



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Cooperative Extension

Pinal County

The Desert Garden Buzz

Winter 2023

prepared by the

Southeast Pinal County Master Gardeners



Hello from the Editors!

Welcome to all of our new subscribers!

We would like to remind our readers of the resources that the Southeast Pinal County Master Gardeners have made available to you.

Our website can be found at <https://extension.arizona.edu/spcmg>

It contains:

- information about upcoming events
- how to contact our plant help line
- frequently asked questions
- articles on month-to-month gardening
- informational links
- a comprehensive plant list for our area, with pictures
- articles of special interest
- copies of our newsletters
- information on how to become a Master Gardener

Please pass our website address on to anyone interested in gardening, and share our free newsletter. The subscription signup link is:

www.bit.ly/DesertGardenBuzz-Subscribe

You can also email: DesertGardenBuzz@gmail.com or sign up on the website.

Happy Gardening!

Editors: Laurie Foster, Barb Diliegghio, Vickie Strand - Art

Assistant Editors: Shirley DeCarufel and Elissa Cochran



Upcoming Presentations

For additional information and to register for zoom presentations, visit our web site at: <https://extension.arizona.edu/spcmg> and click on Events.

Wednesday, December 13, at 1:00 PM ZOOM

Nutrient Deficiencies in Plants and How to Improve Soils

by Debunker Sandal, Ph.D., Assistant Professor & Specialist - Soil Health

Growing plants in Arizona can be rewarding as well as frustrating. We all have had plants that are flourishing, then seem to fade, change color, and maybe die. Our December presentation will provide information to help us protect and save your plants.

All higher plants require seventeen individual elements, or nutrients to grow and reproduce. Each nutrient is critical to one or more vital functions within a plant. Lack of a nutrient often produces unique deficiency symptoms that allow an observer to identify the missing nutrient. This information can be used to develop and implement effective treatment strategies.

Dr. Sanyal will focus on those nutrients most often lacking in Southern Arizona plants, Using a key based on visible nutrient deficiency symptoms, allows the identification of common plant nutrient deficiencies. In addition, soil management techniques to avoid and treat these nutrient deficiencies will be shared.

To register for this free zoom presentation, please use the following link:
https://arizona.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_9dF_TaQhQluLc9FeFxRMSg

In January, we will be taking the month off.

Wednesday, February 14, 2024 @ 1:00 PM - ZOOM

by Katy Prudic, PhD, Professor in the School of Natural Resources and the Environment at the University of Arizona.

Katy studies how we can make the lives of butterflies and other pollinators better in a quickly changing world. For further information regarding Katy's presentation please check the Southeast Pinal County Master Gardener webpage.

<https://extension.arizona.edu/spcmg>



Winter Gardening Tips

by Laurie Foster, SEPC Master Gardener

Frost Protection

During our winter season we may experience "hard frosts". This is when the temperature drops to 32 degrees Fahrenheit or below. A plant can usually withstand temperatures hovering around 32 degrees during the night as long as the temperatures do not get into the 20's, or it doesn't stay cold for more than a few hours and the next day is warm. But when those conditions are not met, we need to help the plants.

The best way to help them is to cover them in frost cloth. There are many different thicknesses of frost cloth, so be sure to buy heavier duty cloth or double wrap your plant if you are using lightweight cloth. The white cloth is a better color than green because it lets sunlight through so the plant can photosynthesize. White cloth can be left on for a few days, up to week if needed, which avoids having to wrap and unwrap your plants. If you are protecting container plants you can move them together and put one large frost cloth over all of them, which makes the wrapping/unwrapping easier.

The key to protecting your plants properly is to bring the frost cloth all the way to the ground. This will block cold air from coming inside the tent over your plant and also will allow the heat from the ground to help warm the plant. Clothespins work great for closing gaps in the cloth and use rocks to hold down the cloth in windy conditions. You can use any type of rods you have available or buy wooded dowels to put in the ground around your plant to drape the frost cloth over. That way, if it rains or snows, the wet, frozen cloth is not touching the top of the plant and will not freeze those upper leaves.

Pruning

It is best not to prune plants, even though there maybe winter damage and your plants may not look very attractive until February. There are several reasons for this. One is that making a cut on a branch can often stimulate growth where the cut has been made, and winter is not a good time for new growth. Also, those "wounds" left from the cut are exposed to the cold. Lastly, by February, you will be better able to tell which branches are dead.

When you prune start with the branches that are dead, growing too tall, in the wrong direction, or are rubbing another branches. Then remove branches that will make the plant less dense so air can circulate among the leaves and help cool the plant in the summer. Lastly, remove branches just for shaping. It is best to cut a branch where it

joins another larger branch, and make the cut parallel to that larger branch. This will prevent a new branch from going in the same spot. Make your cut at an angle so that the water runs off and will not sit on the cut, possibly causing rot.

