



# NMSU-Doña Ana County Cooperative Extension Service May-June Newsletter

College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

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**Doña Ana Cooperative Extension Service,**  
1170 N. Solano, Suite M,  
Las Cruces, NM 88001

Phone: (575) 525-6649

Fax: (575) 525-6702

**Agronomy/Horticulture Program Admin:**  
Jeff Anderson, Extension Ag Agent

**Editor:**

Marcia Adams, Certified Master Gardener  
[glizard2017@gmail.com](mailto:glizard2017@gmail.com)

**Questions:** [donaana@nmsu.edu](mailto:donaana@nmsu.edu)

Photo:

<https://unsplash.com/images/nature/sunflower>

## ***EDITOR'S MESSAGE***

Wow, spring literally blew by in a hurry. That's probably because many of us were super busy with all the volunteering for spring activities. Thanks to all the MGs and interns who donated their time to make these events so successful. And if you didn't volunteer, you missed out on a lot of fun!

And now as we slide into the summer, our schedules will thankfully slow down, allowing us to tend to our own veggies and flowers in the cool of the morning and evening and start to enjoy the fruits of our labors. Then it's time to find a shady spot, sip an iced tea, and read a good book as we wait for the cooling rains to come.

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## PHOTO CREDITS

Photos in the funnies and other cool stuff were taken from Facebook.

The information provided in the Honey Do List has been gleaned from prior newsletters, and is attributed in part to *Month-By-Month Gardening in the Desert Southwest* (Mary Irish, 2002); *Southwest Planting Tips by the Month* and *Tucson Gardening Calendar* (Tucson Botanical Gardens), and *The Desert Gardener's Calendar: Your Month-by-Month Guide* (George Brookbank, 1999).

## DISPATCH FROM THE FRONT LINES

Sylvia Hacker

Earth Day: I'd like to say a big Thank You to everyone who helped with the recent ED outreach events, Terese DeSimio, Leah Henderson, Tabblair Hope-O'Brien, Jill Bills, Jeanie Krumholz, Shirley Miller, Chindi Peavey, Marcia Adams, and Krista Maxwell. Because of you we were able to cover four events last week. Thanks for volunteering!

I haven't tallied up the demographics yet but from glancing at the paperwork it looks like these events will really help our numbers.

Hotline: Beginning in May the entire Extension Office is closed for building renovations. We can't access the office without permission so Hotline is on hold. The work time guess-timate at this point is three months. Hopefully we'll have access in time to start the next EMG training class in August.

Unless something changes there's no Hotline until further notice.

Thanks again for volunteering!



## 10 IDEAS TO STEAL FROM DESERT GARDENS

SOURCE: <https://www.gardenista.com/posts/10-ideas-steal-desert-gardens/>

Desert landscapes look like the backdrops in old cartoons, endless loops showing a lone cactus silhouetted against the sky while Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote tussle in the dusty foreground.

The starkness also can be romantic, a reminder of the endless western horizon. But if you live in the desert, how do you design a garden that feels welcoming instead of prickly and dry?

For advice, we turned to Phoenix-based landscape architect Steve Martino, who grew up in arid, rocky terrain. As a teenage horse wrangler, he developed an affinity for desert landscapes and native plants that has informed his work for four decades.

“One day I found all these old issues of *Arizona Highways* from the forties, featuring these guest dude ranches, desert resorts,” he says. The pictures were crazy, with plants that were just so dramatic, natives transplanted from the desert. They didn’t have all the stuff you get these days from nurseries from somewhere else. It was like a stage setting. That’s the feeling I try to create.”

Martino has collected 21 of his favorite landscape projects in a new book called *Desert Gardens of Steve Martino* (Monacelli Press). Here are 10 garden design tips for how to embrace the natural theatricality of the desert, illustrated with photos from the book.

Photography by Steve Gunther, courtesy of The Monacelli Press

### 1. Cactus Curb Appeal

Entry walls or a front garden fence are a natural backdrop for specimen plants, says Martino. To create curb appeal with cactus, plant Chollas. There are 1,200 plants in the family, and you can go for ones that are trees, ground covers, shrubs,” says Martino. “Use them to create shadows. In the photo, you can see how these guys create their own depth and darkness even in the harsh sun.”



## 2. Sculptural Rocks

In the Scottsdale garden, Martino simplified hardscape elements, including a terrace and swimming pool (“removing distracting elements such as the boulder-lined, “lagoon-style” pool and its heavy wrought-iron railings”).

