

VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2012

# Volunteers In The Garden



# PRESIDENT'S MUSINGS

## SONG FOR LUMINARIA

"Twas the eve of *Luminaria*, and all through the night,  
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mite.  
The Saguaros stood regal with arms spread galore,  
Awaiting the visitors who sought to view more.

Mesquite trees resplendent with lovely white lights,  
Guide guests to sweet music and festive delights.  
And Ken, our Director, called out to his team,  
"Lead on Queen of the Night with your midnight  
bloom beam."

By MIKE GILMAN

## GARDEN GIFTS

The holiday season comes quickly upon us in November and December, often overshadowed by the giving of gifts. Material things may bring immediate joy, but eventually fade into corners of storage. Have you ever thought about the myriad of gifts nature bestows on us through the year, in the Desert Botanical Garden?

The January rain and cold starts the cycle of leaf and cactus growth, along with root growth we cannot see.

February continues the process, culminating with wild flowers in magnificent bloom.

The warmth of March heralds cacti in bloom. Did you ever ask why the small cacti bloom first? Then our desert trees and bushes join in the blossoming----mesquites, palo verdes, ironwoods, and creosotes.

April continues the symphony of flowers from many different sized cacti - what a blessing to have more leaves on our trees. They shade us as we move into late spring and summer.

May brings saguaro flowers which turn into fruit for harvest in June and July. And visitors dwindle as the desert heat rises.

June continues with one of my favorite mysterious plants - Arizona Queen of the Night, that scraggly stick, hides under nurse plants to keep out of sight. And once it forms buds, the mystery continues. Which night it will bloom produces the "lottery question of the desert."

July and August are times of hot desert dormancy. But summer rains bring the scent of creosote wafting in the air. And quietly I wonder how our plants survive such scorching heat and sunshine?

September, October, and November bring the second spring of the desert. We enjoy periods of second floral blooms, new growth of the plants and trees, and cooler days followed by crisp nights.

Nature gives us these gifts day after day, month after month, and year after year. We should never take them for granted!

Happy Holiday Season, and a very Healthy New Year!

MIKE GILMAN

PRESIDENT, VOLUNTEERS IN THE GARDEN



### VOLUNTEERS IN THE GARDEN EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

PRESIDENT	MIKE GILMAN
VICE PRESIDENT	ARCHER SHELTON
SECRETARY	RUTH TILY
TREASURER	JIM JOLING

A monthly newsletter for and by the  
Volunteers of the Desert Botanical Garden

EDITOR/LAYOUT	NANCY WALKER
PROOFING EDITOR	ELAINE GRUBER
STAFF LIAISON	PAM LEVIN
GRAPHICS/ED. SUPPORT	RENEE IMMEL

The **final dates** to have badge photos taken for 2012:

**When:** Friday, November 30th

Saturday, December 8th

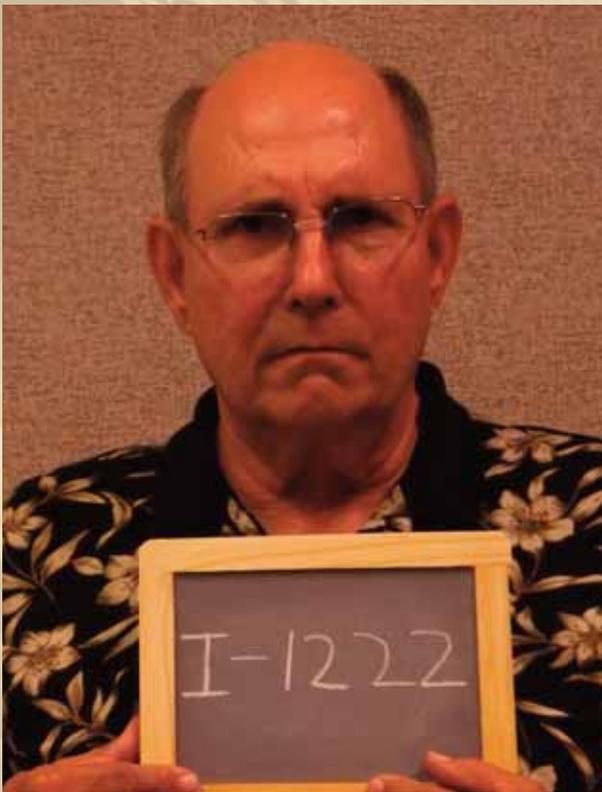
Saturday, December 15th

**Where:** Volunteer Headquarters

**Time:** 8:00 a.m. – noon OR 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

We want to thank DICK TRELEASE for taking GREAT volunteer badge photos.

