

Around My Desert Garden

By Bob Torrest

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May 31—After a year of these articles, I hope you've gotten something useful on some of the trees and shrubs to choose to provide needed shade (and flowers). Trees flowering this month included Screwbean mesquite (*Prosopis pubescens* – tornillo) and the other mesquites, *Acacia constricta* (Whitethorn) and *A. greggii* (Catclaw), *Tipuana tipu* (Pride of Bolivia) and the Sissoo tree (*Dalbergia sissoo* – Indian teakwood) with fragrant but inconspicuous white flowers. There was also Desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*), *Jatropha cinerea*, (Limberbush), *Acacia penatula* (Feather acacia), Ironwood, and Pomegranate (*Punica granatum*). A *Cordia boissiera* (Texas olive) flowered for the first time at three feet but it took about 20 years from seed for Date palms (*Phoenix dactylifera*).

Eucalyptus torquata (Coral gum) has continued to flower for a couple of months, but *Eucalyptus spathulata* failed again and not for lack of water. It is hard to resist the temptation to by the largest five gallon trees in the nursery, but if they've been there a long time, the odds of success go down. A hybrid Palo verde that was supposed to be a fast grower has done nothing in a year. Luckily, volunteers of African sumac and Palo verdes came up in the right places. When that happens, they tend to be relatively fast growers.

Shrubs flowering included Creosotes, Caesalpinias (*C. pulcherrima* – Red bird – and *C. Mexicana* – Mexican bird), *Calliandra californica* (Baja fairy duster), *Gossypium harknessii* (San Marcos hibiscus), an evergreen shrub with yellow flowers, Yellow bells (*Tecoma stans*) and an orange flowered hybrid. Chuparosa (*Justicia californica*) seems to be about done, but a very ornamental cousin, *Justica brandegeana* (Shrimp plant) does well here with extra water. Ruellia and Desert aster continue to flower and Coulter's hibiscus is colorful but not much use for shade. Cat's claw vine (*Macfadyena unguis-cati*) put on a brief but good show of yellow flowers and can provide good shade when you get it up on a pergola.

A few small aloes flowered including *A. rauhii*, *A. somaliensis* and *A. nobilis* (reddish). *Aloe jucunda*, a dwarf species with nice pink flowers on simple racemes, can be used as a ground cover. *A. sladeniana*, a relative of *A. variegata*, is just getting started. *Pachypodium namaquanum* is leafing out and a large *Pachycormus discolor* is flowering. *Euphorbia resinifera* continued to flower through mid-month. *Euphorbia milii* and *E. heterochroma* were flowering at month's end.

Cacti flowers were exceptional this year. Larger cereus plants flowered several times and most of the trichocereus did so again this month, including the best display of *Trichocereus spachianus* (Golden torch) we have seen in 20 years. *T. huascha* can form large clumps and is very colorful even without the bright red-orange flowers. Opuntias continued with *O. microdasys* (Bunny ears), several chollas, *O. paraguayense*, a glossy, dark green, almost spineless plant which just doesn't look like it should reach six feet tall and *O. violacea* (Santa Rita). More barrels flowered starting with *Ferocactus schwartzii*

(yellow), then *F. latispinus* (purple), *F. pottsii* v. *alamosanus* (yellow), *F. cylindraceus* (even at only one foot), and finally the golden barrels (*Echinocactus grusonii*). For the others the sequence through the month was gymocalyciums, notocacti, lobivia, pilosereus, astrophytum, pereskia, rathbunia and other stenocereus varieties, and finally the native mammillaria (*M. microcarpa*).

Quail Gardens in Encinitas, CA, has a variety of gardens including tropical fruit. After tasting Surinam cherries (*Eugenia uniflora*) and White sapote (*Casimeroa edulis*) we decided to try growing them and a few others. Now after many years, the Surinam cherry is still a small shrub that has never flowered. The White sapote is up to seven feet and can take lots of sun as long as it gets extra water...but so far no flowers. Barbados cherry (*Malpighia glabra*) is a large bush that had lots of small attractive flowers many of which have become colorful small fruit (tasteless). Guavas (*Psidium*) can do well here with extra water, and we have had good fruit production on a small strawberry guava tree. Guava "Tropic Pink" was purchased as a small tree two years ago and is hanging on. Pineapple guava (*Feijoa sellowiana*) is a nice evergreen shrub and, although fruit production is low in the desert, the flowers are edible. So it seems our best "tropical" fruit crop this year is *Myrtillocactus geometrizans* with large berries that didn't seem to ripen (the berries were all green). Of course they ripened but it wasn't until I checked at 7 AM that I discovered that the thrashers carefully inspecting each plant and taking every berry with a hint of purple color.