During the process, Martino removed an “exotic cactus” entryway garden that felt out of place, “and moved the exotic cactus around the corner in-between some rocks to make a little home for them.” The result is an unmistakably charming vignette beneath a mesquite tree (“The tree is a native, so it’s OK,” says Martino).



## 3. Filtered Light

To create the translucent wall, rolls of polycarbonate were stretched across a trellis framework. The wall is softened by the silhouette of a grapevine that grows on top. (See more ways to use polycarbonate panels in [Garden Hacks: 10 Ideas Under \\$100 to Create Instant Privacy](#).)

“You can use trees and shadows and filtered light to make a garden feel comfortable and cool,” says Martino.

Before you build a privacy wall in a small garden, know your local zoning rules, Martino advises.

“Say you’re only allowed to build a six-foot-high privacy wall. But if you build an accessory building—like a shed that’s under 200 square feet—you don’t have to have a building permit.

And without a permit, there’s no schedule to finish the shed. Suddenly what you’ve built is the first wall of a shed in progress instead of an illegally high privacy fence.”



#### 4. Ribbon Driveway

In a desert climate where rain is scarce and rainwater tends to run off the hard, rocky surface of the earth, a permeable surface is a friendlier alternative to pavement.

#### 5. Whitewashed walls

To complement the architecture of the adobe house, Martino designed an “old-fashioned” pool, a shoebox with straight sides and square corners. “We usually do darker swimming pools, which act more like a mirror of the sky, but in this one the tile is white and the color of the water is the reflection of the sky and daylight,” says Martino.



## 6. Layered Plantings

“Here we tried to use native, southwestern plants that would have been available 100 years ago to make the garden look authentic to the era when the house was built,” says Martino. “The cactus on right-hand side of the photo was two feet high when we planted it.”

Martino frequently creates a layered look with succulents and cacti rather than trees because “sometimes trees get taller than you want,” he says. “Sometimes you only want a plant to grow up to 15 feet and then stop because there are mountains in the distance above that height.”



## 7. Ocotillo Fence

“Ocotillo is a really historic material; ranchers and settlers made fences out of it a hundred and fifty years ago,” says Martino. “The old saying was that you could throw one of these out on the road for a few months and then pick it up and plant it and it still would be able to grow. Which is not true. But you can see in this photo that some of the ocotillo plants have leaves on them. They’ve re-sprouted.”





## 8. Tropical Colors

Adding to the tropical feeling are “leafy plants, lots of them,” says Martino. “You don’t see through this garden. There are succulents, and cactus, as well, and chairs under trees. It doesn’t look arid like the desert; it looks like an oasis.”

## 9. Water Fountains

The fountain set in a waterfall-blue wall, is visible from the clients’ living room, offering cooling views of running water on even the hottest day.





## 10. Striking Specimens

A diverse plant family, Agaves have sculptural silhouettes. Look for cultivars with striking foliage, Martino recommends. Variegated leaves can be “yellow with green on the edges, green with white edges, or like these with green with yellow edges,” says Martino. “They are quite an interesting family.”



## WHY YOU SHOULD ENCOURAGE LEAFCUTTER BEES IN YOUR GARDEN

*Learn about Identification and Nesting of These Important Pollinators*

SOURCE: The Spruce, Nadia Hassani, 7/14/21



Photo Source: <https://stock.adobe.com/search?k=leaf%20cutter%20bee>

Bees are indispensable for [pollination](#). The numbers may vary, however research has shown that bees pollinate up to two-thirds of all the foods we eat. Honeybees that farmers and fruit growers manage and use for pollination are different from wild bees. While the honeybee might be the bee we hear about most often, there are many species of wild bees important to the pollination effort. If you see a black bee about the size of a honeybee on a flowering plant in your yard it is probably a leafcutter bee. Being able to identify leafcutter bees, and knowing their lifecycle and nesting habits, will help you manage and protect this important pollinator.

- How to Identify a Leafcutter Bee

Leafcutter bees are solitary bees of the *Megachilidae* family, and there are about 242 native *Megachile* species in North America alone. They are about the same size as honeybees; but their bodies are black and furry where honeybees are dark brown to black and yellow striped.

Another way to identify a leafcutter bee is the way the females transport pollen. Other types of bees have unique pollen "baskets" on their rear legs for collecting and carrying pollen. The leafcutter bee has special hairlike structures on the underside of her abdomen used for transporting pollen. The underside of the bee might appear yellow or golden, but look closely and you might see this is actually pollen.

Look for leaf cutter bees on ornamentals with thin, smooth leaves such as roses, azaleas, ash trees, redbud trees, and bougainvillea. You may also find them pollinating [wildflowers](#) as well as squash, melons, peas, and other summer fruits and vegetables.