We had a lot of fun setting up and testing our camera settings and trying out our best “mug shots” -- but I think he prefers taking pictures of SMILING volunteers!!!



So..... bring your best volunteer smile to one of these badge photo sessions. Thanks!

**JUDY AGUILAR**  
VOLUNTEER OPERATIONS COORDINATOR

## IT'S DARK IN DECEMBER

Because of all the seasonal activities, including *Luminaria*, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, there will be no VIG meeting in December. Our next regularly scheduled VIG meeting will be on January 14. As they say in Las Vegas, the VIG will be “dark” in December.

The program for the January meeting is still under construction. However, it's guaranteed to be exciting, provocative and informative. We will send out information as soon as it's available.

The February 11 VIG program will be a first-ever presentation by the talented folks in the Garden's Horticulture Department. They will give us insights into “The State of Horticulture at the Garden”.

**DATES:** January 14 and February 11, 2013

**PLACE:** Dorrance Hall

**TIME:** 9:30 food and fellowship  
10:00 program

Have a wonderful, safe and warm holiday season. We will see you in January

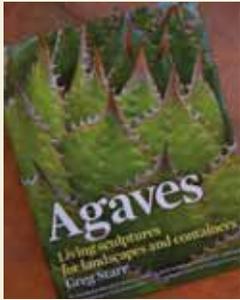
**ARCHER SHELTON**  
CONTINUING EDUCATION COMMITTEE

# The Garden Corner

## A BOOK REVIEW: AGAVES: LIVING SCULPTURES FOR LANDSCAPE AND CONTAINERS

(Reprinted from *The Central Spine*, the newsletter of the Central Arizona Cactus and Succulent Society)

If you collect and grow agaves, this new (2012) book by Tucson agave fanatic and nurseryman Greg Starr is a must for your reference library.



Greg's book does not replace the excellent book by Mary and Gary Irish Agaves, Yuccas and Related Plants: A Gardener's Guide

(2000), rather, it picks up where Mary and Gary left off. Over the past 12 years, new species of

agave have been described (*Agave ovatifolia* by Greg himself); others have had their names changed, and new information on many species is now available. In fact, Greg's new book doesn't include some of the more commonly grown agave species that are already well covered in the Irish's book such as *Agave americana*, *A. angustifolia*, *A. desmettiana*, *A. lophantha*, *A. murpheyi*, *A. sisalana*, and *A. weberi*. Their book covered 84 species out of the approximately 200 species and 50 subspecies and varieties known; Greg's book covers 56 species and subspecies as well as 24 cultivars.

Greg's new book contains chapters with helpful tips about how to grow agaves and how to distinguish look-alike species and it includes a handy table separating the species into size categories which is invaluable when selecting species for our landscapes. However, the bulk of the 342 page volume is dedicated to an encyclopedia and excellent photos of some of his favorite agave species and some really cool new hybrids and cultivars, many of which should do well in our Valley landscapes and/or containers if we follow his advice.

For example, he cautions to be careful with water-sensitive species including *Agave utahensis* and *A. deserti* (keep it "dry, dry, dry"), but for watering the majority of the other agave species, he recommends a thorough soaking once every seven to ten days from spring through fall. He also provides lists of those most and least tolerant of limited or extra water and of the most and least frost-hardy species.

Greg is an advocate of mixing succulents, including agaves, with desert-adapted shrubs and flowers in

our landscapes and makes suggestions for pairings of structural agaves and softer perennials for maximum visual impact in each species account. His information on their natural habitat collected while on many of his expeditions to the south, is also helpful in understanding the requirements and possible limitations of each species described.

Most helpful to the seasoned agave collector is his information on name changes (*Agave patoni* is now *A. appplanata*, *A. scabra* is now *A. asperrima*, *A. celsii* is now *A. mitis*, and *A. ferdinandi-regis* is now *A. nickelsiae*), and he discloses the parentage of some of our favorite hybrids - did you know that the parents of Agave 'Blue Glow' are believed to be *A. ocahui* and *A. attenuata*?. He begins his species accounts by tantalizing us with the soon to be available, recently described and uniquely tufted species, *Agave albopilosa*.



