**Events & Activities**

MG Association Meeting, Wednesday, Nov. 20, 6:30pm Camp Verde (see back page)

Alta Vista Gardening Club, Prescott, fourth Tuesday of the month, 12:30pm. Call 928-458-9508 for information.

Prescott Area Gourd Society, third Tuesday of the month, 6:30 pm, at the Smoki Museum.

Prescott Orchid Society, 3rd Sunday of the month, 2pm at the Prescott Library, (928) 717-0623

Prescott Area Iris Society call 928-445-8132 for date and place information.

Mountain View Garden Club, Prescott Valley, Dewey area, 2nd Friday of month, 1:30pm, call 775-4993

Native Plant Society Meetings - Prescott, 2nd Thursday of the month, 6:30pm. Attending the talk qualifies as Continuing Education. Non-members are welcome. Highlands Center for Natural History, 1375 S. Walker Rd. (928-776-9550).

The Verde Thumbs Garden Club, Cottonwood 2nd Tuesday, 6:30 pm at The Seventh Day Adventist Church. (928) 634-7172

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**Hedgehog Cactus**

_Echinocereus sp._

by Nora Graf

One of the more common cactus types we use in landscaping is the hedgehog cactus. Most of the species are small and compact and have beautiful flowers, which makes them a welcome addition in the xeriscape garden or in pots.

The name comes from Ancient Greek, “echinos” meaning hedgehog and “cereus” meaning candle. Two other species are also called hedgehogs, Pediocactus and Echinopsis. The hedgehog part refers to the spiny fruit.

The cacti are cylindrical, ribbed and small to medium-sized. One reference described them as bushy, although I am not sure that is a good description. Perhaps a better description is that they form clumps, although some species have solitary stems. They do have tight spines, which can be decorative. The flowers are quite beautiful in most of the species. The claret cup cactus, with its gorgeous red-orange, flowers is a hedgehog cactus.

Cactus are masters at surviving our hot dry weather and the cold of winter. A thick wax-like coating covers the stems. It is thickest on the sunny side and helps keep the cactus from losing water. The thick cover of spines also helps protect the plant from the heat. Species vary in height. The tallest can grow to about twenty inches while most range between six and eight inches.

Hedgehogs are easy to grow. They need a light soil, lots of sun and a dry winter to flower. The cactus is very cold-hardy; some species will go as low as -23° F in dry conditions. Some are more sensitive than others. My claret cup cactus was nearly killed by the cold two winters ago. It is still in recovery. In the winter the cactus may start looking shrunken but once the weather warms and they get a little water they spring back.

Hedgehogs bloom between April and June. Depending on the species the flowers range from pink to fuchsia to red. Each of the flowers remains open three to five days. Once the flowers are pollinated an edible fruit develops.

If you are going to add hedgehogs to your landscape always purchase from a reputable dealer. Do not go into the desert and dig one up unless you are on private land and have the permission of the landowner. There are laws against digging up cactus on public lands. If you have a friend with one you like, ask if you can take a few stems. You do not have to dig up the whole plant. Mark the south side of the plant and make sure you place the plant in the...
same direction it was originally growing. If you forget to mark it, look at the plant carefully; the side with the heavier spines faces south. It might not be easy to figure that out so marking is best. Plant in the spring or fall in full sun.

These guys normally won’t do well in the shade. Hedgehogs prefer rocky, gravelly or well-drained soil. To plant, remove the plant from the container and place in a shady, dry area. Cut off any broken or damaged roots. Allow the roots to dry out for about a week so any cuts or breaks can dry out. (This applies to cactus dug from the ground. Cactus in pots like you would get at a nursery can be planted directly out of the pot into the ground.) Dig a hole that is only as deep as the plant so you can keep the stems at the soil line. Water once and then wait a month before watering again. During the winter you probably shouldn’t have to water at all, in fact once the plant is established (unless it is an unbearably hot and dry summer) it should survive on only rainfall.

The names of these plants seem to be in flux, species can be quite different in different areas. The information below is the synopsis of some complicated and long articles.

**Echinocereus coccineus**, also called Scarlet Hedgehog forms clumps that can range from 20 to 500 stems. Stems sometimes form a rounded mound. The size of the stem varies. In mild climates they can be quite large but if transplanted they shrink. The spines are ashy white to gray, brown, yellowish, reddish or black, often dark-tipped. The flowers are usually crimson or scarlet, occasionally red-orange and rarely rose pink. It flowers March to late June. It is mainly found in desert scrub, grasslands, pinyon-juniper and oak woodlands, forests, rocky slopes and cliffs.

**E. englemannii** or Engelmann’s Hedgehog is also sometimes called the Strawberry cactus. It is very common and found throughout the southwest and Mexico. It is the one that is most commonly found growing around the County. It has bright magenta blooms that open in April and into late May, depending on the location. The fruit is spiny. When young, the stems are upright but over time the stem lays down. Spine color is variable.

