



Gardening Insights

October - December 2010

Landscape Grasses

There's something magical about grasslands and how waves of wind draw patterns as they sweep across the landscape. It's an effect that's impossible to replicate on a garden scale, but planting grasses will still add movement, grace, and even color to a small space. Native grasses grow rapidly in the warm season but spend the fall and winter in a brown dormant state. However, they are quite beautiful then and provide much needed food for seed-eating birds.

Native grasses for low desert gardening range in size from 1 foot tall for a mini-grass like Blue grama, to 6 feet for Giant sacaton. Small species can be sown randomly by seed and edited as necessary, but the larger types should be placed with the same care as landscape trees and shrubs. If not planted in a water collecting swale, most grasses in low desert gardens will require monthly or more frequent irrigation to thrive when it's hot. They also need yearly or bi-annual "haircuts" to keep them looking good. Beware that masses of grass can be a fire hazard near structures so position them in a garden where that is not a risk.

Below is a short list of species that perform well in Tucson. Desert Survivors Nursery and Tohono Chul Park are good places to look for them and many more.

Aristida purpurea	"Purple three awn"
Bouteloua curtipendula (Pic. 2)	"Sideoats grama"
Bouteloua gracilis	"Blue grama"
Bothriochloa barbinodis (Pic. 1)	"Cane beardgrass"
Digitaria californica	"AZ cottontop"
Heteropogon contortus	"Tanglehead"
Muhlenbergia dumosa	"Bamboo muhly"
Muhlenbergia emersleyi (Pic. 3)	"Bull grass"
Muhlenbergia rigida	"Deer grass"
Sporobolus wrightii	"Giant sacaton"

If you like the look of grasses but wish to avoid the dormancy and yearly maintenance, you might consider grass-like plants that provide many of the same benefits as true grasses. They include Calibanus hookeri plus several Nolina and Dasylirion (Desert spoon) species.





New address

We've now moved into our new place on the west side of Tucson. It includes a small brick house from the 60s - just half the size of our last home - with a stable and a shed that will eventually be my office. The stable has a resident western screech owl which doesn't need to worry about being run out by horses - the corrals are all being revegetated as wildlife habitat. The 4.5 acre lot includes dozens of saguaros and clusters of condalia, palo verde, mesquite, greythorn, and whitethorn acacia. There are some spectacular barrel cacti and a single Ephedra (Mormon tea). Cholla cacti are dense enough to ensure I never wear flip-flops again.

Our address is: **4200 N. Oxbow Road, Tucson, AZ 85745-9766**. We no longer have a land line, so you can reach me only on my cell phone at 520-603-2703.



Two-horse stable for one owl (with private bath) and future office of Gardening Insights, Inc.



*I'll be presenting a talk on Functional Garden Art for the **San Diego Horticultural Society** on Monday, January 10 at 6 pm. Come by if you happen to be in town - or live there! More details at: <http://www.sdhortsoc.org/>*



Upcoming classes and tour

at Tohono Chul Park

Gardening Where We Live

Sat., Jan. 29 and Feb. 5 / 9am-12pm / Ed. Ctr. #1

Gardening in Tucson is not quite like gardening anywhere else and this popular two-part class is for newcomers to Arizona and newcomers to gardening. Greg Corman and Lynn Hassler share their Tucson gardening experiences, from designing landscapes to growing plants in what can be a difficult environment for the uninitiated.

\$16 members/\$20 general public

The Secret Junque (Yard) Garden

Sat. Mar. 5 / 7:30am-5pm

In their quest for exciting building materials for creative and budget-minded gardens, Scott Calhoun (ZonaGardens) and Greg Corman (Gardening Insights) have gotten well acquainted with the hidden treasures in Tucson's salvage yards. Start this day trip with a continental breakfast and slide presentation in the Education Center. Then we're off to visit private gardens that have put "junque" to inspired uses. Lunch at Maynard's Market and Kitchen in the historic Southern Pacific train depot is followed by stops at some of Tucson's best junk yards. Cost includes transportation, lunch, and Scott and Greg, of course!

\$125 members/\$150 general public

Living Less Large

Sat., Apr. 9 / 10am / Ed. Ctr. #1

Ready to explore the ways you can enjoy a simpler, less expensive and more "eco-logical" way of living that puts you in touch with your surroundings? Innovative, or atavistic, ideas for environmentally friendly, low-tech living include outdoor showers, sleeping porches, solar water heaters, chicken coops and veggie gardens. Greg Corman, currently incorporating many of these elements into his new residence, shares his experiences and offers tips for adding some or all of these ideas into your sustainable home.

\$4 members/\$8 general public

For all classes and workshops, **call 742-6455 x0 to register**. Pre-registration is required.

Other news

Practical Art Gallery

I'm very pleased to announce that my bee habitats, benches, wood vessels and other work are being carried by **Practical Art** in uptown Phoenix. The gallery features only hand-crafted functional works by Arizona artists. It's just north of the intersection of Central and Camelback in a neighborhood full of great restaurants and shopping. And it's right by a light rail stop too. Check it out if you're looking for unique, handmade items at great prices. The staff are terrific and can help you with your selections. Learn more about the gallery at www.practical-art.com.

I'm also thrilled about having a **solo show** there for the month of **April**! I'll have more about the event and the opening in my January newsletter.



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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