Won't it be great when cultivars of this newly discovered species, *Agave albopilosa*, show up at our Garden plant sales?

Greg is an engaging and witty writer who sprinkles dry humor through the book, so be sure not to take it seriously when he facetiously recommends rubbing sunscreen on your sun-sensitive agave species!

**TOM GATZ**

THE GARDEN CORNER

- Thanks to Brandi Eide and Janet McMillan for helping me with this review.
- All photos were taken by Greg Starr.
- This information-packed book is now available to peruse at the Garden's Schilling Library.



*Agave gentryi* changes color as it dies, but Greg says it is a slow grower so you will have to wait a while to see this happen.

# CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

Although the Garden may not be full of children just yet, the Sonoran Desert Adventure Program (guided school tours) expects an exciting and busy season as we implement our new and improved program.

We would like to welcome new staff members, LINDA RAXTER, CHRIS DACEY, and KELLY HEDBERG. Each of these Garden Educators brings unique environmental and educational experiences. Other new people in the program include volunteers JAN LAUFER, MICHELE SPILLER and JESSICA BRAUN. You may have already seen them around the Garden. Jessica helped with Flashlight Tours during the summer and is eager to work with the kids. Michelle also works in Admissions and previously worked in the Plant Shop. Lastly, Jan is an avid photographer and has volunteered in the Garden including with the fall Plant Sale. We are excited about our wonderful staff and volunteers, both new and returning, who make the kids' time at the Garden so much more enjoyable.



Volunteer Sandy "Ollie the Owl" Golden talking to Bill "Dry Mesquite" Jones.

The SDA staff and volunteers began the season with a great kickoff. We worked really hard the first day making changes and figuring out how to navigate the ever changing Garden. The second day was all fun, as you can see from the photos! *Childsplay* came and helped us to re-write one of our tour stories. We worked together practicing our theater skills and creating pieces of the story that *Childsplay* sewed together seamlessly. Using these creative techniques with our tour groups, we anticipate that the kids will enjoy even more the story in which Ollie the Owl visits his desert friends and learns about how plants adapt to conserve water.



Volunteers Michele "Roots" Spiller, Marty "Stem" Fischer, and Barbara "Leaves" Stoneman-Herman waiting for Ollie, as Jessica Braun looks on.

Finally, I would like to say "Thank You!" to all of the wonderful volunteers who brought in scarves. You were so generous, and we came very close to hitting our goal of 50.

Thank you for always being willing to help!

**JEN JENKIN**

FORMAL SCIENCE EDUCATION COORDINATOR

## IMPRESSED? YOU BET!

Now recovering from my third plant sale at the Garden, I wanted to take a moment to thank everyone who helped make this plant sale the most successful one in the Garden's history. We bit off some ambitious goals this time around and were able to meet them. The efforts of the volunteers certainly do not go unnoticed, and I was so impressed to see so many dedicated volunteers out there alongside of the staff for the entire weekend.

With the huge number of plants and selection that we brought in, it was very gratifying to me to see the plants finding lots of new homes. It is clear to me and the staff that this event would not happen without enormous efforts from everyone. I believe that as we plan for the future in our new event space, the visitor experience and the financial benefits of the plant sale are only beginning to scratch the surface.

It is also clear to me that the work and contribution of the volunteers is what makes the Garden so special. The passion and commitment of the volunteers has been amazing for me to see. I watch volunteers stepping up and filling voids where needed, and I see volunteers being flexible and accommodating with changes and challenges that are presented to them on a daily basis. My commitment as a liaison between staff and volunteers is to be available and responsive to the needs of our group, and I thank you all for making my first year at the garden so enjoyable.

I am very happy and excited to be at the Garden and I look forward to many great experiences and achievements in the future.

**KENNY ZELOV**

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF HORTICULTURE

## ENVOYS OFF TO GREAT START

Tis the fall season again where every weekend seems to be a festival of some sort. Lots of people to talk to and memberships to sell. So far, the three festivals in October have been quite successful.

The Plant sale netted us 254 memberships. At the Pumpkin Fest we sold 249 and at the "Day of the Dead" celebration we were able to sell 135 for a grand total of 638. While that may be good, I know we can do better. We will press on.

