

# The Chuparosa

Chapter Newsletter

Volume 4, Issue 1 - January 2017



## Native plants for your wildlife-friendly backyard



A monarch caterpillar on a Rush milkweed. Photo by Dr. Christopher McDonald.

*By Dr. Christopher McDonald*

Our backyards are an area of our home that has multiple uses. The old landscaping goal was wall-to-wall lawn, with some trees or shrubs for decoration. We've certainly learned a lot, and now landscape uses are more diverse. Trends in backyard landscaping include places built for

us to relax, grow food, provide shade and connect with nature.

In my previous articles I described how we can attract wildlife to our backyards by providing them with water, shelter and food. Native plants are key to attracting wildlife in our

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## Our Next Meeting: Wednesday, January 18 at 6 p.m.

There are many interesting connections between birds and plants in the desert Southwest. People might have many questions when they plan a garden to attract birds. For instance: Should I feed birds? What will happen if I plant sweet acacia in my yard? Why should I avoid trimming my palm trees? How can I attract more bird species to my garden? Which bird field guide is the best?

College of the Desert professor Kurt Leuschner will discuss these questions in his talk about the various relationships between plants and birds.

He teaches courses on conservation, entomology, field ornithology, native plants, and GPS navigation. He has a bachelor's degree in zoology from U.C. Santa Barbara and a master's in wildlife ecology from the University of Florida.

Leuschner also teaches weekend courses and workshops on bird watching, insects, GPS, and backyard habitats for UCR Extension, the Desert Institute at Joshua Tree National Park, the Desert Studies Center and The Living Desert.

**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 Kurt Leuschner, professor of natural resources at College of the Desert. Topic: "Birds and Plants: Creating a Backyard Habitat"

**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](http://www.deserthorticulturalsociety.org).

### Ongoing Mondays free help:

Through May 2017. Master Gardeners will be at the UC Cooperative Extension office in Indio to answer gardening questions, help solve gardening problems. Free. Drops-ins,

telephone calls, emails welcome. 81-077 Indio Blvd., Suite H. (760) 342-2511, [anrmgindio@ucanr.edu](mailto:anrmgindio@ucanr.edu)

### Ongoing "Ask the Gardener":

Master Gardeners set up tables Saturdays at Palm Springs farmers market; on second, fourth Wednesday at Palm Desert farmers market; on second, fourth Sunday at La Quinta farmers market. 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

### Ongoing: Docent tours of Moorten

**Botanical Garden:** By Master Gardeners, through middle of May 2017.

Scheduled between 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Free with admission (\$5 adults, \$2 for children 15 and under, no charge for children under 5). Garden houses: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. daily except Wednesday. 1701 S. Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs. (760) 327-6555. Call to confirm tours.

### March 11-12 Overnight bus trip

**to Arizona:** Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Superior on 3/11; Tucson Botanical Garden on 3/12. \$139 per person, double occupancy includes bus, hotel, one meal. Waitlist only.

## This & That

### ***CVWD launches free app for customers***

A new app for iPhone and Android devices offers lots of goodies for Coachella Valley Water District customers.

Information and tools in the CVWD app include:

- Emergency alerts
- News releases and board agendas
- Job postings
- Notices of upcoming events
- A place to report water waste
- A link to pay bills
- Rebates and discounts
- Canal water ordering
- Social media links

The app allows customers to sign up to receive alerts and notifications as a text message or email, said Director of Communication & Conservation Heather Engel.

To download the new app on your phone for free, visit the App Store or Google Play and search using the letters "CVWD." Standard data fees and text messaging rates may apply based on your plan with your mobile phone carrier.

Customers can also find information on CVWD's website or by liking the district's Facebook page and signing up for email notifications via the website, Engel said.

### ***Rain, rain come our way***

Thanks to December rain storms, more water than expected will flow through the State Water Project in 2017. As of Christmas Eve, state officials increased their estimate of how much water the state will pump through California's major north-south water artery from 20 percent to 45 percent.

To compare, in 2016 the state thought 10 percent would be allowed, but water districts eventually received 60 percent of their full allotments.

Desert Water Agency and Coachella Valley Water District are among 29 districts to receive water from the State Water Project. The two desert agencies trade their allotment to the Metropolitan Water District for the same amount of water from the Colorado River Aqueduct.

