

The Chuparosa

Chapter Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 6 - June/July 2016



Desert
Horticultural
Society of the Coachella Valley

Smoke Tree Ranch: Landscape by nature



Nancy Antonius took the photos in this article on the Desert Horticultural Society's field trip to Smoke Tree Ranch in Palm Springs.

By Robert Musial

60 years.

It was a beautiful spring day at the end of April when 24 members of the Horticultural Society enjoyed the rare privilege of a private guided tour on a portion of the 400 acres that make up Smoke Tree Ranch in South Palm Springs.

The Ranch located behind Smoke Tree Plaza on a gently rising alluvial fan has been a successful private home and resort operation for over

The Markams bought the property in 1936. The Ranch was never advertised but became known by word of mouth amongst their affluent friends and acquaintances who shared the idea of a peaceful way of life away from the pressures of the daily grind. Cowboy clothes were the norm instead of an affectation. Dinner was served community style

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Note: The Chuparosa will combine newsletters for the summer season as the publication has done in the past. Watch for June/July and August/September issues in your email inbox.

Our Next Meeting: October 19 at 6 p.m.

Joshua Tree National Park has used native plants to restore impacted areas in the park for over 30 years. Seeds are collected within five miles of project locations and planted in the park's nursery, called the Center for Arid Lands Restoration.

Despite many success stories, the restoration program faces tough challenges in the future that the park is working to overcome. Speaker Neil Frakes, Vegetation Branch Chief in the Division of Resource Management at JTNP, will introduce us to the center and to some of its success stories.

Frakes, who has been at JTNP since 2015, oversees a variety of vegetation based

programs at the park, including native plant restoration, invasive plant species management, field botany and climate change monitoring.

5:30 p.m. Plant exchange. Bring pups, cuttings, plants to share with others. Even if cannot bring plants feel free to adopt and watch your garden grow.

6 p.m. Regular DHSCV meeting with presentation by Neil Frakes

7:30 p.m. Refreshments

Where: Hoover Room, The Living Desert, 47-900 Portola Ave., Palm Desert. Free

More Upcoming Events

Here's a cache of events and meetings of interest to members of the Desert Horticultural Society of the Coachella Valley and fellow gardening enthusiasts. Read more at www.deserthorticulturalsociety.org.

Through Summer Bird Watching: 7 a.m. Wednesdays, Big Morongo Canyon Preserve. Bring binoculars, stroll trails with birding experts. Beginners welcome. 11-055 East Drive off Highway 62, Morongo Valley. bigmorongo.org, (760) 363-7190

June 9 Landscaping and Microclimates for Small Gardens: Illustrated talk by cactus and succulent ex-

pert Gary Duke about how to develop a landscape plan for small gardens. Including: Sun angles, focal points, how to plan ahead for maintenance needs. 2:30 p.m. Plant sale follows talk. General admission. Ahmanson Room, Brody Botanical Center, Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino. huntington.org, (626) 405-2100

June 9, 10 Lemon Lily Festival: Activities, hikes, live entertainment. Idyllwild Nature Center, 25-225 Highway 243, Idyllwild. lemonlily-festival.com, (951) 659-3850

June 10-12, 17-19 12th annual Lavender Festival: Tours, vendors,

live music, seminars, food. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Highland Springs Ranch & Inn, 10-600 Highland Springs Ave., Cherry Valley. \$8. hsresort.com

June 11, 12 Orange County Rose Society 23rd annual show: Sanctioned by American Rose Society. Displays, competitions. 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday. Free. Roger's Gardens, 2301 San Joaquin Hills Road, Corona del Mar. (949) 640-5800, orangecountyroses.org.

June 26 Irrigating Your Southern California Garden: Tim Becker, director of horticulture at the Theodore Payne Foundation, discusses best practices for irrigating Southern California gardens to maintain opti-

Events, cont'd

mum plant health while conserving water. Including: Pros and cons of various irrigation systems, how to irrigate native, drought-tolerant, edible plants. General admission. 2 to 3 p.m. Ahmanson Room, Brody Botanical Center, Huntington Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino. Huntington.org, (626) 405-2100

July 2, 3 Cactus & Succulent Society of American Annual Show & Sale: Huntington Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino.

