



Gardening Insights

October 2009

Art for TPAC's Open Studio Tour

Tucson-Pima Arts Council sponsors an open studio tour annually and this year's event is November 14 and 15 from 11 am to 5 pm each day. Nearly 170 artists are opening their workspaces and galleries to the public and from the examples on TPAC's website, it promises to be an interesting mix of works.

My wife Susan Fehlow and I will have our home studio open for the tour and hope you'll stop by. She'll be displaying her works in paper and her rugs. Her piñatas are delightful and colorful creations and her rugs are art for the floor made of recycled wool that is meticulously hooked through a fabric backing. They could be hung on a wall, but they feel so nice on the toes that they should be walked on.

I'll have my bee habitat sculptures and garden elements on display. They are made of recycled wood and steel and found objects from local salvage yards. My collaborator on these pieces, Tidi Ozeri of Ozeri Metal Designs will be here with some of his work and his impressive portfolio too. Our house, at 1800 N. Norton Avenue, is located in midtown by the Arizona Inn. There are many other artists in the area, so it will be a quick and easy to drive from one studio to another.

A preview showing is on display at 801 Gallery on Main Street until November 12. That night the show closes with a "meet the artist" event from 6 to 8 pm.

More information is available at the TPAC website: <http://www.tucsonopenstudios.com/ost/>





North Carolina sculptor, George Peterson

To say the hills of western North Carolina are ablaze in late October really doesn't do justice to the array of colors in the autumn leaves. Fire just isn't spectacular enough. I'm not sure what adjective I'd use, but I've never seen a fall display like it before. The leaves were a bonus on a trip I took to work with sculptor George Peterson who lives near Brevard, just south of Asheville. I had discovered him and his works through Google image searches and they resonated with me so much that I emailed him and asked if he'd consider having an "apprentice" for a few days. He generously agreed and taught me some great techniques for texturing and coloring wood. A big plus was that he uses chainsaws and blowtorches for much of his work, so in addition to being artful, the experience was infused with lots of smoke, noise, and flying wood chips. George is well known for his turnery work and for hardwood sculptures that evoke a feeling of African naive art. He's represented in Tucson by Obsidian Gallery.

The projects we worked on were broken skateboards that he's transforming into wall pieces that look like African shields. He carves designs in them with a chainsaw, burns them and paints them with several layers of milk paint, wax, and rust. The results are quite amazing. In a day, what's clearly a modern element takes on a patina of great age and looks like a treasured antique object. Those illustrated above are destined for shows in Washington, DC and Philadelphia in November.

George is fortunate to have a ready supply of oak, hickory, maple, and other eastern hardwoods from urban landscapes and nearby forests where 80 inches of rain per year produces mammoth trees. Vertical slabs through some of them are four or five feet across! He uses small parts of these monster trees for bowls, wall pieces, and totemic forms that echo works by English sculptor David Nash. Check his website for more information and photos of his work: www.circlefactory.com.





Plant of the month

Senna covesii (Desert Senna)

A year like 2009 with little rain in winter or summer is a good test for seeing what plants tough it out in the worst conditions. One that comes through with ease is Desert senna and that's why it's one of my favorite plants for no-irrigation gardens.

This Tucson local typically grows 18 inches tall and wide and has oval evergreen leaves that are a dusty gray green. It bursts into bloom in spring and reblooms during the monsoon with typical yellow senna flowers.

Desert senna grows well from seed and can be prolific under good conditions so avoid the temptation to water it during dry spells. It's terrific for revegetating disturbed areas after construction and it teams well with other tenacious plants like Turpentine bush (*Ericameria laricifolia*), Wright's buckwheat (*Eriogonum wrightii*), Desert zinnia (*Zinnia acerosa*) and Limberbush (*Jatropha cardiophylla*).

Opportunities

Jamaica: A tropical treat from hibiscus flowers

Mexican restaurants often serve a cranberry red sweet-sour drink that's called Jamaica and pronounced Ha-Mike-A. The drink is extracted from flower parts of *Hibiscus sabdariffa*, a native of Asia and the ruby red juice is enjoyed around the globe under different names. You might have had it in Red Zinger tea.

I recently found the dried flowers in the bulk section of a Food City store and make it often at home. It's easy to prepare simply by steeping the flowers in hot water, straining them and adding sugar and more water.

Jamaica is a versatile mixer and can be prepared with ginger or mint. It's also nice with a slice of lime and a splash of white rum or citrus vodka!

Check out the recipe below. There are lots of others on the web too.
<http://mexicofoodandmore.com/drinks/jamaica-flower-iced-tea-recipe.html>

Photo above: Becky Luigart Stayner

Other notes

In the next issue:

- Stone features for bird watering
- Chuparosa: Edible winter flowers that hummingbirds love too!
- Chipotles and Posole, two delicious finds at Native Seeds/SEARCH
- Landscape irrigation: How might outdoor water use change in the next ten years?



Save this Date!

Susan and I are participating in a multi-artist sale on Saturday, December 5th at 4221 E. Burns Street in the "Poets' Corner neighborhood. Details will be in my next newsletter.



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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- * Local plants, materials, art, 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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