The state continues to face water challenges. Reservoir levels, although replenished a bit by December's rains, are still below normal and snow pack in the Sierra Nevada this season is well below average at about 60 percent of normal.

### ***Give hummers a boost***

In one of her weekly articles in The Desert Sun, desert gardening expert and author Maureen Gilmer tells us how we can help hummingbirds and bees thrive in the Coachella Valley.

These two species are threatened by less rainfall and the changing landscape. For instance, she says, "Huge areas where bees once drank from the irrigation runoff are now dry gravel. Plants that have been removed in lieu of dry landscaping are no longer feeding" hummingbirds.

Both need watering places above the ground. A shallow bird bath on a pedestal works well for birds, but can present dangers to bees and butterflies. Gilmer suggests quiet out of the way places where you can keep an eye on activity. A deep, heavy plate set on top of an overturned flower pot will work. For weight, you can add a perch rock in the center, she says.

"Deeper plates give hummers a deeper cooler spot to dip. A rim that allows for lots of shallow water around the edges lest bees line up to sip without hanging on.

Other than water, to attract hummers Gilmer suggests red flowers. For bees, southwestern native vine Queen's Wreath is "our most perfect bee plant," she says.



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## Wildlife gardens, cont'd

yards and landscapes because native wildlife are capable of breaking down the variety of defenses, most often chemicals, that native plants use for protection. Most plants have a variety of defenses that prevent animals from eating them to death. However, plants from other parts of the world have chemicals that most of our wildlife have never encountered and are unable to detoxify. In contrast, native plants have defenses that our wildlife recognize and can resist.

Here is a short list of native plants that are relatively common in native plant nurseries in the Coachella Valley that should thrive in a variety of landscapes. These plants also create an easy to build palette when building a larger native plant garden.

### Small plants

**Desert marigold** (*Baileya multiradiata*) 1-2 feet tall with whitish green leaves. A relatively small plant with bright golden daisy-like flowers that blooms late spring to summer.

**Brittlebush** (*Encelia farinosa*) – 3-5 feet tall with whitish green leaves. A reliable bloom of yellow daisy-like 2-inch flowers in the spring and

with flowers in the summer too. Drought-deciduous, this plant will lose many leaves during the dry season. Great for pollinators, birds will eat the seeds, and insects use this as a host plant.

**Desert globe mallow** (*Sphaeralcea ambigua*) – 2-4 feet tall shrub with mostly grey-green leaves. A reliable bloom of orange to reddish 1-inch flowers in the spring and can bloom



A close-up of a desert globemallow flower ('Louis Hamilton' variety)

much longer. Great for pollinators including native mallow bees (*Diasia sp.*). Tolerates pruning.

**Chuparosa** (*Justicia californica*) – 3-5 feet tall with brittle long green branches and small leaves. Flowers are bright red and tubular, perfect for hummingbirds. Chuparosa in Spanish means hummingbird. Tol-

erates pruning.

### Herbaceous perennials

**Penstemons** (*Penstemon eatonii*) with *P. palmeri* and *P. parryi* (native to AZ) also found in some nurseries – 2-4 feet tall with waxy green leaves occurring in pairs. Bright pink to deep red tubular flowers occur on tall stems. A favorite of hummingbirds and bees.

**Rush Milkweed** (*Asclepias subulata*) – 2-5 feet tall with long green stems and narrow leaves. Unique white flowers occur in 2-4 inch clusters that attract a variety of pollinators. Host plant for monarch and queen butterflies. Blooms nearly year round, with large seedpods that release wind dispersed seeds.

**Climbing milkweed** (*Funastrum cynanchoides*) is a vine and also can

host queen butterflies. Some have suggested tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) may not be as beneficial to monarchs as native milkweeds, however more research is needed.

### Large shrubs to trees

**Smoketree** (*Psoralea spinosa*)

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## Wildlife gardens, cont'd

– 10-15 feet tall with grey green foliage and branches (smoke colored from a distance) with bright purple pea-like flowers in the summer. Great for pollinators and a good host plant for caterpillars.

**Honey mesquite** (*Prosopis glandulosa*) – 15-30 feet tall with dark brown branches and bright green foliage. Flowers are yellow and resemble bottlebrushes. Flowers, leaves and fruits are excellent food for a wide variety of insects. Blooms spring to summer. Dropped fruit are also eaten by squirrels, rabbits and other wildlife. Velvet mesquite (*P. velutina*), Chilean mesquite (*P. chilensis*) and hybrids are not native to California.

