



# Gardening Insights

January to March 2014

## *A Bulb Gardening Experiment*

A design colleague and I were touring a local garden recently and came across a bulb plant with strange blue fluted leaves. He knew it as *Boophane* (bow-aw-fanny) a South African species well known to collectors, but not often seen planted in the ground here. The plant appeared very healthy and its odd form was a lovely complement to the cacti and native shrubs surrounding it. It got us wondering why so few exotic bulb plants are included in Southwest desert gardens. I thought it a good time to do some research and I knew just where to begin - Plants for the Southwest, a Tucson nursery specializing in the oddballs of the plant world.

Jane Evans, co-owner of the establishment (with Gene Joseph) guided me through their selection of weird bulbs that grow well in desert dirt, need no soil amendments, and tolerate occasional hard freezes. Among these were *Lachenalia* with delightful orange winter-blooming flowers, *Haemanthus* and *Massonia* with broad tongue shaped leaves, and *Albuca* with sweet curlique foliage. She explained that the bulbs were cool season growers from areas with moist winters and bone dry summers. For success in the Southwest, she suggested planting them where they'll get full winter sun but little direct summer sun, where herbivores are unlikely to nibble on them, and where the soil drains very well so they don't rot while dormant during our hot and wet summers.

I bought about a dozen kinds and followed Jane's directions, and rather than creating a defined bulb bed, I planted amongst existing perennials in areas that have a good winter sun exposure. The trees overhead are deciduous and the nearby shrubs nearly dormant. In summer, when the bulbs are dormant, the areas will be shaded almost all day. The soil is sandy loam with no stones and there is a 2" layer of screened gravel over the surface. The drainage is excellent. These plants will get the same level of neglect I visit on all of my landscape specimens. They'll get water for a short while and, well, that's about where the care will end. I hope some of them thrive solely on a combination of "good vibes" and being freed from the confines of their nursery pots. If they're happy, they should multiply and provide a lovely dash of color in an otherwise drab winter landscape. I'll keep you posted on their progress!



*Jane Evans and Gene Joseph have a wealth of knowledge, a pragmatic approach to gardening, and an infectious enthusiasm for weird plants both native and exotic. You can visit Plants for the Southwest nursery, or order plants for shipment across the US.*

50 E. Blacklidge Drive, Tucson, AZ 85705 • (520) 628-8773 • [www.lithops.net](http://www.lithops.net)



I'm very pleased to have my work gracing the walls of a fantastic Tucson restaurant - Tasteful Kitchen. The food there is delicious and inventive vegetarian made primarily from local produce. Try it - it's great!

***Tasteful Kitchen 722 N. Stone Avenue, Tucson, AZ 85705 520-250-9600***



Just down the street from Tasteful Kitchen, on February 1st, you can enjoy the opening of the **Tucson Sculpture Festival**. The work of dozens of local artists will be on show through February 15th. Last year's opening event was impressive, and I expect it will be this year too.

***Tucson Sculpture Festival 1122 N. Stone Avenue February 2 to 15 from 11 - 7 daily***



Another fun event in February is the **Rodeo Days Art Celebration**. It includes dozens of artists, beer, food, wine and bacanora tastings, and live music. It's free, and this year it's being held at Plaza Palomino at the corner of Swan and Ft. Lowell. Stop by, eat and drink, and visit me in the sunken patio where I'll be showing work alongside other metal artists.

***Rodeo Days Art Celebration  
Sunday, February 23rd from 11 - 7  
Free Admission!***



## Water probe for easier planting

I wrote about probes in an earlier newsletter, but wanted to revisit the subject with a better design, plus a parts list and instructions. I've been using mine a lot lately and it's made digging holes possible in very tough soil. It's made primarily with 1/2 inch galvanized steel plumbing pipe plus fittings, which are available at any hardware or plumbing supply store. It's shaped like a "T" with the top acting as handles, so it's easy to use and very tough. Total cost for parts will be about \$40.

### Parts:

- 2x galvanized steel pipe sections (nipples) 6" long
- 1x galvanized threaded pipe 36" (or 48" long if you're tall)
- 1x "T"
- 2x end caps
- 1x brass ball valve (female/female)
- 1x brass hose adaptor (male)
- 1x spring reinforced stub hose
- teflon tape or teflon pipe thread sealant (for ALL threaded connections)

### Tools:

- drill with 1/8" bit
- hammer and center punch
- pipe wrench
- vise

### Directions:

- Secure one end cap into a vise, closed end up. Use the center punch and hammer to make a divot in the center of the end cap. Using the divot as a starting point, drill through the cap with the 1/8" drill bit.
- Secure the galvanized "T" in a vise.
- Apply teflon to one end of each 6" pipe and thread the pipes into the sides of the "T".
- Apply teflon to one end of the long pipe and thread it into the bottom of the "T".
- Thread the end cap with the hole on the end of the long pipe.
- Thread the other end cap on one of the 6" pipes.
- Thread the ball valve on the other 6" pipe, followed by the hose adaptor and stub hose.

Attach a garden hose, put the tip on the ground, and slowly turn on the ball valve. You'll quickly learn how to start without splashing mud all over you! Work the probe into the soil as deep as required, dig out the moist soil and insert a plant. It's messy, but much easier than trying to dig in dry soil.



stub hose



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GOT GARDEN QUESTIONS? Email me for answers (or at least opinions!)

**Greg Corman** [www.gardeningsignights.com](http://www.gardeningsignights.com) 520-603-2703 [greg@gardeningsignights.com](mailto:greg@gardeningsignights.com)  
Studio open by appointment  
[www.facebook.com/gregcormansculpture](https://www.facebook.com/gregcormansculpture)