

Der Vogelfänger

by Joseph G. Griffith

DESERT GARDENS

To those of us familiar with deserts, it comes as no surprise that cacti are seldom the major plants of an area. Most often, there are some cacti living in association with a number of shrubs and grasses. Many of the shrubs of the desert are thorny and most of the remainder are bitter.

One problem in recreating a desert is the shrubs, many of which are difficult to transplant. It is best to resort to a nursery that specializes in desert plants, but you have two other options. You can grow a great many of them from seed, if you are patient and skillful, or you can collect the shrubs in mid-winter. **BE ADVISED**, do not remove anything from the desert until you have checked with the authorities. If permits are necessary, obtain them!

Most deserts can be divided into high and low, or cold and hot. If you live in a cold area, choose plants that are from the high desert, including those from high elevations such as the Andes. It is surprising how much plants from these areas can take in the way of cold and snow.

I suggest that cacti comprise not more than a third of the plants in a desert garden. Another third could be desert shrubs which are often thin growers with a see-through quality. The remaining third should be annuals, perennials and grasses.

The first step is to put in sand. If you use builders sand, get some gravel to mix with it. One of the outstanding features of our deserts is the large number and kinds of rocks. Our deserts are very stoney. Make the surface of the soil uneven. Stones of every size and shape can be used as freely as you like, even to the point of making small piles.

Where water is used, and it should be, you have two options. Select a low spot and make a pool only, or make a pool with a stream. Not more than 20% of the stream should have water; the remainder should be a dry streambed. By a freehand use of stones and gravel you can easily delineate the streambed. Do not fill the whole bed with water. Periodic desert water moves with such force that it often undercuts the banks, leaving them sharp.

Here is a trick of Japanese gardening that tends to increase perspective in small gardens. You usually view the garden from one point (the front), so when using more than one plant of the same kind, save most of the larger ones to plant in the front. Plant more of the smaller ones toward the rear. Don't grade them out like they're on parade; mix the heights a little. You can do the same thing with rocks.

The garden must be watered before planting. If you are a purist, don't water after the plants are established. If you are like most of us, water heavily in

spring, once a month in summer, and none after September 1st. Withholding water will help the plants to "harden off" before cold weather. When cold weather hits before the plants have had a chance to harden off, there will be severe frost damage.

Cacti and succulents are so popular in themselves that I will not deal with them except to say that you should make sure that you get those that won't grow through the top of the aviary. Lee Horton has already dealt with some of the succulents (Agapornis Acres, AFA Watchbird, Vol. II, No. 1). Many of the shrubs and perennials listed below can be obtained from the Theodore Payne Foundation, 10459 Tuxford St., Sun Valley, California 91352. The Foundation also has a fine desert annual mix that can be sown in spring in the colder parts of the country.

SHRUBS: not all desert plants, but all drought tolerant.

Acacia greggii, CATCLAW. A thorny member of the pea family with much divided leaves and yellow flowers. Rarely a tree 10-20 ft. More often a shrub and can be pruned low.

Artemisia californica, COAST SAGEBRUSH. Not a true desert plant, it does range into the edges of the desert and can withstand drought. Flowers from late summer through late winter. 2-3 ft.

Atriplex canescens, HOARY SALTBUCH. A dense fuzzy-leaved shrub of 4 ft. or less. Flowers inconspicuous.

Beloperone californica, CHUPAROSA. Another hairy shrub that loses its leaves during the dry season. Flowers are red, in small clusters; much liked by hummingbirds.

Brachysema lanceolatum, SWAN RIVER PEA BUSH. A 3 ft. shrub with grey-green leaves that act as a foil for the many bright red flowers.

Chilopsis linearis, DESERT WILLOW. Not a willow. Grows from 6-20 ft. and would need pruning. A plant of desert washes, it blooms throughout the warm season. White or pale-purplish, tubular flowers in loose clusters at branch ends.

Convolvulus cneorum, BUSH MORNING GLORY. In the 2 ft. class, it has smooth, silvery foliage with white or pinkish flowers. Blooms from May to September.

Cistus sp., ROCKROSE. Several of these are drought tolerant plants. Choose from those that are low growing and that have the flower colors that you want.

Cystis kewensis, KEW BROOM. Shrublet to 12 inches and 3-4 ft across. Flowers are creamy-white.

Cystis praecox, WARMINSTER BROOM. Compact, 3-5 ft. very fragrant yellow flowers.

Encelia farinosa, BRITTLE BUSH. A low rounded shrub. The silvery leaves make a foil for the yellow flowers in loose clusters.

Encelia virginensis, VIRGINIA CITY ENCELIA. Similar to Brittle Bush, but flowers borne singly.

Ephedra viridis, MORMON TEA. Twiggy, rather than leafy shrub, Green or grey-green. Plants are male or female.

Genista hispanica, GENISTA. Spiny shrub to 2 ft. with golden-yellow flowers.

Hyptis emoryi, DESERT LAVENDER. A tall shrub with hairy leaves, grey bark and a minty odor. Purplish-blue flowers in small clusters in spring.

Isomeris arborea, BLADDERPOD. Fast growing shrub with leaves that smell rank when crushed. Gets its name from the inflated pods that it bears. May bloom anytime; flowers yellow.

Juniperus californica, CALIFORNIA JUNIPER. An open shrubby juniper of dry areas of the west; sometimes a small tree. Often has a very twisted form.

Leucophyllum texanum, TEXAS RANGER. A round mass of grey. 1 inch rose-purple flowers are borne best in hot, dry areas.

Mahonia (Berberis) nevini, NEVIN'S BARBERRY. Erect shrub about three feet tall. Small thorny leaves, berries red or blue.

