

# COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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## the Cochise County Master Gardener

# NEWSLETTER

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JUNE 1994

### DESERT WILLOW (*Chilopsis linearis*)

Barbara Kishbaugh  
Staff Writer

Desert willows, now in bloom, cover a large portion of Arizona with their gorgeous displays. This is the showiest time of the year for this tree. We traveled North to Payson over the Memorial Day weekend and glimpsed this tree in bloom all the way. Desert willows are most often noticed growing along arroyos, although they also succeed along roadways where they catch the water runoff. They do prefer the sandy washes but will grow most anywhere there is a sufficient water supply.

Close inspection of the blossoms reveals a lovely flower ranging in color from white to pink and lavender. If the color of the blossom is an important consideration when selecting a specimen, it is important to view the plant in blossom. This assures the plant will produce the desired color. When you see a specimen you admire, save the seeds. Propagation is simple and a full year is not required before seeds will sprout. Once seeds have matured in the pod, they will germinate as soon as they receive water, sun, and nutrients.

This deciduous tree is not so lovely in winter, although the drooping character of the limbs with many seed pods clinging to the branches creates an interesting silhouette. The dark bark of the tree is also a contrast to the other pale shades of desert winter.

The desert willow is gaining recognition as an accent or specimen tree when landscaping. The very dark trunk of mature trees offers an interesting alternative. Its adaptability to various environments makes it useful and the willow shape offers graceful form. The leaves are a darker green on top with a gray-green underside, but the true beauty of this plant are the orchid-like blossoms which vary in size and color.

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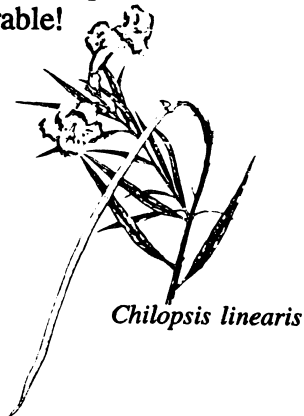
Robert E. Call  
Extension Agent,  
Horticulture

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Tamarisk or Salt Cedar is not a recommended landscaping plant. It grows in similar conditions with the desert willow in dry washes and along streambeds. Its dense appearance with graceful mauve colored blossoms in spring may entice a gardener to use this tree when landscaping.

This aggressive tree choked the Gila River and rendered the area useless for recreation purposes. The mass of salt cedar created such a barrier it was not possible to approach the bank since the plant invaded all useable soil. When the river flooded, it washed many of the trees away and people are again enjoying fishing, tubing, and canoeing along the river. The seedlings of the salt cedar, however, are already beginning to re-invade the river banks. The tree, introduced for erosion control, has become a weed and menace to all other native plant life.

Even though the tree may appear attractive, please consider its cancer-like growth habits. It is messy and not considered landscaping material. Use a desert willow instead and potential future problems of the salt cedar can be avoided. The desert willow is a native plant and the tamarisk imported from China. Using the native plant is sensible and desirable!



*Chilopsis linearis*

## THE AGENT'S CORNER

Robert E. Call  
Horticulture Agent

**QUESTION:** I have several 12 year old Arizona cypress trees with needles that are turning brown. The middle to center of the limbs on the lower branches are affected. What disease is causing this? What can I do about it?

**ANSWER:** As evergreen trees get older the leaves, called needles or scales, on older branches (those that are close to the tree trunk or base of the tree) will naturally brown and fall off. These leaves are old having served the tree well but have become shaded out and are not contributing to the tree's growth. During normal winters adequate moisture falls. This winter however was unusually dry. Because of little or no moisture supplemental water was necessary. Several people have called with questions about browning evergreens. Usually people will state that they did not water their trees last winter. Evergreens need about one third of the water during the winter compared to the rest of the year. Therefore, water the trees and watch for new growth. The tips of the branches should be green and healthy because that is where shoot growth takes place. Also, water at the tree drip line and out from that point. Feeder roots are located usually out from the drip line, not next to the tree trunk. If trees are planted through plastic that has crushed granite or gravel on top, take a pitch-fork and poke holes

through the plastic to allow rainfall into the soil.

**QUESTION:** I planted onions last fall. They are starting to develop seed heads. Should I cut them off or harvest the onions?

**ANSWER:** You should harvest the onions. This is normally done when about 25% of the onion tops are drying down or 1 to 5% of the plants have flower heads forming. Bend over the remaining leaves by stepping on them or a second alternative is to mow them off. This is done so that root growth will be minimized which aids in harvesting.