10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Huntington. org, (626) 405-2100

Aug 13, 14 31st annual Intercity Show & Sale: Cactus and succulent show and sale. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. LA County Arboretum, 301 N. Baldwin, Arcadia

Oct. 1, 2 Gubler Orchid Festival: Orchid nursery tour, orchid classes, jazz music, food vendors and more. Benefits Morongo Basin charities. 2200 Belfield Blvd., Landers. gubler-orchids.com, (760) 364-2282. Also,

free tours 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Nov. 12 Desert Palm Oasis Ecology: Leading desert biologist and author James Cornett talks about desert fan palms. Class presented by Desert Institute at Joshua Tree National Park. 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. CSUSB Palm Desert Campus. \$80, \$90, includes text "Desert Palm Oasis" by Cornett. Joshuatree.org, (760) 367-5535

Insects 101: Desert Blister Beetle



Photos & Text By Brian K. Rolf

Common name: Digger Wasp

Scientific name: *Sphex lucae*

Size: ~1 inch

Range: From Western Canada down into Mexico and east to Oklahoma and Texas

Adult digger wasps can be seen in our area in the spring and into summer feeding on nectar from various plant

species. The young larvae of the species feed on paralyzed insects.

After a female *Sphex* wasp has mated, it will dig a number of nest chambers in the ground and then store a good sized insect (cricket, grasshopper, cicada) in each chamber where it will then lay a single egg on the still living insect. The female first paralyzes the insect by stinging and then dragging it back to the nest and to place it into one of the chambers. The female will then lay a single egg on the insect and then seal the chamber entrance.

After hatching, the larva will feed on the live but paralyzed insect while it develops and ultimately emerges as an adult to repeat the process.

Males and females of this species are very similar in size and shape, but the males are all black and the females are black with a reddish orange abdomen.

Brian K. Rolf is owner of Seattle Bug Safari, a traveling bug zoo. brolf@seattlebugsfari.com, (425) 829-4869

Location, selection crucial factors in planting *Fouquieria* species

By Bryan Stone

Ocotillo is a shallow-rooting semi-succulent that includes 11 species of desert plants, the only genus in the family Fouquieriaceae. *F. splendens* reaches as far north as the Southwestern United States and *F. formosa* reaches as far south as Guatemala, favoring low, arid hillsides.

The *F. splendens* and the *F. macdougalii* species of ocotillo are best known in the Coachella Valley, but a lesser-known *F. columnaris*, the Boojum tree that looks a little like something out of a Dr. Seuss children's book is an eye-catcher.

There is little to do for the ocotillo once it is established and growing. Selection, planting and location are probably the most important factors when adding ocotillo to your garden. The side that faces south needs to be carefully selected, more on this below.

Selection

The ocotillo is available two ways in some nurseries. A third choice comes from good friends with beautiful specimens you admire.

Buying in a pot: If you find an ocotillo in a pot this usually means it has been grown from seed. One of the positive sides of selecting an ocotillo in a pot is that you get a plant with

established roots. They have typically been moved around a lot so you do not have to worry about which side is subject to the constant sun exposure from the south.

Just choose one that has a look you prefer, making sure there is no decay or damage near the base.



Buying bare root stock: Stringent California laws protect ocotillo, and they should not be removed from their original home in our state. If you find bare root ocotillos in the nursery it is very likely they have been shipped in from another state or Mexico. It is not done much any-

more, but the harvesters or growers sometimes mark the side that was facing to the south. This is to tell which side should be planted with the most exposure to the sun.

I try to find specimens with the least damaged roots. When picking out bare root, I find a couple plants that are similar in size and I pick the heavier one (tested by lifting). The heavier one most likely has the highest volume of moisture left in the plant.

With both the potted and bare root selections, look for areas that are hollow or look like decay near the base of the plant (and avoid those plants). Up to 27 (or 32 depending on whose research you read) varieties of wood rotting fungi have been found on ocotillo roots, and if planted with other ocotillo the roots can graft.

From cuttings: The selections I find that perform the best are ocotillo I have started from cuttings. This does not mean you walk into a nursery and start taking cuttings as they have usually paid a patent fee for the seed-ed plant. It's where your friends or acquaintances with odd or striking varieties come in.

It's best to plant the cutting in a relatively similar position as the parent plant (if it was taken from the front

Ocotillo, cont'd

yard of a south facing house do your best to plant it on the south side of the property).

