



*Hacienda de los Santos, Alamos, Sonora, Mexico*



# Gardening Insights

June 2010

## Poolside planting

Most pool owners find the joys of a cool summer dip are offset by the drudgery and expense of keeping the backyard waterhole clean of dust and plant debris. Anyone who has a bougainvillea crawling on their pool fence knows what I mean. Choosing the right species for poolside planting can go a long way to reducing the workload and making those summer swims more enjoyable.

Good plants for poolside landscapes are clean, unarmed, tolerant of full sun, and perhaps tolerant of small planting spaces. The same plants should provide the soft, colorful lushness of a tropical pool or the drama and sculpture of a desert water hole depending on the owner's preference. The plants below are some of my favorites and a longer list is available by emailing me. Also consider these ideas:

- Use sculpture, colored walls and artwork, and containers of annuals for interest around the pool.
- Cover or enclose part or all of the pool with a ramada or sail cloth instead of using trees for shade.
- Occasionally flush poolside beds with fresh water to reduce the buildup of pool chemicals.
- Use steel netting on the lower part of pool fencing to prevent blow-in of leaves and trash.
- Create positive drainage to prevent storm water running into the pool.

### Trees:

Acacia willardiana "Palo blanco"  
 Brahea armata "Blue hesper palm"  
 Eysenhardtia orthocarpa "Kidneywood"  
 Fraxinus greggii "Littleleaf ash"  
 Nannorrhops ritchieana "Mazeri palm"  
 Pistacia lentiscus "Mastic tree"  
 Sabal minor "Dwarf palmetto"

### Shrubs:

Asclepias linaria "Pineleaf milkweed"  
 Asclepias subulata "Desert milkweed"  
 Eriogonum fasciculatum "Flattop buckwheat"  
 Euphorbia antisyphilitica "Candelilla"  
 Euphorbia rigida "Gopher weed"  
 Guardiola platyphylla "Apache plant"

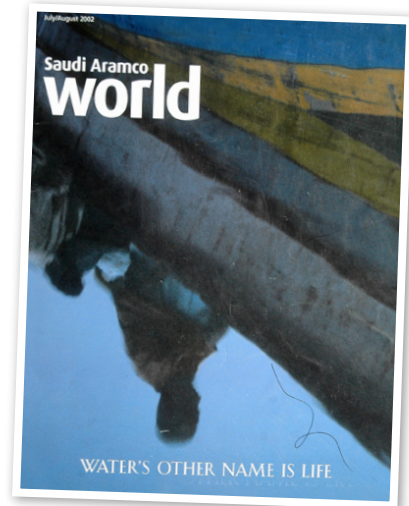
### Cacti and Succulents:

Agave bracteosa "Squid agave"  
 Agave victoriae-reginae "Queen Victoria agave"  
 Aloe striata "Coral aloe"  
 Aloe variegata "Partridge breast aloe"  
 Aloe petricola  
 Hesperaloe parviflora "Red yucca"  
 Nolina bigelovii "Bigelow's nolina"  
 Nolina matapensis "Tree bear grass"  
 Nolina nelsonii "Blue nolina"  
 Pedilanthus macrocarpus "Slipper plant"

### Grasses and Grass-like Plants:

Calibanus hookeri  
 Muhlenbergia emersleyi "Bull grass"  
 Muhlenbergia rigida "Deer grass"  
 Nolina microcarpa "Bear grass"





## Art and Culture Magazines

My favorite early morning ritual is sitting at the dining room table with my cat Norton, a strong cup of tea, and a magazine that inspires my creative instincts. No current events, politics, or bad news are considered. Three of my preferred reads are:

### Wallpaper

"Euro-hip" is the essence of this magazine, and though I can't aspire to that, I enjoy the breadth of its coverage of arts, architecture, fashion, and design. Every issue has at least one amazing idea that makes it worthwhile. Like rich desserts, however, a little of it goes a long way -- the writing can be self-indulgent and cloying and it's definitely stuck in 20th century consumerist mode. Perhaps they need a few treehuggers and visionaries on staff.

