

# Desert Plants

A quarterly journal devoted to broadening knowledge of plants indigenous or adaptable to arid and sub-arid regions, to studying the growth thereof and to encouraging an appreciation of these as valued components of the landscape. Subscription price is \$10.00 per year.

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## Editorial

**Landscaping With Desert Plants**—Natural desert vegetation withstands sun, heat, drought and drying wind. Desert plants have a beauty and perfection all their own—a beauty combining fascinating structural modifications (some bizarre) with simplicity of form, function and phytosociological association. The sclerophylls, microphylls, spines, thorns, swollen stems, succulent nature and other adaptations evoke interest not only by plant scientists but by all persons who come into contact with desert plants.

As desert plants survive in a struggle against the hardships of aridity, they symbolize an overcoming of adversity on a broader scale. Rugged and hardy desert plants represent a beautiful marriage between the solitude of the desert and an irrepressible vegetative life force. No wonder indeed that world religions were born in desert places conducive to meditation and reflection, conducive to decision-making, conducive to strengthening, bronzing and maturation,—places where the innocence and passiveness of plant life could be assimilated and opposite qualities inferred,—where simple values relating to human earthly existence could be extrapolated. The Garden of Eden was a desert landscape where mankind's albeit imperfect earthly existence (epitomized by the earth-bound serpent) caused him to depend on the fruits of the land. The knowledge of good and evil thereby became inevitably revealed, appreciated and lamented. Mankind yet exhibits a strong psychological dependence on plants—a need to be close to vegetation. Mankind also exhibits a strong psychological need to retreat to the seclusion of a place of quiet solitude where thoughts can be sorted out and perfection measured against flaw.

By landscaping with desert plants mankind brings the good values of the vegetation-and-desert marriage into association with his everyday activities. But aside from the colorful flowers and fruits, the green of the vegetation, and the psychological values, desert plants can be chosen for

landscaping purposes to perform functions. The landscape architect who works with desert plants is more than an artist, since the palette he paints from provides mankind with shade, privacy, barriers to foot traffic, separation of activities, cover for the ground to minimize dust, vines for walls to cut the heat-load on buildings, bushes with root mats to hold the soil on banks and slopes, as well as a dozen or more other functional and creature comforts and conveniences. By searching in nature to see how desert plants function in their own communities,—how each occupies its habitat and fills its niche, it has been possible to choose desert plants to carry over natural functions into artificially constructed landscaping situations.

Desertification is a process whereby landscapes become deprived of moisture, often becoming subjected to increased light intensities and heat. Mankind unintentionally compacts the soil around buildings by walking and conducting the everyday activities of life. This results in water running off and not being retained by the soil. Walls and sidewalks reflect a glare which intensifies the amount of light and heat. These phenomena and various activities of man and his domestic animal associates result in various degrees of desertification and may make the use of desert landscaping plants more practical than use of more mesic species under many situations. When the expense of pumping water from depths in the ground increases as energy costs become inflated, many a property owner can benefit by replacing thirsty lawns and water-guzzling broad-leaf landscaping plants with truly desert species. Researchers are even now scrambling to develop energy-efficient desert plants which will better shade homes in the summer but will let the sun through in winter. Our subscribers can expect to read articles on landscaping with desert plants as native desert species are introduced into cultivation and as trials and experiments continue to yield results.