**Blue Palo Verde** (*Parkinsonia florida*) – 10-30 feet tall with distinctive green bark, palo verde roughly translates to 'green stick' in Spanish. The yellow pea-like flowers bloom during the spring and summer and are excellent for pollinators. The seeds are eaten by a variety of insects and wildlife. The leaves may drop during dry seasons.

**Desert Willow** (*Chilopsis linearis*) – 15-25 feet tall with long green leaves and white to purple tubular flowers. Hummingbirds and bees are fond

of the flowers. The leaves can drop during the cool season providing seasonality to the garden.

Other plants to try that would be suitable for beginning native plant gardeners and for backyard wildlife are:



And last, a young chuparosa plant in flower. Some native plants can look lanky in nursery pots and fill out when planted.

**Creosote** (*Larrea tridentata*) a medium-sized shrub with yellow flowers and white, fuzzy seeds;

**Desert agave** (*Agave deserti*) a California native agave;

**Apache plume** (*Fallugia paradoxa*) a medium-sized shrub found in the Mojave Desert with feather-like seed heads;

**Desert lavender** (*Condea emoryi*, formerly *Hyptis emoryi*) a medium to large fragrant shrub and can bloom winter to spring;

**Ocotillo** (*Fouquieria splendens*) a tall wand-like plant;

**California barrel cactus** (*Ferocactus cylindraceus*) a large barrel cactus;

**Beavertail cactus** (*Opuntia basilaris*) a cactus with flat, wide pads and short, but still painful spines;

Yuccas including **Mojave Yucca** (*Yucca schidigera*), which occurs in both the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts;

**Joshua tree** (*Yucca brevifolia*), which occurs primarily in the Mojave Desert;

and **Banana Yucca** (*Yucca baccata*) growing generally in the Mojave Desert, but is available at some native plant nurseries.

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## What to do in your garden in January

By Troy Bankord

With 'Season' now in full-swing, we can find ourselves easily distracted in the desert with events and social activities. But it's also a great time to get out and enjoy those temperatures, while cleaning up your garden.

### Frost protection

Although we are not often prone to freezing temperatures, there are colder "pockets" and microclimates in Coachella Valley where frost protection may be necessary.

Monitor your weather forecasts and check online for nights that will drop to 36 degrees or less. I've found Weather.com to be one of the most accurate sources. Remember, if you reside in a cooler area of the valley and they are calling for a low of 36 degrees, some of you may be in

for temperatures that hover around the 30-degree mark. So, you'll want to provide frost protection to some succulents, cacti and frost-tender plantings. Some succulents are sensitive at 36 degrees or less.

Also, remember that cold air settles in lower areas and sunny areas of your home and garden will retain some warmth through the night, where areas on the north side of your home will not. As an example, my rear garden is at least 5 degrees cooler than the garden in the front of my home. I almost never experience frost in the front, whereas I usually find frost and freezing in the rear of my home.

If freezing temperatures are predicted, cover the tips of columnar cacti with foam cups. At sunset, your frost-sensitive plantings such as succulents, certain aloe species, (*A.*

*desmettiana*, *A. attenuata*, *A. sansiveria*, *A. portulacaria*—elephant food, bougainvillea, *Euphorbia* species, lantana, certain citrus (lemon and lime), hibiscus, natal plum, roses and annual flowers and vegetables should be draped with drape frost cloth, burlap or old sheets and blankets (never plastic!).

I've found that frost cloth tends to be the most effective, as it retains the warmth from the soil while also repelling water, keeping the actual cold off your plantings. (Burlap, sheets and blankets will allow the moisture through them, often causing plant and tip die back.) Frost cloth can be purchased at local garden centers and at larger home retail outlets.

Extend the canopy over the entire plant or area, allowing it to hang to the ground. If possible, support the cloth on temporary framework so that it does not touch foliage. With our occasional winds, you may also need to tie the frost cloth onto the plants or stabilize it in place with stones, bricks or stakes. The covering should be removed the following morning before temperatures reach 50 degrees.