Bulbs are usually dug after a week or 10 days while the onions are left in the ground curing. However if rains are coming, dig the onions as soon as possible to decrease possible rot of the bulbs. After digging place bulbs in mesh sacks, boxes, or spread out to allow them to dry. Discard any diseased or damaged bulbs.

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**Staff:**

Carolyn Gruenhagen  
Barbara Kishbaugh  
T.J. Martin  
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## GARDEN TIP NUMBER 8639

Gary A. Gruenhagen  
MG Class '93

If your soil is like mine, digging a hole for a new plant is a major chore. I once spent a week with a geologist's pick chipping out a hole in the caliche big enough to plant a single tree. The project was closer to hard rock mining than gardening. Then I discovered the water drill, an indispensable tool for gardeners and other folks who want to poke holes in the caliche in this area.

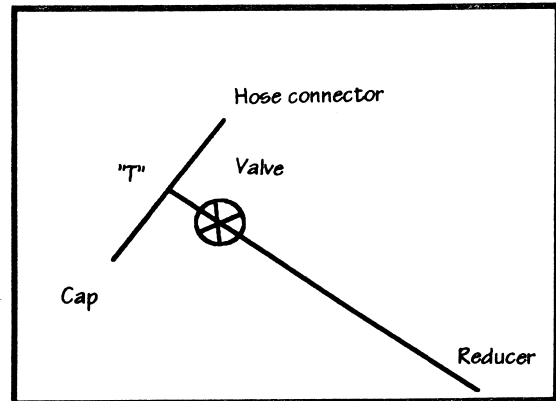
I figured out the design by myself several years ago and thought I was on my way to entrepreneurial fame and fortune until I went to the hardware store to buy the parts. After I listed the first couple or three parts I needed, the clerk said, "Building' a water drill, huh?" and then went on to suggest the rest of the parts required, including some I hadn't thought of. Well, so much for fame and fortune.

Although water drills are widely used in this area, I don't think you can buy a manufactured one. The closest thing would be one of those flimsy "root feeders", but they're just not in the same league. A water drill is simply something you have to design and build yourself. There are several variations in the design, but the principles are the same. Here is the one I used.

Mine is shaped like a T with a hose coupling on one end of the top of the T, a cap on the other end, and a valve at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal axes. I used three-quarter inch water pipe throughout but put a reducer on the business end to cut the pipe diameter to three-eighths inch and give a higher velocity to the water. All the parts (one four foot length of pipe threaded at both ends, two one foot lengths of pipe threaded at both ends, a cap, a "T" fitting, a valve, a reducer, a one inch length of three-eighths inch pipe threaded on one end, and a hose fitting) cost less than twenty dollars.

The drill is easy to use. Hook it to a garden hose, make sure the valve on the drill is closed and turn on the water at the faucet. Stick the business end into the ground and slowly open the valve on

the drill. I stress the word "slowly" because the drills have a nasty habit of showering you in muddy water if you turn them on too fast.



Sometimes it's necessary to push on the drill a bit and twist and jiggle it back and forth to get it moving, but it has never failed me. About the only thing it won't penetrate is a rock. If you are digging a planting hole or post hole, you probably ought to drill the holes with the water drill several hours before you intend to finish the digging with the shovel. I usually bore the holes with the drill the day before so that the ground has time to soften up before I go to work with the shovel or post hole digger. Happy digging!



# Coming in August!

## 1994 Arizona Master Gardener Conference

Presented by Master Gardener Inc. and the University of Arizona Maricopa County Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners. The Conference is open to Master Gardeners, horticulture professionals and all who are interested in furthering their gardening education.

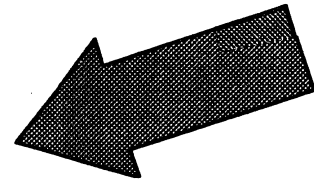
Theme: *Gardening for all Seasons*

When: August 4 & 5 with optional tours on 6th

Where: Marriott Mountain Shadows, Scottsdale

Cost: \$75 includes breakfast and lunch on both days as well as tour costs

A more detailed schedule will be forthcoming!



## JUNE

### Reminders

- Check tree ties
- Remove stakes if tree can stand by itself
- Mulch trees & shrubs
- Remove faded flowers and fertilize roses
- Prevent blossom end rot on cucumbers, squash, melons and tomatoes by keeping an even watering schedule
- Stake tomato plants
- Watch for curly top on tomato plants and remove
- Water! Water! Water!

