



Gardening Insights

August 2009

Vary amin anana: a tasty Malagasy stew

Vary amin anana (varee am nanana) is a national dish of Madagascar and like many aspects of the country, it is a mix of French, African, and Asian influences. I had a delicious bowl of this stew at a guest house in Antananarivo, the island's capital, and the owner was kind enough to share her family recipe, which is below. She used Zebu meat, but that might be a bit hard to find here, so beef is the logical substitute. I've also made the dish with pork and chicken with equally delicious results.

1. In a large soup pot, brown 1 pound of 1" chunks of beef in a bit of oil. Then remove it from the pot and set aside.
2. In the same pot saute the following ingredients:
 - 1 large onion diced (or 1 bunch green onions in 1" pieces)
 - chopped celery (2 or 3 stalks)
 - 2 or 3 grated carrots
 - 2 minced garlic cloves
 - 1 - 2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger
 - Salt and pepper to taste
3. Return meat to pot with the vegetables and add the following ingredients, bring to a boil, then simmer until the rice is nearly done.
 - 6 - 7 ounces of chopped tomatoes (canned or fresh)
 - 6 - 7 ounces coconut milk (or more to taste)
 - 2 - 3 quarts of beef stock or broth
 - 1 cup uncooked rice (brown, red, or white)
4. Add 1 lb. of loosely chopped mustard greens (or kale, collard, or spinach) and simmer 15 - 20 minutes or until done to liking.
5. Just before serving add 1/4 cup of chopped fresh cilantro or parsley and sprinkle with flaked red pepper for some heat, if desired. Serve with baguettes and ice cold beer.





Easy care container plants for drama, color, and hummingbirds

There are plants I love for containers because they require little care and still provide lots of color, movement and accent in a garden. Some attract hummingbirds too. Below are species at the top of my list. I water mine every two weeks in summer if I'm feeling generous and give them slow-release fertilizer once a year. None of them is spiny and all will take at least a light frost. Those marked with asterisks fare best in shade.

Calibanus hookeri (Calibanus): Its hair-like mop of long blue grassy leaves cascade from a tall container and wave in the lightest breezes. With age it develops a large turtle-like base that is nice to expose by shallow planting.

Pedilanthus macrocarpus (Slipper plant): Tall, curvy, erect stems and bizarre orange flowers and fruits make this a terrific accent plant. Hummers love the flowers of this designer favorite. It is native to Baja California.

Euphorbia antisyphilitica (Candelilla): A slimmer, shorter cousin of Slipper plant, it performs well in tight spaces and smaller pots. It's terrific in rock gardens where it spreads by runners.

Hesperaloe parviflora, campanulata, and nocturna (Hesperaloe): These species are common in gardens, but excel in large containers. Their thick grassy leaves and spectacular flower stalks are like living sculptures. Hummingbirds adore them and the flowers last for months.

***Aloe variegata (Partridge breast aloe):** Spotted triangular leaves and red flowers make this aloe a real beauty. It does not suffer leaf tip dieback like many aloes. It flowers in winter and attracts hummers.

***Gasteria species (Gasterias):** Gasterias are named for their stomach-like flowers (see main photo above). They come in a variety of sizes and shapes, most with tongue shaped leaves and long flower spikes. The pendulous flowers attract hummingbirds.

***Haworthia species (Haworthias):** Related to, and often hybridized with Gasteria, the Haworthias are miniature plants that even do well inside in well-lit locations. They look best in small unusual pots like those created by Mike Cone of Phoenix and Jan Bell of Tucson.

Look for tough, beautiful container plants at **Plants for the Southwest, Arid Lands Nursery, Bach's Cactus Nursery,** and **B&B Cactus Nursery**. I like the container soil offered by **AAA Fertilizer** (ask Kevin for the Greg Corman mix). **Pottery Blowout** on Grant has a wide selection of containers.





Plant of the month

Acourtia thurberi (Desert peony)

It's been a maddeningly dry summer, so many of our normally vibrant monsoon wildflowers have given the year a pass. One of them is Desert peony, which looks nothing like its namesake but is a beautiful native plant that occurs around Tucson at 4000 to 6000 feet elevation. It does well in low desert gardens if grown under the canopy of a tree where it will get light shade and a little extra water from irrigation or passive water harvesting. Desert peony emerges with the monsoon from underground stems. It has large, slightly crinkled leaves and is topped with stunning sprays of pink flowers. It looks especially good in gardens with lots of boulders.

Two close relatives, *Acourtia nana* and *A. wrightii* also live in the area and are worthy specimens for no-irrigation landscapes. Both have fragrant flowers and roots that were used medicinally by Native Americans.

Desert Survivors Nursery and **Tohono Chul Park Nursery** are good places to find these and other little-known native species.



Opportunities

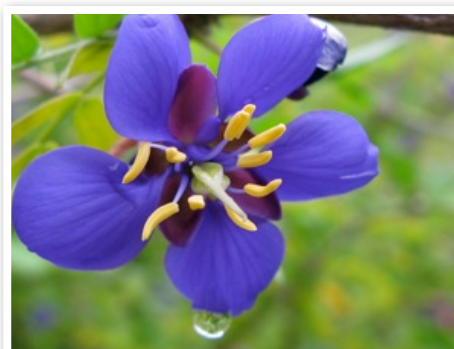
Ben's Bells

Ben's Bells is a Tucson organization that operates on the simple premise of spreading joy with small acts of kindness. It was started by a local couple after the tragic death of their young son. They were deeply moved by the kindness and support they received and wanted to share the goodwill with others.

To learn more about the group and its activities, go to **Bensbells.org**.



I am collaborating with noted garden writer and landscape designer **Scott Calhoun** on a class about designing with native grasses. Tohono Chul Park: Sat., Oct. 17th. Call 742-6455 ext. 0 to register.



In the next issue

- Treasure hunting at Tucson's salvage yards
- Shrubs for security plantings and bird habitat
- Guayacán: the stunning blue Sonoran native shrub pictured above
- Drawing out the artist in you: Courses with The Drawing Studio and Richard Scott



Save this Date!

Tucson/Pima Arts Council is hosting it's annual Open Studio Tour on November 14 and 15, 11 am to 4 pm. My studio will be one of 150 open those days and I'll have a selection of sculptures for sale. My wife will be there with her fiber arts and our friend Tidi Ozeri (my collaborator on sculptures) will be there with metal works. We hope you come by for a visit!



Past issues of this newsletter are available at GardeningInsights.com. Feel free to forward it to friends or have them contact me if they wish to be on the mailing list.



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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

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