The species

There are examples of many of these species at The Living Desert.

F. burragei Found mostly in southern Baja California, near the Gulf of California and some of the gulf islands. In nature the shape varies from a wide shrub to something very similar to a young Sonoran Palo Verde boasting pinkish white flowers. This variety prefers a slightly acidic soil, so grows slowly and to my knowledge does not do well with the occasional frost.

F. columnaris Usually growing as one stalk (up to 45 feet) with a broad base unless the stalk is damaged. Then the Boojum tree will send out smaller skinny stems riddled with leaves. It can be grown out here, just make sure the soil drains well, the coarser the better.

F. diguetii Similar to the wide shrubbing burragei but with bright red flowers and will perform better in our soil. Spreads to a width of 4 to 5 feet and up to 8 feet tall. Just needs minor supplemental irrigation after it's established.

F. fasciculata Quoting Mark E. Ol-

son "probably one of the most remarkably odd plants you will ever see," with an extremely wide trunk tapering almost to a point to spiny branches. Blooms large groups of small white flowers, red spines and a more rounded leaf. It does better in higher elevations, around 3,000 feet, than the valley floor.



Fouquieria macdougalii

F. formosa This species most resembles a standard tree, occasionally reaching 30 feet. It sometimes is used as a living fence. It has bright orange-red flowers in bloom when the rest of the plant is dormant. This species can be grown in the valley if you can find it. I hate to sound like a broken record. but just make sure it

is planted in well-drained soil.

F. leonilae Sends out flowers from the stems that resemble the flower shoot from the hesperaloe (just not as long). It has the smallest thorns of the genus, this does not mean they do not hurt! Resembling the Bursera, but with red-maroon flowers.

If you can find one it would make a beautiful specimen for almost any desert landscape.

F. macdougalii My favorite to use here in the Coachella Valley. It can grow to look like a tree, but the way it contours itself is quite amazing. Depending on location, you can keep it leafed out for the whole year with an occasional flower as late as November and as early as March, flowering profusely in the summer depending how good you are at restraining water.

F. ochoteranae In nature this species' trunk changes colors with the seasons (green-gray to an orange-gray), which has more to do with rain than temperature. With bright scarlet red corolla looking similar to a red chili and a sometimes bronze leaf it is one of the easiest to identify. Not used very often because they are very difficult to find.

F. purpusii With the massive trunk looking similar to a Brachychiton (Bottle tree), colored grey and green,

Ocotillo, cont'd

this variation of ocotillo is mostly found within the limestone cliffs. It is rated for our valley but is cold sensitive. It blooms red.

F. Shrevei Grows solely in gypsum flats. It can be easily identified by the distinctive orange stems. Although it grows upwards with its very spiny branches it is considered one of the smallest of the genus.

F. splendens Two varieties are, to my knowledge, the campanulata naturally restricted to Mexico and *F. splendens ssp. splendens* is the only form of ocotillo to naturally reach the Southwestern United States. The campanulata is a more dense spreading than upward growing sub-species of the splendens. The ssp. splendens is a more widely known counterpart due to its wide range.

Planting

Installing the ocotillo species can be a daunting task depending on size and due to thorns. Of all the equipment to have while planting, a nice thick pair of gloves is always the biggest help.

Planting potted and bare root specimens is a similar procedure. Planting depth is not as important as when you plant a shrub or a tree, as long as the ocotillo is sturdy. Make sure that if there is a southern-facing mark on the ocotillo you plant it accordingly for the best chance of a healthy specimen. Pack the soil firmly around

the root ball or root after planting. If you have a heavy silt or clay soil, lightly amend the soil (I prefer to use Amend made by Kellogg's as it has gypsum) to deter standing water.

If you are planting bare root or cuttings, water generously until you start seeing healthy new growth. I double the plant's water needs until I see consistent growth. Water needs are based on soil type and location.

Once new growth is seen, reduce the water slowly over a couple weeks until you are at the point of watering 1-2 gallons bi-weekly. It is best to water deeply one or two times bi-weekly than to water a little each day once established. This will ensure deeper, healthier roots.

Please be very careful while planting.