- The Lifecycle of Leafcutter Bees

Leafcutter bees mate shortly after emerging in the spring. The males live for a short period of time after mating, whereas the females seek out potential nesting sites. As solitary bees, leafcutter bees don't live in colonies with a queen. Each bee builds her own nest and raises brood on her own.

Starting in late spring and into late summer, the leafcutter bee builds her nest in wood cavities, typically rotten wood, or in tunnels carved into hollow stems, empty snail shells, dry soil, or holes in concrete walls and other man-made objects.

Depending on the species—the members of the *Megachile* family vary in size—the cavity can be smaller or larger but on average it's about the diameter of a pencil.

To build the nest, the female bee chews ¼- to ½- inch circular pieces from leaves or petals which she layers into the shape of a thimble for each cell. A typical nest consists of up to 20 of these cells, packed tightly together. The female then begins the process of collecting nectar and honey which she mixes with her own saliva to create food for her larvae. After placing food in each cell, she lays a single egg in each one. The final task in her life cycle is to close each cell with a seal made of chewed up leaves.

When the larvae emerge, they feed on the food in the nest and pupate over winter. In spring, the new generation of adult bees chew their way out of the nest and the lifecycle begins anew.

- Do Leaf Cutter Bees Cause Garden Problems?

Many species of leaf cutter bees chew circular sections from the leaves of plants which they use to build nests. Unlike insects that feed on plant leaves, these bees take only what they need for constructing the nest. Holes in the leaves of your favorite rosebush can be unsightly but the plant, itself, is rarely damaged.

Insecticides are not recommended nor are they effective for this insect. Leafcutter bees don't actually feed on the leaves, so most sprays will not work. Because they are such efficient pollinators, these bees are considered a beneficial as opposed to an insect pest. Using insecticides will kill other beneficial insects too, and these are the ones that you need in your garden.

If you want to protect a prize plant in your garden, try a floating row cover, cheesecloth or dense netting until the bees have finished building their nests.

- Why Leafcutter Bees Are Important Pollinators

Mason bees, *Osmia spp.*, are one species of leaf cutter popular with gardeners. Nests are constructed in existing or newly excavated hollows, similar to nesting sites for other leafcutter species. The Mason bee lines its nest with mud, rather than leaves. Mason bee houses can be purchased at many garden centers and DIY patterns exist to build them.

Mason bees are even used as managed bees for commercial pollination for alfalfa, blueberries, carrots, and onions. Some non-native leafcutter bees have also been introduced to North America specifically for commercial pollination purposes, such as the alfalfa leafcutting bee *Megachile rotundata*.

- How to Encourage Leafcutter Bees

Instead of eliminating the nesting sites of the bees, consider providing the bees with suitable housing, either by leaving that rotting tree stump in the back corner of your yard, or by building a leafcutter bee hotel from scratch or from a kit. Building a leafcutter bee hotel and watching the bees build their nests is a fun project to do which children.

The only thing you need to watch out for are the parasitoids that may attack the nests of leafcutting bees, such as wasps, beetles, and ants. The *Coelioxys* is also a leafcutter bee, albeit not a friendly one, that lays her eggs in the nests of other leafcutter bees where her larvae gobble up the pollen.

### WARNING

Unlike other bees, wasps, and hornets, leafcutter bees won't become aggressive when you approach their nesting sites, and they will only sting when handled. The sting is much less painful than the sting of a wasp, hornet, or honeybee. The venom content is much lower however if you have had an allergic reaction to stings, seek medical treatment if you have a reaction after being stung by a leafcutter bee.

### “Bee-ritos”



#### PHOTO SOURCE;

[https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1GCEA\\_enUS927US927&sxsrf=APwXEdePfAHHxZAJYFqIfn86bG3gZaCVTw:1682799957008&q=What+does+a+leaf+cutter+bee+nest+look+like&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjYi6mt9s\\_-AhWDBjQIHSpnBH4Q4qYDegQIShAL&biw=1536&bih=746&dpr=1.25#imgsrc=GO2VmszczTaNnM](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1GCEA_enUS927US927&sxsrf=APwXEdePfAHHxZAJYFqIfn86bG3gZaCVTw:1682799957008&q=What+does+a+leaf+cutter+bee+nest+look+like&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjYi6mt9s_-AhWDBjQIHSpnBH4Q4qYDegQIShAL&biw=1536&bih=746&dpr=1.25#imgsrc=GO2VmszczTaNnM)

## FLOWERING CACTI POP WITH POLKA DOTS OF COLOR

Marcy Scott Naturally Speaking April 25, 2023



Photo: Jimmy Zabriski

Springtime in the desert can sometimes be downright spectacular, particularly after wetter-than-normal winters, when Mexican gold poppies blanket foothill slopes. Even when conditions have been considerably dryer, however, with far fewer spring wildflowers sending up blooms, many of our native cacti will still put on a colorful show as they unfurl their short-lived but sumptuous blossoms.