**E. fendleri**, Fendlers Hedgehog or Pinkflower hedgehog is another common hedgehog that is found throughout the Southwest and Mexico. The stems on these remain erect and form clumps of about 20 stems. The flower can be any shade of pink from nearly white to deep maroon. It blooms April to June. The fruit is red. The flesh of the plant is edible. It can be found in mesquite thickets, grasslands, chaparral, pinyon-juniper or pine-oak woodlands.

**E. fasciculatus** is also known as Pinkflower Hedgehog which is one of the reasons it’s a good idea to use the plants scientific name. This cactus has 5 to 30 stems per clump. The three-inch flowers are rose pink to magenta with midstripes darker and a darker center. Fruits are bright red or orange red with the pulp white or sometimes pink. It flowers from March to June. It is found in the Sonoran desert, semidesert grasslands and chaparral.

**E. rigidissimus** or the Arizona Rainbow cactus has upright stems no more than a foot tall and forms a cluster. It likes dry, sunny, rocky slopes and grassy areas. The stems have horizontal bands of pink and white. The flowers are purplish-lavender and seem too large for the stems. It blooms May to August depending on location. The fruit is greenish or dark purplish brownish, the pulp white. This cactus lacks central spines so it looks considerably different from other hedgehogs. The spines create a lacy look, hence its sometimes nickname of lace cactus.

**E. triglochidiatus** or claret cup or king cup (var. arizonicus is an endangered species) is a complex plant as extreme types with different appearances may be the same species. It is native to the low desert, rocky slopes, scrub and mountain woodlands. It is most abundant in shady areas. It is considered a mounding cactus having up to 300 stems in a clump. It is considered one of the most beautiful cactus with its flowers of bright scarlet to orange-red. The plants are pollinated by hummingbirds. The fruit is green to yellow-green or pink and rarely red. The pulp is white. It flowers April to June.
They are everywhere and grow better, bigger and faster than all the plants we really want to grow. These are some common ones you can find locally:

Scotch thistle (Onopordum acanthium) a biennial that can grow up to 12 feet high. Yikes! That’s really a tree. Fortunately I have never seen one that tall but you might find them growing in your yard. They are fairly common in Yavapai County. Originally they came from Europe and eastern Asia, but are now found throughout North America. You might first notice a low growing rosette of grayish green leaves. The rosettes can get quite large, up to two feet across before they send up broad branches with spiny wings. The leaves are large, spiny and covered with fine dense hair. Numerous flower heads form at the top and are one to two inches in diameter and have spines. The flower is a lovely purple but it’s best if you remove them before they even get to that stage. They can produce a lot of seed and you don’t want these spiny things in your yard. If left to their own devices they can form thickets that even livestock won’t go through. Remove them when they are young in their rosette stage.

London Rocket (Sisymbrium irio) recognizable once you take a look at the picture. It is very common around here. The name is fun but you might not want them growing in your yard. London rocket is a winter annual. It is a lush-looking bright green plant that grows 1 1/2 feet to 2 feet tall. The flowers are very small, yellow and appear in small clusters at the tips of the stems. The leaves are always indented. It was originally a native of Europe but has spread across the country. You will find it in irrigated crops, orchards, vineyards, roadsides and ditches. Unless it gets regular water it disappears in the summer. Get rid of it before the seeds form as it spreads only through seeds.

Russian Thistle (Salsola iberica) Tumbling tumbleweeds may sound romantic in song but in reality they are a nuisance. Introduced (notice the word introduced) from Russia in the late1800’s, they have since gone on to be one of the most troublesome weeds in the West. Russian thistle is a rounded bushy plant with lots of thin branches, usually red, scale-like leaves. The flowers are green and very small. The parts you notice when you come into contact with them are the spiny bracts. They came by their nickname of tumbleweeds honestly. They spread their seed when the plant breaks off from the main stem. When the wind blows the plant around it is spreading seeds far and wide. So next time you see one flying through your yard in the wind, don’t think of the song, think of the seeds being spread hither and yon. The seeds will germinate on the tiniest amount of water, which is another reason why it is so hard to get rid of. It loves the dry conditions here and can be found nearly everywhere. The good news is that if you don’t have thousands of them they are easy to control in small areas. Chop them off at the ground, they won’t re-grow; just try and get it done before the seeds mature.