Location

As I was driving through West Texas a few months ago I would see the occasional ocotillo growing up through limestone, which I found amazing as there were not any growing in bare soil areas. It seems the ability for the limestone to absorb water, heat and stay relatively warm during the evenings and nights was keeping the plants alive during the extremely cold nights. Location does matter.

I find, in a majority of my consultations that involve a decline, 50% of the declines are because of location.

Sometimes this is about a change to its environment that you didn't make.

A quick example about the sensitivity of location: A happy ocotillo has been in the same place in your back yard for 10 years. Your rear neighbor decided two years ago to plant a ficus hedge. As the hedge grew in, you watched as sunlight in the back yard slowly diminished, the leaves on all your shrubs became sparse and increased in size, and your ocotillo is now dormant 11 months out of the year.

Choosing a location requires planning and knowledge of your landscape. Ocotillos love direct sunlight and infrequent deep watering. Long periods of either morning or evening sun will do, just give it enough space for the variety you choose. Unlike many of the desert-friendly plants the ocotillo has a shape all of its own and, if put in the right place, can be a point of interest in any landscape.

Bryan Stone is a certified arborist and horticulturist. Born and raised in the Coachella Valley, he learned to respect the landscape and plant life at an early age from his parents and grandparents, helping care for the pines, eucalyptus, citrus and avocado trees on their ranch. As a licensed landscape contractor, Bryan also works with other professionals in the valley on projects like consultation, installation, tree pruning, irrigation and yearly plant maintenance.

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Plant of the Month: *Calylophus hartwegii* v. *fendleri*

By Troy Bankord

These lemon yellow flowering natives are prevalent in a large area of the Southwest and Plains.

This mounding, woody perennial blooms during the spring and summer and grows to a height of 1 foot and a width of 2 feet. Their blossoms have a 24 hour life span, opening at night and fading to an orange-pink color by late afternoon.

Prune back in early spring to remove woody or frost-damaged stems. They grow well in our sandy, well-draining soils; be careful not to over water.

Like most *Oenothera* species, this plant is very susceptible to flea beetle infestations, but they can be easily controlled with common insecticide treatments.

Lemondrops, as I call them, grow quickly, are a lovely soft, green accent to our architectural specimen plants and are happily hardy to -20 degrees. A true winner, in my eyes.

Until next time...
Peace+Love+Pruning

Troy Bankord also contributes our monthly maintenance article. You can read more about him there.



Images courtesy of Mountain States Nursery (mswn.com)

This & That

CVWD lifts drought penalties, extends water-use restrictions

Coachella Valley Water District has lifted drought penalties, effective June 1, in response to the State's transition to water supply-based conservation targets.

The district also updated its water use-restrictions to coincide with other statewide changes, saying CVWD expects customers to continue managing water wisely.

CVWD's "Water Management Plan" calls for a 20% reduction in water use by 2020. The Urban Water Management Plan, mandated by the state to be updated this summer, also calls for 20% reduction by 2020.

Changing to a supply-based approach makes more sense to an area like the Coachella Valley that has a strong supply that isn't tied to users outside the region.

"Eliminating overdraft of the aquifer is the most critical goal for our community and if we can do that with a variety of programs and projects that don't require 36% or 32% conservation then we should have the flexibility to do that," General Manager Jim Barrett said.

The Board also updated its water-use restrictions and extended them

through January, in conjunction with the State's recent actions.

The restrictions include:

No irrigation during or within 48 hours after measurable rainfall.

Broken sprinklers must be repaired within 24 hours of notification.

Eating establishments may only serve drinking water upon request.

Hotels and motels must provide guests with the option of choosing not to have towels and linens laundered daily.

Applying water to outdoor landscapes in a manner that causes runoff to adjacent property, roadways, parking lots, etc. is prohibited.

Using a hose to wash an automobile, windows, solar panels, and tennis courts, except where the hose is equipped with a shut-off nozzle, is prohibited.

Applying any water to any hard surface including, but not limited to, driveways, sidewalks, and asphalt is prohibited.

Homeowners' associations or community service organizations cannot block, stifle, or threaten homeowners from reducing or eliminating the watering of vegetation or lawns

during a declared drought emergency.

Since drought penalties began, CVWD customers reduced water use an average 25% compared to the same time period in 2013. Water agencies are required to continue reporting monthly water use compared to 2013, and if reductions are not maintained the State could revert back to mandatory conservation targets.

