



# Gardening Insights

March 2010

## *Fragrant plants for desert gardens*

It's not hard to have a fragrant garden in a spring like this. Just go outdoors, breathe, and you're done! The air is delicious with the smell of citrus, sweet acacia, and desert garden plants -- they're all blooming madly in response to the plentiful rain we got in January and February.

In drier springs and seasons though, it might be good to have the scented plants a bit closer at hand so you can enjoy them when you wish. We're fortunate to have many of them in our regional plant palette and they range from accent plants and trees to ground covers and shrubs. In fact, a landscape could be designed easily using only scented native plants.

Some species have fragrant flowers and some have fragrant foliage which releases its scent when wetted or rubbed. Place them where their scents are accessible: strongly scented flowers and "wetable" plants like creosote can be planted anywhere because their scents carry. Mild flowers and plants that need to be rubbed should be close to living and walking areas. Night bloomers should be in areas that are easy to reach in the dark.

A bonus of the species with strong smelling foliage is that they are usually unpalatable to rabbits. Below are a few regional plants to enjoy for their fragrance.

Acacia constricta "Whitethorn acacia" #3

Aloysia gratissima (lycioides) "Bee brush"

Artemisia ludoviciana "Western mugwort"

Berlandiera lyrata "Chocolate flower"

Chilopsis linearis "Desert willow" #2

Datura wrightii (and others) "Jimson weed" #4

Dyssodia acerosa and Dyssodia pentachaeta "Dyssodia" #5

Ecelia frutescens "Green brittlebush"

Ericameria laricifolia "Turpentine bush"

Eysenhardtia orthocarpa "Kidneywood"

Hyptis emoryi "Desert lavender"

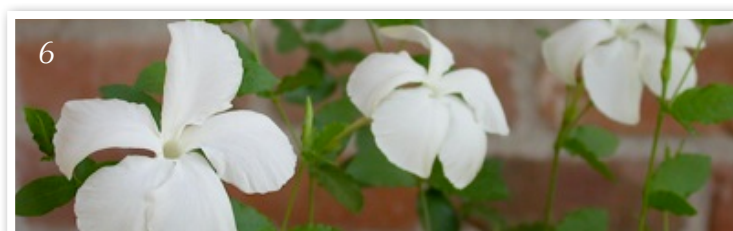
Larrea tridentata "Creosote"

Peniocereus greggii "Queen of the night" #1

Penstemon palmeri "Palmer penstemon"

Poliomintha maderensis "Mexican oregano"

Telosiphonia brachysiphon "Rock trumpet" #6





## *Spring wildflowers*

What a surprise this year has been! Rains came late and many of us plant nuts expected a poor annual flower show followed by a good perennial bloom. It's turned out to be terrific for both! Some mountain slopes were carpeted with lupines, poppies, and phacelia and the desert floor was covered with other beauties like bladderpod, penstemon, desert marigold and microscopic Monoptilon. Globe mallows have never been better -- 3 and 4 foot plants were the norm with fountains of flowers from white to pink and salmon to deep red. Late season perennials like brittlebush, senna, and many cacti are just getting started and should provide brilliant color into early May.

There is still plenty of time to get out and enjoy the bloom and it will be a great year for gathering seed too. Collect them now and store them in paper bags in a cool dry place. In October or November, prepare the target area by raking it with a steel rake and fencing it against rabbits and rodents. Mix the seed with dry sand to make spreading easier and more even, and rake over it lightly after tossing it about. Then wait for good rains. Most of the seed will fall prey to ants, birds and other critters, but all it takes is a few to establish a populations of flowers.

Speaking of wildflowers, if you're interested in replacing your roses with more xeric plants, consider a "rose garden" of staghorn chollas. Their 3 inch wide blooms range in color from chartreuse to burgundy with every color in between. They need no irrigation, attract local pollinators, provide nesting sites for cactus wrens and thrashers, and create formidable security screens. What an amazing plant! With a long rake and a pole pruner, they're not hard to maintain either. Gather small cuttings from specimens with flower colors you like, set them on the ground where you want them to grow with a small rock on top to anchor them, and let the cuttings do the rest. Could it get any easier? Cacti bloom every year, so even when annuals take a break, you'll get exciting spring color from your cholla rose garden.





### Plant of the month

#### Artemisia ludoviciana --

##### Western mugwort

Mugwort isn't the most attractive name, but don't let it put you off this wonderful local shrub. It is a silvery, soft, and mounding perennial that forms masses of nearly white stems. A typical size is two feet tall and three feet wide. The foliage is graceful and when crushed exudes a pleasant sage smell. Mugwort is a great replacement for its more commonly used and non-native relative - Artemisia "Powis Castle".

Mugwort is exceedingly tough despite its soft foliage and thrives off irrigation in places that get a little runoff from the roof or other hard surfaces. It tolerates full sun and part shade and looks best with a dark background of stone or deep green plants. A stunning effect could be had by massing it with angular boulders and Mexican fencepost cacti.

All it requires for maintenance is a good "haircut" every two years in late winter. And keep it on the dry side. If overwatered, it can spread widely via underground rhizomes and might outgrow its allotted space.



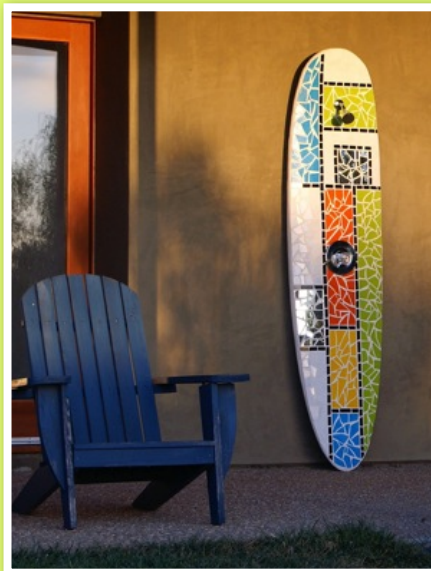
### Opportunities

#### Surf's up!

Jane and Will Fowler, a team of artists in Solana Beach, CA, have come up with a terrific idea for recycling used surfboards. They do structural repairs as necessary, tile them, and plumb them as dramatic garden showers that combine art and function.

What a great way to clean up after a swim or a hot day of gardening! And the water drains to the roots of nearby plants so none is wasted.

See more at: [www.willandjane.com](http://www.willandjane.com).



### Other notes

#### In the next issue:

- Steely wit: two local sculptors who have fun with their work
- Thin and crispy oatmeal cookies. Yum! I want some now!
- El Porvenir - helping Nicaragua's poor with water and sanitation
- Chiltepine



Here's a tip from **Chris Monrad** of the Tucson Cactus and Succulent Society. Remove remaining barrel cactus fruits now and you'll get a better bloom on the plants in summer. Let the fruits dry, crush them and spread the seed!



Here's a great organization and event!

#### Celebrate Kindness Day

Saturday, April 24

Ben's Bells Project

816 E University Drive

2-5pm - Afternoon family event - free

5-8pm - Evening party and silent

auction. \$25/person (\$30 at the door)

<http://www.bensbells.org/CKD/>



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## GARDENING INSIGHTS - LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND SCULPTURE - "WHERE ART MEETS ECOLOGY"

Our LEAF\* design philosophy and practices include:

- \* Local plants, materials, art, and architecture
- \* Eco-friendly ways to save water, avoid chemicals, and encourage wildlife
- \* Artistic, inspiring, and creative uses of plants, sculpture, and other outdoor elements
- \* Functional design for spaces that are easy to live in and easy to maintain

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