Pinus monophylla, ONE LEAF PINYON PINE and *Pinus edulis*, PINYON PINE. These two pines are most closely associated with dry areas and being slow growers are easily controlled.

Prosopis pubescens, SCREWBEAN or HONEY MESQUITE. A large shrub with thorns and divided leaves. Blooms in summer, yellowish flowers.

Prunus fasciculata, DESERT ALMOND and *P. fremontii*, DESERT APRICOT. Both of these are spiny shrubs that have small white flowers. Difficult to find in cultivation, they are well worth having.

Rosmarinus officinalis, COMMON ROSEMARY. Grows to 4-6 ft. The more neglect, the better.

Teucrium chamaedrys, GERMANDER. Low shrub to 1 ft., spreading to 2 ft. Leaves are a dark green and the flowers are rose or purplish-red.

Teucrium fruticans, BUSH GERMANDER. The ovate leaves of this 4-5 ft. shrub are grey-green above and whitish below. Flowers are lavender blue in loose spikes and may appear at any season.

Xylosma senticososa, XYLOSMA. Spreading, 4-6 ft. with yellow-green foliage that is slightly bronzy when young. Inconspicuous flowers are mildly fragrant.

Penstemon, BEARD TONGUE. Most are native to the West and even the non-natives don't like much water. Flowers are borne on erect spikes.

P. heterophyllus, BLUE BEDDER. Blue or lavender flowers.

P. barbatus, RED PENSTEMON. To 6 ft. with bright green leaves and tubular red flowers.

P. centranthifolius, SCARLET BUGLER. Loose spikes of red flowers. Reaches three feet.

Potentilla nepalensis, MISS WILLMONT CINQUEFOIL. Low growing with fanlike leaves and magenta flowers in summer.

Verbena rigida, PURPLE VERBENA. A persistent verbena with intense purple flowers in spikes.

The list of plants given is by no means complete and it fails to deal with plants from some of the more northerly desertlike areas.

Birds for this kind of aviary are not hard to find. Almost any of the Australian parakeets, finches or soft-bills would feel at home here.

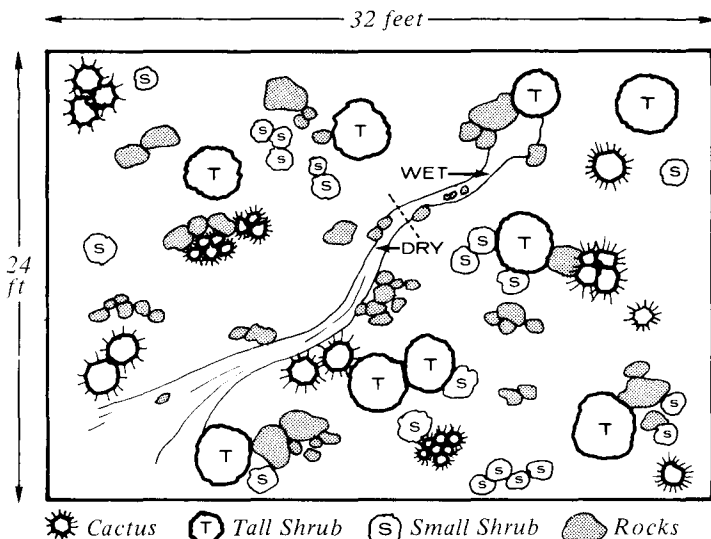
A very large number of African birds would be suitable in a desert setting: Cordon Bleus, Fire Finches, most of the Waxbills, Rock Buntings, Wheaters, Gonoleks, African Titmice, Touracos, Rollers, Broadbills, Wattleyes, Cisticolas, Flycatchers, Robinthrusters, and Sunbirds are some of them.

From South America there are Venezuelan Cardinals, Tyrant-flycatchers, Tapaculos, Saffron Finches, any of the small seedeaters of the genus *Sporophila*, Black-crested finches, Warbling finches, Euphonias, many of the Tanagers, some Mannikins, Hummingbirds, etc.

Asia and Asia Minor have a number of birds that would do well here. Flycatchers, Trumpeter Bullfinches, Isabelline Finches, Great Rosefinches, Sultan Tits, Rock Thrushes, Rollers, Hoopoes, Trogons, and some of the warblers.

Although we tend to think of most of these areas as "tropical", and they are, the wet rainforest and swamps occupy a fairly small part of them. Dry savannahs and deserts occupy very large areas of the world's continents, and it is for this reason that so many birds are adapted to them. Surprisingly, deserts are particularly rich in insect life.

The next article in this series will deal with a Forest Edge Garden.



FLOOR PLAN FOR A DESERT AVIARY. It is a difficult thing to use lots of plants, yet give a very open feeling. Keep in mind that the plants will grow laterally as well as vertically.

PERENNIALS: Most of the plants that follow are not strictly desert plants. They have been chosen on their liking for dryness.

Aethionema, STONECRESS. Small shrublets best treated as perennials. Seeds in spring or cuttings in fall and winter.

Catananche caerulea, CUPID'S DART. Hairy basal leaves and lavender-blue flowers that can be dried.

Coreopsis grandiflora, COREOPSIS. 3 ft. with narrow leaves and yellow flowers on wiry stems. Blooms all summer.

Echinacea purpurea, PURPLE CONEFLOWER. Coarse and bushy. Clumps may reach 4-5 ft. Centers of the large purplish flowers are coneshaped. Longlasting flowers come in late summer.

Heliopsis scabra incomparabilis, HELIOPSIS. 3-4 inch golden-yellow flowers on wiry stems. Dies to the ground in winter.

Hunnemannia fumariaefolia, MEXICAN TULIP POPPY. Bushy plant with finely cut greyish leaves. Yellow flowers have crinkled texture.

Lavandula spp., LAVENDER. Several kinds are available. Dried flowers used in sachets.

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