Do not prune so that you are just cutting off the ends of the plant. The plant will grow thicker and only require more pruning.

The University of Arizona has an excellent publication, with illustrations, on proper pruning: *Pruning Shrubs in the Low and Mid-Elevation Desert in Arizona*
<https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1499-2016.pdf>

Cacti

Native cacti are relatively immune to frost, the ones that flower are more sensitive. The tip of the cactus needs the most protection because that is the point of new growth. A quick and cheap option is to place a Styrofoam cup over any growing tip if a hard frost is in the forecast. If the cactus is not frost tolerant it is best to wrap it loosely in frost cloth.

Citrus

Citrus trees require little care in December and January. During this period, increase the number of days between waterings, but don't change the length of time that the trees are watered. In February, as spring approaches, it is time to fertilize and prune.

For further information: *Protecting a Citrus Tree from the Cold*, Glenn C. Wright
<https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1222.pdf>



Winter Watering

by SEPC Master Gardeners

Your winter watering schedule should be much less than your summer watering schedule. Plants will not need to be watered as often because the days are cooler and shorter. This means the plants are growing less, which requires less water. Without the summer heat, there is not as much evaporation from the leaves of the plant, and therefore the plant can also utilize the water better.

The recommended AMUWA (Arizona Municipal Water Users Association) guidelines for winter watering are as follows:

Trees

Desert adapted - water every 30 to 60 days to a depth of 24" - 36"

High water use - water every 14 to 30 days to a depth of 24" - 36"

Shrubs

Desert adapted - water every 30 to 45 days to a depth of 18" - 24"

High water use - water every 10 to 14 days to a depth of 18" - 24"

Ground Covers and Vines

Desert adapted - water every 21 to 45 days to a depth of 8" - 12"

High water use - water every 14 to 30 days to a depth of 8" - 12"

Cacti and Succulents

Normally don't need winter watering, but if water is needed:

water to a depth of 8" - 12"

Because we do not always get winter rains, if you are in doubt as to whether your plants need water, use a soil probe. You can buy a probe, which is a metal rod with a handle that can be pushed into the soil. It will go easily through damp soil, but will stop when the soil gets dry and hard. Other items around the house can be used as probes such as wooden dowels, long screwdrivers, and some fencing pieces.

The most important thing to remember is to cut back on the water by watering less often, not by watering for less time. When the roots are used to one hour watering, for example, cutting back to a half hour watering will not be enough water to get down to the roots where it is needed. Because the ground will not dry out as quickly in winter, water the same amount of time, but space out the days you water.

Thanks to the following information for this article.

- Rick Gibson, "Should I Water in the Winter?"
<https://extension.arizona.edu/should-i-water-winter>
- AMWUA
<https://www.amwua.org/what-you-can-do/landscape-and-garden>
- Joe Allen, "Sonoran Desert Watering Guidelines"
<https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/attachment/Sonoran%20Desert%20Winter%20watering%20%20Guidelines.pdf>
- Cactus, Agave, Yucca, and Ocotillo AZ1225
<https://extension.arizona.edu/pubs/cactus-agave-yucca-ocotillo>
- Irrigating Citrus Trees, AZ1151
<https://extension.arizona.edu/pubs/irrigating-citrus-trees>
- Pruning shrubs in the Low and Mid-Elevation Deserts in Arizona AZ1499
<https://extension.arizona.edu/pubs/pruning-shrubs-low-mid-elevation-deserts-arizona>
- 10 Steps to a Successful Vegetable Garden AZ1435
<https://extension.arizona.edu/pubs/ten-steps-successful-vegetable-garden>

Note- The publications listed above are only a few of the many publications sponsored by the University of Arizona.

View them at: <https://extension.arizona.edu/pubs>



Plant of the Quarter:
Lilac Vine
Hardenbergia violacea

Photo and information provided by AMWUA -
Arizona Municipal Water Users Association

<https://www.amwua.org/plant/lilac-vine>

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Plant Type: | Vine |
| Sun: | Full sun, partial sun |
| Hardiness: | 20° F - In USDA Zone 9, the lilac vine withstands typical winter temperatures, but the leaves may suffer some frost damage in the 20° F range. |
| Water: | Low |
| Native to: | Australia |
| Foliage: | Evergreen |
| Habit: | Mounding, Climbing Upright, Training, Sprawling |
| Growth Rate: | Moderate |
| Flower Color: | Purple |
| Flower Season: | Winter, Spring |
| Height: | 10 ft - 15 ft |
| Width: | 10 ft - 15 ft |
| Note: | The purple lilac vine is not actually a lilac, but this plant is a wonderful substitute for winter color in the low desert. |

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DesertGardenBuzz@gmail.com

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