lets water in but keeps weeds out. For best results, lay the fabric around plants and cover with wood mulch.

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## **Take Another Look at Pyracantha**

Red berries in fall and winter are the trademark of this plant. Pyracantha has been around a long time so it may not be considered in a new landscape design. But, take another look. The advantages of using pyracantha as landscaping material are many.

It is perfectly adaptable to the high desert. It comes equipped with thorns and fleshy leaves which can store water for the drought periods. Forget to water? Pyracantha is extremely drought tolerant and can take neglect and abuse and still grow. It is forgiving.

If placed right up against the house it will continue to function

under the adverse conditions of the reflective heat and poor soil.

Chop it back and it is only encouraged and will push twenty more new starts on the limb you tried to remove. Pyracantha is very fast growing and will produce two to four feet in a season. It is quick to respond when trained as an espalier. The new growth is pliable and flexible and can be used to dress up a wall or frame a doorway. It can also be trained upon a trellis or fence.

Pyracantha can be used as a hedge or barrier plant, however it will require frequent trimming to maintain the desired form. It works well as a windbreak or as a control of erosion from a bank or arroyo. Many varieties of pyracantha are available from ground cover size to a specimen

that will grow as tall as a house. The trunk of a mature plant can be as large as a small tree.

This plant is quite beneficial to native species. It creates a perfect shelter or nesting place for birds and small animals. The foliage is dense with many small limbs. The curved-bill thrashers and Western mockingbirds feed on the red berries.

The cut branches can become the foundation for a lovely Christmas centerpiece. The contrast of the dark green leaves and clusters of red berries lends itself well to the holiday season.

Pyracantha is adaptable and useful. It is evergreen, drought resistant, and extraordinarily hardy.

*Barbara Kishbaugh  
Master Gardener/Staff Writer*