



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Cooperative Extension

Master Gardener

Our Grateful Desert

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SaddleBrooke and SaddleBrooke Ranch Master Gardeners

Just over a year ago I wrote my first column for SaddleBrooke/SaddleBrooke Ranch Master Gardeners. Titled, "Ocotillo: Dead or Alive," it was inspired by my own Ocotillos that had looked dead from the moment they became part of my landscape but, according to my research, might come to life at any time. I'm sad to report that both were pronounced very dead last month when I cut into their branches and found nothing but dust. They easily surrendered without any roots clinging to the earth.

Happily, the 2021 monsoon rained down on so much of our desert that we are seeing flowers we haven't seen in years, cacti blooms in the midst of summer, arroyos flowing and sprouting new growth, and the desert floor carpeted in green.

My own landscape has transformed so much in the past few months that I want to share some of the plants and succulents that have surprised and even thrilled me with their beauty, growth and resilience.



Salvia clevelandii, by Sheilah Britton

I'll begin with a favorite, *Salvia clevelandii*, Cleveland Sage, a plant I wasn't able to properly identify until it tripled in size this summer and brought a most amazing fragrance to my backyard. A drought resistant perennial, it is blooming for its third time, and I've had visitors from as far away as Maryland capture its seed pods in the hope of seeing it bloom in their own backyards.

I live on an open, corner lot and many of my walking neighbors have stopped in recent weeks to compliment me on the Bougainvillea that has also shown its rich colors this year following the abundant moisture. Dormant in winter, this plant is a lovely addition to any landscape and comes with a number of choices of colorful flowers.

My citrus trees have weathered drought, sleet and wind but they have shown incredible growth this summer following the monsoon rains. As my mentor and friend, Zann Wilson reminded me,

“Irrigation is not rain.” I won’t have any fruit this year on my lemon, lime or tangelo trees, but they have grown strong and will at least have a better chance of surviving and thriving this winter.

Like many of you, I’ve watched all of my plants react to our rains with gratitude—growing, blooming, attracting birds and butterflies, hummingbirds and moths. You’ve probably seen the baby Mesquites popping up in yards and gardens. I’ve had several but one in particular is beautifully sited and I’ve decided to welcome the little one. It will be interesting to watch it grow in the years to come.

I moved here two years ago and the dramatic difference between last summer and this summer makes me realize how truly adaptable our desert landscape can be. Fellow Master Gardener, Ellen Sosin found it in her own garden, but was impressed even more with the wide spread beauty. “The most amazing site to behold is driving down Oracle Road and seeing the Santa Catalina range. I have been living here for 10 years and have never seen the greening of the mountain like this before.”



Santa Catalina Mountains by Sheilah Britton

SaddleBrooke/SaddleBrooke Ranch Master Gardeners are volunteers trained under the auspices of the University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension, Pinal County. We offer educational programs and classes to residents of our communities.