### HAND/EYE

*"HAND/EYE is an independent, international publication which explores the nexus between design and development, culture and commerce, art and craft, and environment and ethics. HAND/EYE's goal is to engender intelligent debate among artisans, exporters, designers, artists, wholesalers and importers, retailers, and consumers so that all may make smart, ethical, and inspired decisions about their activities."* That's their mission statement and it says it all. The compassion, creativity, and connectedness are apparent in the writing and make it a compelling read. It is so beautifully illustrated and designed that you certainly won't throw it in the recycling bin when you're finished. HAND/EYE, which is a non-profit organization, has a website full of interesting information.

### Saudi Aramco World

Big oil might have a bad reputation right now, but I admire Saudi Aramco for their work on this magazine. It is one of the finest print productions I know and contains not a whiff of petroleum products. It is written to promote knowledge of the Arab and Muslim worlds and their connections with the West. The articles range from history and science to art and agriculture and the writing and illustrations are top-notch. Plus, it's FREE!

- Wallpaper: [Wallpaper.com](http://Wallpaper.com)
- HAND/EYE: [Handeyemagazine.com](http://Handeyemagazine.com)
- Saudi Aramco World: [Saudiaramcoworld.com](http://Saudiaramcoworld.com)







## Plant of the month

## Opportunities

## Other notes

### Coral bean -- *Erythrina flabelliformis*

For many people, their first encounter with this plant is when they find its bright red and rock-hard seeds scattered on the high desert floor. The plant itself is much less conspicuous, especially in winter when it is nothing more than a leafless collection of twigs.

Coral bean is a plant of subtropical origin and in Mexico it grows into a tree. In Arizona, the northernmost part of its range, it freezes back most years and never gets much larger than 5 or 6 feet tall. I've seen very old specimens in the Dragoon mountains with a few leafy twigs and enormous root systems that attest to their tree heritage.

In early summer it produces stunning sprays of lipstick red flowers and then pops out with aspen-like pale green leaves. Its stems are prickly and pale gray.

Plant Coral bean with evergreen shrubs like Turpentine bush and Beargrass that will cover for it in winter. It survives with little supplemental watering and seems to flower best in full sun. It looks particularly nice tucked into large boulders.



### Ten tips for sustainable landscapes

1. Minimize garden inputs including irrigation and other systems, and chemicals and fertilizers
2. When possible, maintain natural areas and allow little used spaces to "go native"
3. Plant native species that thrive on rainfall only and provide food and shelter for native birds, bugs and other critters
4. Reduce potable water outdoors with fewer, smaller water features, low water plants, and little or no lawn
5. Implement passive water harvesting to make the most of rainfall and use "graywater" if possible
6. Support wildlife with native bee nesting boxes, bat roosts, and lizard lairs but avoid bird baths, quail blocks, and scattering bird seed
7. Keep organic matter on site by leaving it in place, composting it, or piling it in "nutrient sink" areas where it can decompose slowly
8. When possible, maintain some dead limbs in trees - they attract small insects which are food for birds
9. Locate trees to shade buildings in summer but allow solar gain in winter
10. Remove all invasive plant species like South African sumac, Buffelgrass, Fountain grass, and Tree of heaven

### In the next issue:

- Landscape grasses
- Replacing irrigation endcaps
- Tucson insider shopping spots
- Prairie zinnia



It's taken a while, but my NEW WEBSITE is up and running. Please have a look and I'd appreciate your suggestions and comments. There will be minor tweaks and some new photos coming soon.

[www.gardeningsignights.com](http://www.gardeningsignights.com)



## GARDENING INSIGHTS - LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND SCULPTURE - "WHERE ART MEETS ECOLOGY"

Our LEAF\* design philosophy and practices include:

- \* 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 outdoor elements
- \* Functional design for spaces that are easy to live in and easy to maintain

### COMMERCIAL & RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS

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