### Garden clean-up

January is a great month to get in there and remove dead wood from your evergreen trees and plantings. In addition, you may want to clear

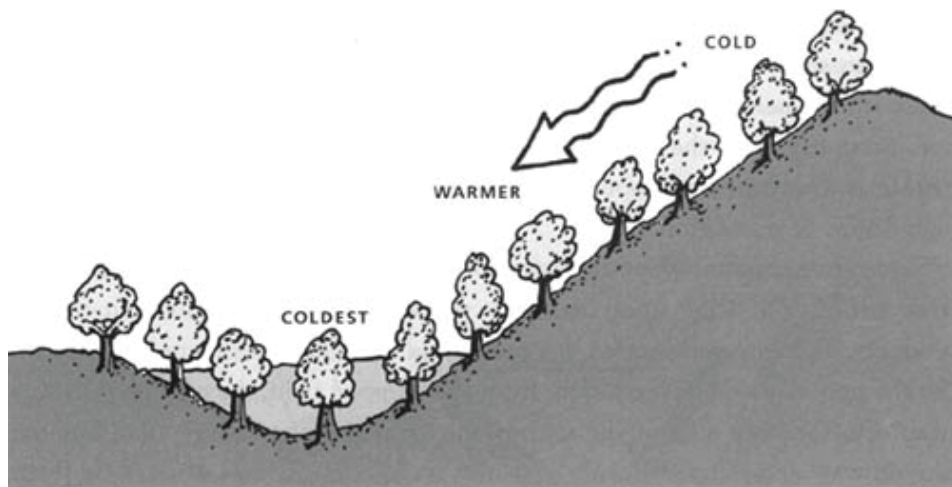


Image borrowed from Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations:  
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/008/y7223e/y7223e0c.htm>

## January maintenance, cont'd

out any underlying debris, which can sometimes enhance root rot or suffocation of our desert plants.

Grasses can be cut back almost to the ground this time of year and will slowly flush out (with the exception of purple fountain grass, which can be frost sensitive). Your cold-hardy plantings such as privet, olive, myrtle, sage, cassia, creosote, dalea, etc. can be cut back now for spring, but keep in mind that you will be looking at stubs for much of the winter as they are dormant. Refrain from any major cutting back or pruning of frost-sensitive plantings at this time for obvious reasons.

## January bloomers



*Tagetes lemmonii*, Mt. Lemmon Marigold

You might see these plants in bloom: *Aloe* species, *Bulbine*, *Cassia* species, *Caesalpinia cacolaco*, Sweet Acacia, *Encelia* (Brittlebush), *Dalea versicolor*, *Eremophila maculata* 'Valentine',

Angelita Daisy, *Justicia candicans* (Ovata) and *Tagetes lemmonii* (Mt. Lemmon Marigold).

Troy Bankord of Troy Bankord Design in Palm Springs has been a landscape and interior designer for 30 years. His award-winning projects have been featured in publications, on architectural tours and on television shows. In Arizona, his firm was the forerunner in native desert plant species maintenance via natural and selective pruning practices. He was named, 'Master of the Southwest' by Phoenix Home & Garden Magazine in 2006, and is a graduate of Marquette University.

## Nearby places that sell desert native plants

Water costs are increasing. The drought continues. But by switching water-guzzling plants to desert native choices, you can still have an attractive garden.

Where can you find appropriate choices? Mack Nash, who has worked as a garden supervisor at The Living Desert in Palm Desert, has suggestions.

- Palo Verde Garden Center at The Living Desert
- Moller's, Palm Desert
- California Desert Nursery, Indio
- Vintage Nursery, Bermuda Dunes

- Bob William's Nursery, Indio
- Home Depot has some desert natives
- Lowe's has some desert natives
- Cactus Mart, Morongo Valley
- Unique Garden Center, Yucca Valley
- Moorten's, Palm Springs

Also, a handy Web site resource is the California Native Plant Link Exchange, ([www.cnplx.info](http://www.cnplx.info)). You can search for native plant nurseries by county here.

## New website coming soon!

In January the Society will launch a new website because the current one is expensive and sometimes difficult for us to maintain. Jessyca Frederick volunteered to build a new one to save the organization money each year—money we can use to fund scholarships, improve our events, and more.

When the new website is ready to launch, you will receive an email with instructions.

Special thanks to Carl Schoeneman for all of his help getting the content from the old website loaded into the new one!

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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](mailto:jlp6@hotmail.com). We'll share them in future newsletters.