On June 14, the district will consider proposed domestic rate increases and changes to the water budget structure. Under the proposal, water budgets would be approximately 25% stricter than the budgets that were put into place in 2009.

New conservation program targets landscaping pros

Coachella Valley Water District and the State Water Resources Control Board are collaborating on a new conservation program aimed to help professional landscapers in the Coachella Valley be more efficient water users.

The new online program will focus on teaching professional landscapers the best practices for achieving water efficiency. This certification course will be required for any new

Continued on page 9

This & That, cont'd

or existing professionals seeking a landscaping business license in the Coachella Valley.

CVWD is creating the program's on-line curriculum in partnership with College of the Desert and Coachella Valley Association of Governments, which will oversee the implementation of the certification criteria

into landscaping business licenses.

The State Water Board fined CVWD in 2015 for not meeting its water conservation standard. The two agencies collaborated on a way to enhance local conservation in lieu of paying the fine. With the successful completion of this program within one year at an estimated cost of \$83,400,

the \$61,000 fine will be suspended. CVWD has committed to investing in the program for five years.

"The new program is expected to be available to the public this summer. More details will be available soon at www.cvwd.org.

Maintenance by the Month, June & July

By Troy Bankord

The desert is heating up (after a long, beeeautiful spring!).

Plan your time outside carefully—early morning or evening. That's better for your eyes, your health and your skin.

Try to water plants in the evening or early morning to minimize evaporation; with more water going to your plants than into our dry atmosphere. Keep in mind that water pressure might be greater in the evening or middle of the night, versus 7 a.m. when everyone else is most likely showering and watering.

First, make sure your irrigation program is correct.

- Prune plants that reach for the sun—oleander, citrus, lantana, bougainvillea and hibiscus.

- Thin excessive and crossing interior growth of mesquite and palo verde trees.

- Add 2 to 3 inches of mulch to roses, shrubs and young trees to keep the roots cool and to slow evaporation of moisture from the soil. Gravel, river stones and the like can also assist in keeping the roots of your plants shaded and cool. I find using river stones to top dress pots effective in the summer to minimize evaporation and the frequency of watering.

- It's time to transplant palms. In the early part of the warm season, they recover with good growth, respond to heat and deep irrigation in well-drained soil. Make sure that outer fronds are trimmed off, to compensate for root loss and then all remaining fronds are tied up around the heart of the palm with twine. This will protect the

tender new growth as it starts to grow, while minimizing stress and sun damage.

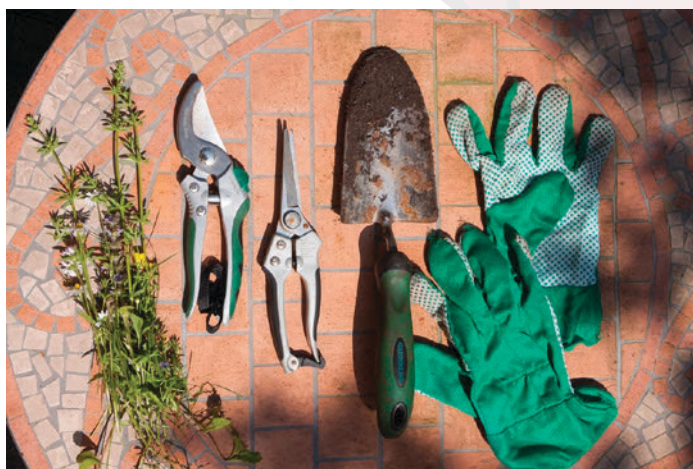
- Some sago palms might need shade from the direct sun. I've found that if they have enough water, they shouldn't yellow in the sun. There are also organic sunscreens available for plants that I've found to be effective in our desert climates when sprayed on per the manufacturer's instructions. Most likely they can be located and purchased on-line. You might consider using an oversized umbrella (anchored into the ground) rather than unsightly stakes and shade cloth.