## WHAT IS XERISCAPE?

Xeriscape, a creative landscaping program which is sweeping the SW and Pacific Coast States, comes from the word "xeros," the Greek word for "dry," but the look of a Xeriscape can be lush and colorful. A Xeriscape yard can provide shade, beauty, and color, and save you water, money, and time. To Xeriscape, apply the seven basic landscape principles:

1. Start with a plan. Put higher water use plants close to the house and group plants, shrubs, and trees according to their water needs.
2. Limit turf areas. Use grass where it provides functional or recreational benefits.
3. Install an efficient irrigation system. Consider drip irrigation systems.
4. Harvest rain water.
5. Improve the soil. Decomposed organic mulches provide plant nutrition and improve water absorption. Cover the soil—it minimizes evaporation and reduces weed growth.
6. Use low water plants. Visit your local nurseries for assistance.
7. Remember appropriate maintenance. Careful pruning, weeding, and watering will increase your water savings.

## BIO BABBLE: Interpreting Garden Seed Catalogues

Gary A. Gruenhagen  
MG Class '93

Gardeners tend to be the types of people who like to curl up before bed with a good seed catalogue and a glass of warm milk. If you are one of those hopeless seed catalogue addicts, this is the article for you because it defines some of those fancy terms found in seed catalogues that you never really understood but were afraid to ask your County Extension Agent about.

In case you think I must be brilliant to know all this stuff off the top of my head, I must confess that the information in this article was unabashedly stolen from an article that originally appeared in a publication of the Cooperative Extension Service in Massachusetts and was subsequently transmitted over the "Information Highway" (i.e., the Internet).

Here are the terms:

**Gynoecius.** This term is derived from Greek roots and means that the plant only has female flowers. The term is only used on those plants that have separate male and female flowers. (Does anyone know what the term is for a plant that only produces male flowers?) If you buy a gynoecius plant you need to find it a husband before you can produce fruit, unless it is parthenocarpic..

**Parthenocarpic.** In parthenocarpic plants fruit sets without the need for pollination. Of

course without the contribution of pollen, there are no seeds within the female fruit.

**Slicing.** This is a specialized term referring to a type of cucumber intended for fresh use as opposed to pickling. Slicing cucumbers are usually longer and have a deep green color.

**Non-bitter.** Another cucumber term that refers to a plant that doesn't produce the bitter compound cucurbitacin. Of course regular cucumbers don't produce bitter fruit either unless they are subjected to stressful growing conditions, but you will be pleased to note that non-bitter plants are also less damaged by the dreaded cucumber beetle.

**Determinate.** This term refers to a variety of tomatoes in which the main stem finally produces a terminal flower and stops vertical growth. Indeterminate varieties, like a popular brand of batteries, just keep on g(r)o(w)ing and g(r)o(w)ing and g(r)o(w)ing, that is until they are stopped by frost. Determinate tomato plants produce early ripening fruit clusters at each node.

**Jointless.** Indicates a tomato that can be pulled off the plant leaving the stem behind. Because jointless varieties do not form an abscission layer on the stem an inch or two above the fruit, the tomato detaches at rather than above the fruit.



### SAY IT WITH FLOWERS

When you want to say:

"I love you."  
give red roses

"I'm jealous."  
give yellow roses

"My heart aches for you."  
give red carnations

"I'll never forget you."  
give pink carnations

"You are a wonderful friend."  
give chrysanthemums

"I want to spend my life with you."  
give orange blossoms

"I will always be true."  
give blue violets

"I can't live without you."  
give primroses

-American Floral Marketing Council

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## **Congratulations!**

At 5:30 pm on Wednesday, May 25, graduates of the spring '94 Master Gardener program, their families and Master Gardeners from previous classes assembled at the University of Arizona, Sierra Vista campus for the First Annual Master Gardener Graduation Ceremony.

Frank Christ, MG class of '92, was the Master of Ceremonies for the program that included the awarding of certificates to the 35 graduates, a brief explanation of future Master Gardener plans by Gary Gruenhagen, MG class of '93, words of congratulation by Rob Call, Cochise County Horticulture Agent and instructor of the Master Gardener class, and a surprise presentation by graduate Grady Banister of a custom designed soil tester to Rob Call. A potluck followed accompanied by the music of Don Pedro on the harpa.

Since the program began in 1988, over 160 Cochise County residents have completed the Master Gardener program!

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