Thanks to everyone at the Garden, all volunteers, who continue to sell their enthusiasm for the Desert Botanical Garden

Until next time,

**MARY STOCK**

ENVOY CHAIR



# DOCENT UPDATE

## THE EUPHORBIC ICON

The Holidays are upon us! Valley retailers, from supermarkets to hardware stores, are stocked with the signature plant of the season: the poinsettia. Did you know this red, pink, white (and other) colored plant is a Euphorbia? That's right, *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, also called a spurge. Tens of millions are sold each holiday season.

A little history: The poinsettia was first brought to the United States by Joel Roberts Poinsett. He collected specimens of the flower while serving as the United States Ambassador to Mexico from 1825 to 1829. The plant is indigenous to the tropical, deciduous forest of Mexico, from southern Sinaloa, down the entire Pacific coast to Chiapas and Guatemala. It is also found in the interior in the hot, seasonally dry forests of Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas.

In 2002, U.S. Congress passed a resolution (H Res. 471) making December 12th "National Poinsettia Day."

A plant with a reputation: As a parent, I was cautioned about the poison allegedly contained in the poinsettia's colorful bracts. Some relatives refused to have the plants in their homes while their toddlers were in the "everything-goes-in-the-mouth" phase.

However, an article written for MedicineNet.com by Dr. Melissa C Stoppler, contends "while ingestion of poinsettia leaves will not damage your body or kill you, it may lead to nausea and vomiting in some cases. Since the taste of poinsettia leaves is reportedly very unpleasant, it is unlikely that a child or animal who attempts to chew the leaves will continue to do so after the first taste." Ingestion of the leaves aside, the plant does have a milky sap in the stems (it's a spurge, after all) that might cause skin irritation or a stomach ache, if swallowed.

A question: As docents, do we just ignore this plant as something not found naturally in our desert? Or, do we take the opportunity to interpret a plant that is here temporarily?

I am not recommending that the poinsettia be part of our three to five plant tour, but it might have a place as a SNAP (Spontaneous Naturally-occurring Amazing Phenomenon). True, it does not "naturally occur"

here, but we do display it each year. Our visitors enjoy the seasonal color and may have questions.

We have all answered, "Do you grow these here at the Desert Botanical Gardens?" You might answer, "No, they are purchased from a local nursery." But, as an alternative, you might offer, "Aren't they beautiful? They are not produced here, nor native to our Sonoran Desert. But they are found in the tropical deciduous forest of southeastern Mexico."

Additionally, you may include that they are in the Euphorbia (spurge) family and we have several members of that family in the garden, such as *Euphorbia Tirucallii*, the pencil cactus. You get the idea.

SUE ALTMAN-RIFFEL  
DOCENT CO-CHAIR

### Mark Your Calendars:

- December 5th (Wednesday), Field trip to the Central Arizona Project.
- January 1st Homework, due to your Day Captain: your top four solutions for effective trail usage during Chihuly.
- January 13-19, Annual Required Docent Refresher Training.



# Volunteer DATELINE

## WEEKLY OPPORTUNITIES

Mondays, 8:00 a.m.

Bird walks - Meet at Admissions

Tuesdays at 4:00 p.m. and Thursdays at 4:00 p.m.

Yoga classes, Munson Classroom B

## NOVEMBER

Friday, Nov. 30, and Dec. 1 and 2, 5:30 to 9:30 p.m.

*Las Noches de las Luminarias* for Members

Friday, November 30, 8:00 a.m. to Noon OR

1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Badge photos taken in Volunteer Hdqs.

## DECEMBER

Monday, December 3

Deadline for January *Gatherings*

Wednesday, December 5

Field trip to the Central Arizona Project

December 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22,  
23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30; 5:30 to 9:30 p.m.

*Las Noches de las Luminarias* - All public invited

Saturdays, Dec. 8 and 15, 8:00 a.m. to Noon OR

1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Final 2 days for badge photos, Volunteer Hdqs.

## JANUARY

Tuesday, January 1

Homework - Due to your Day Captain: Your top four solutions for effective trail usage during Chihuly

Wednesday, January 2

Deadline for February *Gatherings*

Sunday, January 13 - 19

Annual Required Docent Refresher Training

Monday, January 14, 9:30 a.m.

*Volunteers in the Garden* Meeting, Dorrance Hall

## FEBRUARY

Monday, February 4

Deadline for March *Gatherings*

Monday, February 11, 9:30 a.m.

*Volunteers in the Garden* Meeting, Dorrance Hall