Hog potato (Hoffmannseggia glauca) Don’t you just love the name. This is a small weed and is relatively easy to control in a garden. I know because I have it in my yard. But it is prolific and can cover a bed quickly. This is a low-growing perennial that reproduces by seed and underground tubers. Once you see the flowers you will recognize it as a member of the pea family. It will grow up to about a foot with bipinnately compound leaves. Flowers are yellow to red-orange and look like pea flowers 1/2 inch long. It is native to the southwest and can form large colonies. It likes alkaline soil on roadsides and ditches (or in my case, my raised bed garden).
With outdoor gardening chores winding down for the winter, now is a good time to take a dispassionate look at your garden. Did you really like all the plants you put in? Did they work well in that location? Were you disappointed over some plant or group of plants? Start thinking about a new garden design now if the answers were less than a resounding yes. Planning will help you avoid some disaster you may have encountered.

The first step is to make a sketch of your garden. No, you don’t have to be a Rembrandt, but perhaps more organized than Picasso. Include where the house is and any other permanent structures. Add existing trees, shrubs, fences, flowerbeds, water and other details that will affect your garden. Make notes as to the light—which areas receive full sun, shade, etc. Take dimensions—measure! Now take all this information and make a scale drawing of your yard. You might want to make several copies to try different options or, if you have a computer, there are some good software options out there. Some can “age” plants, giving you a feel for what the yard will look like in the future. (This was written in 1997 and a lot has changed.)

As you are laying out new beds think about the shape of the bed. Rigid straight lines fit a formal space. Curving lines give a wilder, natural look to the garden. Before you dig, take your garden hose and lay out the site. Leave it for a few days and try to imagine it mid-summer. Is it really what you want? Thinking and planning before you dig can be a real labor saver.

Whichever way you decide to go, now is the time to start thinking about what plants you want—perennials, annuals, succession of bloom and/or wildlife plants. Make a list to choose from. Size is a consideration. You don’t want some fast-growing large plant to overshadow something smaller. Plant in tiers according to height with taller plants to the center or rear of the bed and with the smallest up front. Don’t enforce this rigid standard though. A little variety will give the bed a more natural look. A few plants out of place will add interest. Planting tall slender spire-type plants in the front will also work, as they allow plants behind to be seen. Penstemon, foxglove and liatris are good examples that can be used for this effect. Plant a few mid-size plants among the smallest plants up front to also break up a rigid tier system.

Are you designing for a continuous color show? Make sure you know the bloom times of the plants. Know the foliage color. Mixing different leaf color can lend a dramatic accent to the garden beyond the blooms. An early spring start would be with most bulbs; long blooming perennials like day lilies can provide flowers for months. Summer flowers include zinnia and marigolds, while fall bloomers like cosmos, sedum or asters can close out the season.

Mass plantings can be a dramatic visual statement in the garden. Just remember that if they have a short blooming season, you’ll have to look at their leaves the rest of the year unless you pull them out and start over. Whatever your plant list includes, get full information about each one to make sure it fits in the area. Otherwise you might end with an empty spot of dirt if you plant a shade-lover in the full sun.
MG Volunteers Needed

MGA Secretary
The election for 2014 officers is on November 20th, and we still need a candidate for Secretary. The primary activity is taking minutes at the monthly MGA meetings in Prescott and Camp Verde. And of course, it helps if you have a computer and have writing skills. You must also be a certified Master Gardener. Contact Cathy Michener, caasam@cableone.net

Social Committee
We still need a Social committee for the Prescott meetings in 2014. The main function is to organize the refreshments for the MGA meetings in Prescott, and make the coffee. If we do not have a Prescott Social Committee we won’t have refreshments. Positions been to be filled by Dec 1st. Contact Betty Loos, bettyloos1@gmail.com

Speakers Bureau Co-chair
The Speakers Bureau chair, Angie Mazella, needs a co-chair to help with tracking and doing some follow-up on speakers who do not report back on talks given. This can be done from the Prescott or Verde area, and can be done from your home. Requirements: computer literate and organized. Our Speakers Bureau has come a long way in the past year and when the work is shared no one person gets burned out. Position needs to be filled by Dec 1st. Contact Betty Loos, bettyloos1@gmail.com

2014 Master Gardener Class
Applications for the 2014 Master Class are available on our website. The class will be held in the Verde Valley – location TBD. Encourage friends and neighbors to apply. We also need a co-chair to work with Barbara Saul on getting the supplies to the classes, making coffee, etc. Contact Mary Barnes, mcbarn1@cableone.net

2014 AHGC – PR Coordinator
The 2014 garden conference will be held in Prescott on October 25th. The Steering Committee has been formed, with the exception of one position, and that is Public Relations coordinator. This position needs to be filled by year end, and the monthly committee meetings begin in early January. Contact Karen Austermiller, karenlmr206@gmail.com
MG NEWSLETTER

Next Meeting

Speaker: Jeff Schalau, Garden Food Safety

November 20, 6:30pm, Camp Verde

Superior Court Building off of Hwy 260 in Camp Verde.

2840 N. Commonwealth Dr.