Blood meal (rather than iron) will help green them up if they yellow a bit. Slight yellowing is normal on much of our vegetation during our hottest months; it's just our plants' natural de-

June & July, cont'd

- fense mechanism to reflect heat and the sun's rays back into the atmosphere, rather than absorbing it to manufacture food.
- Help your lawn survive, if you still have one, by mowing a little on the high side so the grass shades the soil.
- You can sow seeds of squash, melons, okra, black-eyed peas, amaranth and yard-long beans. They love the heat and sunshine. June and July, traditionally, are the hottest driest months, here in the low deserts. Temperatures of 120 degrees are not unusual and gardening nearly comes to a standstill. Don't tackle any big garden chores this month. It's not the best time of the year for planting or digging.
- Weed control is still important.
- Trim off spent roses.
- Keep an eye on your irrigation systems.
- Start planning fall plantings or retrofitting the garden to become more water efficient.
-

- Deep water trees. Palms need special deep watering
- If chlorosis shows on your eucalyptus or other trees, treat your plantings with chelated iron. It absorbs into the root system and is more readily available than regular iron. Just be careful as it will most definitely stain your patios and walkways.



Be very very careful if you're trimming bushes and hedges this time of year. If they get out of hand and too much of their shade is trimmed off at one time, they can scald, sunburn and even die.

Much of our plant material is dormant in the summer or requires the growth it shot out in the spring to shade itself. If you have higher maintenance plants or hedges, I've found it most effective to trim them regularly, keeping their growth exposed to the sun to minimize sunburning. Think of your skin. If you

step into the sun with no previous exposure, you'll endure a severe burn. However, once you have developed a base tan, you'll continue to tan nicely (with no sunburning) throughout the summer, as your skin has acclimated to it.

Treat your agave for snout weevils but doing granular and liquid soil treatments. I like both, as the liquid is immediate; the granular application continues to treat, should those little vermin wander into your garden and want to set up shop. This is very important to do in June. Should the weevils have laid eggs in the ground last season, their larvae will be hatching in June and aggressively feeding on the roots of your agaves.

Let's not lose any readers this summer. Drink your fluids, remember to rest and most of all, go at a steady pace, don't overdo it and be careful out there!

For 30 years, Troy Bankord of Palm Springs has been creating 'Places of Peace' through connective landscape and interior design. He was named 'Master of the Southwest' by Phoenix Home & Garden Magazine in 2006. www.troy-bankorddesign.com, <https://www.facebook.com/TroyBankordDesign>

Survey to give members path to help plan society's future

In an effort to enhance membership experiences and further develop the scope and effectiveness of the Horticultural Society, the board of directors has decided to ask members what they think. So, society members can expect to see an online survey in their email inbox in late June.

"The board would appreciate it if members would take a few minutes to complete the survey," says acting president Paul Ortega. "It will help us make appropriate plans for our thriving organization."

Questions will focus on members'

ideas for projects, interests in volunteering and thoughts on the society's direction

Plans call for collating the responses in July. The Chuparosa will print a review of the results in a fall issue.

Smoke Tree, cont'd



Caesalpinia gilliesii (Yellow Bird of Paradise)



Calliandra californica (Baja Fairy Duster)



every evening at 6:30 sharp heralded by the peal of the dinner bell, which still rings to this day.

In 1945 there was a change in ownership but not in philosophy. Now 93 homes form the "Colony." The elected board of directors administers the various aspects of life on the Ranch. A unique "view" lot next to each dwelling on which no

one is allowed to build preserves an uninterrupted panorama of pristine desert views of the Santa Rosa Mountains to the south, by the San Jacinto Mountains to the west and the Little San Bernardino Mountains to the east.

The cholla, saguaro and ocotillo soar 20 to 50 feet reaching for the cloudless blue sky. The hundreds of

Nolina (desert spoon) have formed trunks two and three feet in height and diameter. The *Opuntia* and *Penstemon*, and trailing purple sand verbena were all in bloom.

Smoke Tree Ranch is a distinctive opportunity to experience a piece of Palm Springs history that will surely continue into perpetuity.

A Special Thank You to Our Sponsors



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Want to Get More Involved?

We have so many opportunities for members to become more actively involved with the Desert Horticultural Society of Coachella Valley. Jump in!

Send Us Your Photos & Favorite Websites!

We like to show off photos of gardens or plants that horticulture society members have collected. Please send your jpeg photos at full size attached to an email with your name, where the photo was taken and information about the photo subject.

And, have you come across online gardens, educational sources or conservation links you like? Email links and photos to Jamie Lee Pricer at jlp6@hotmail.com. We'll share them in future newsletters.