



Gardening Insights

February 2009

Elegant and Easy Patios

A reader emailed asking how to have an elegant but easy care patio with year 'round appeal. It's a simple question with a complicated answer and I'm happy to address specifics with an on-site consult. But in the meantime, try these three ideas:

1. reduce clutter

Begin by removing anything extraneous from the patio like empty pots, tools, and other things you're not using. Hide utility panels, hoses, and trash bins with decorative screens or plantings. Then group small pots on benches or stands and, finally, keep your patio spotless.

2. create a theme

A theme makes plant shopping easier and creates a sense of unity in a landscape. Examples include butterfly gardens, winter color gardens, and fragrance gardens. Stick with your theme when buying plants and select species that are interesting even when dormant. Plant containers of annuals and colorful vegetables for winter color, then store the containers away in the off season. Also limit the number of construction materials like decorative rock, brick, concrete, and tile: fewer is always better.

3. use accents, color, and great accessories

Install large pots with dramatic plants to set the mood for your patio. Buy weatherproof furniture and accessories that complement the architecture of your home and splash on color with painted or tiled walls. Incorporate sculpture or other outdoor art, and entice birds, butterflies, and lizards for their beauty and interest.

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*Miss an issue of this newsletter? Email me or visit www.gardeninginsights.com.
You'll find them posted there.*



Drylands Institute

Drylands Institute is a Tucson based non-profit organization that seeks to increase awareness and appreciation of nature, natural history, and conservation by advancing the sciences that document life on our planet.

Drylands books include *The trees of Sonora, Mexico*, *Flora of the Gran Desierto*, and *Dry borders*, a desert natural history of the seven-and-a-half million acres of protected lands in southwestern Arizona and northwestern Sonora, Mexico. In the works are publications on reptiles and amphibians, tiger moths, raptors, beetles, and dragonflies which combine expert science with exquisite photography.

The researchers working on these critically important subjects are doing so without the funding of large institutions or grants and they need our support to identify, inventory, and understand the diversity of creatures that surround us. They are the natural history equivalent of garage scientists who struggle to invent the next great medical device, and with our help, they can continue their endeavors and leave us a legacy of knowledge, artistry, and inspiration for generations to come.

Visit DrylandsInstitute.org to learn more about its publications, projects, and opportunities to support its efforts.

Sustainability and Energy EXP09

Mark your calendars for the **Sustainability and Energy Expo** at the TCC on March 6th and 7th. Hours are 3 - 7 on Friday and 10 - 7 on Saturday. For just \$5 you can discover more about these cutting edge topics.

- Alternately fueled vehicles
- Alternative fuels
- Solar power technologies
- Sustainable living
- Green building
- Rainwater harvesting
- Sustainable landscaping

Gardening Insights will be there doing our part to promote energy saving landscapes. Check out our booth if you're interested in designing with native plants for easy care, "eco-logical" gardens, passive water harvesting, or creating habitat for birds, bugs, and lizards. We'd love to see you there!!!

For more information, visit

<http://www.pagnet.org/Programs/EnvironmentalPlanning/EnergyandSustainability/AlternativeEnergyExpo2009/tabid/689/Default.aspx>



Plant of the Month:

Limberbush (*Jatropha cardiophylla*)

Most desert hikers pass by Limberbush without a glance. With no thorns, it cannot grab attention, and most of the year it is but a mass of twigs without a leaf or flower to signal its presence. Put in a garden, though, this otherwise unassuming plant shines!

Its puce colored stems are upright, tough, and sculptural, and provide a perfect complement to leafier shrubs and prickly ocotillos. It establishes with ease from pot to ground and requires almost no maintenance. With its resinous wood, it's rarely eaten by javelinas, rabbits or rodents.

Limberbush won't fail to catch your eye when planted with blue agaves, ocotillo, banana yucca, and low growing perennials like desert senna, desert zinnia, paperflower, and Wright's buckwheat. It will become a favorite perch for your resident hummingbirds too.

This plant can be hard to find in nurseries but worth the search. Call me if I can help.



Classy, Grassy and Blue!

Looking for a unique, kinetic, and colorful garden? Here's an idea: a garden composed only of monocots; the plants related to the grasses and lilies, agaves and palms.

This palette is a perfect mix for a contemplative garden or a cool complement for modern architecture. When done with tough Sonoran and Chihuahuan desert natives, a monocot garden requires little water or maintenance and creates a haven for local birds and butterflies.

Just imagine yourself on a warm spring day sitting amongst a soft waving mass of native grasses that are dotted with the vibrant blooms of seasonal bulbs and punctuated with spiky agaves like the one pictured above. With the gently rustling canopy of tall graceful palms overhead, what could be closer to heaven?

Convinced you need more monocots in your life? Email me and let's get started!



In the next issue:

- Nurturing native pollinators
- Landscape DIY: Trees, accents and seeds for a "frugalscape"
- A guided tour of the Birds and Plants of Bolivia!
- Wolfberry: Never seen a wolf near one, but birds sure love them!

NOTES

Join Greg Corman and Jim Verrier for **"Cool combos for hot gardens"** a class on great native plants for Tucson gardens. Saturday, February 28th from 9 am to 11 am at Desert Survivors Nursery on W. Starr Pass Blvd. RSVP to me, please. Class is limited to 25 - **by reservation only**.

Watershed Management Group a Tucson nonprofit that improves people's lives by integrating community development and conservation, will hold its Spring Fundraiser with Esperanza en Escalante (EEE), a non-profit organization that provides assistance to veterans of the US Armed Forces who have fallen victim to homelessness. The fundraiser will be held at EEE on **Saturday, March 28th, from 5 - 8 pm**. For more information email: lisa@watershedmg.org



GARDENING INSIGHTS - LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND CONSULTING

Our **LEAF*** design philosophy and practices include:

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

Call or email for a consult, a comprehensive design, or an on-site design

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