Among the showiest of these early bloomers are the hedgehog cacti, so dubbed because their spiny clumps of many stems, when not in bloom, closely resemble those funny-looking creatures. This group of cacti, with the botanical name *Echinocereus*, can be further divided into subgroups that include rainbow cacti and claret cup cacti, and nearly all of them flower in mid spring.

Commonly encountered locally are three kinds of rainbow cactus, which are small hedgehog cacti characterized by pastel bands of color around their stems. Texas rainbow, with its large, pale yellow flowers, and New Mexico rainbow, with petite green- and white-striped flowers, are often seen along desert trails. Less common is Arizona rainbow, a tiny hedgehog cactus with clear pink flowers, and just beyond our area and southward into Mexico is another rainbow cactus that richly deserves its moniker, with bolder pink and purple bands of color that make it showy year-round even without the large pink flowers it displays this time of year.

Another relatively small hedgehog cactus native to most of New Mexico and Arizona is Fendler's hedgehog, which is fairly plain-looking most of the time and might easily be overlooked except in spring, when its extravagantly large, deep pink flowers appear. On a recent hike in the Robledo Mountains, I was twice stopped in my tracks to admire a couple of blooming plants we encountered along the trail – the first an eye-popping cluster of magenta blooms and the second one a single stem topped with a sigh-inducing pink flower that was larger than its girth. These head-turning beauties may not grow into impressively-sized clumps but their spectacular blossoms more than make up for their smaller stature.

In the vicinity of “A” Mountain one might encounter one of the larger and showier members of the group, the strawberry hedgehog or haystack cactus. Its extra-spiny clumps of stems, which indeed resemble a messy haystack, sport deep purple flowers that will be followed by tasty, strawberry-like fruits.

My personal favorite and perhaps the most striking of all the hedgehogs are the claret cup cacti, which can grow to a couple feet in diameter with dozens of stems. Whether in their natural desert haunts or planted in landscapes, their huge, deep orange to red blossoms are veritable head-turners. Cranking out enormous quantities of sugary nectar during the few weeks that they are in bloom, they are extremely important to breeding and migrating hummingbirds and unlike most cacti they depend heavily upon hummingbirds for pollination. Large clumps of blooming claret cup cacti on desert slopes are an irresistible beacon to hummingbirds passing through, and the enchanting flowers are visited by butterflies, bees, and many other small insects as well.

As temperatures climb, the flowers will begin to wither and the yearly spring spectacle will draw to a close, so if you haven’t yet experienced the delight that these colorful cacti can bring, take the opportunity to amble along a desert trail, while these beauties are still doing their thing.



Haystack Cactus. Photo credit: <https://www.digie.org/en/media/175>

## PLANT OF THE MONTH – MAY Hardy Hibiscus (Rose of Sharon)

Hardy Hibiscus: *How to Plant and Grow This Tropical-looking Perennial*

SOURCE: <https://savvygardening.com/hardy-hibiscus/> BY Jessica Walliser  
Photos from Wilson Brothers Gardens



Do you love the look of tropical hibiscus but hate having to toss the plant on the compost pile at the end of the growing season or watch all its leaves fall off when you try to overwinter it indoors? What if I told you there was a way you could enjoy those same big, gorgeous blooms without needing to worry about what to do when cold temperatures arrive? Say hello to the hardy hibiscus! Yes, you heard me right. Let me tell you more about this amazing perennial hibiscus.

### What is a hardy hibiscus?

These herbaceous perennials are hybrids of a few different North American native Hibiscus species. One of the most common parents, species *Hibiscus moscheutos*, is a perennial hibiscus that grows in the wet soils of floodplains, marshes, and meadows. Because of this, it's also known as the swamp mallow or the rose mallow. Depending on the variety, other parents could be *Hibiscus syriacus*, *H. coccineus*, *H. palustris*, and several others. Breeders recognized the merits of these plants decades ago and began to hybridize for increased bloom size and different color forms. Now, there are dozens of cultivars on the market with blooms ranging from burgundy and pink to white and bicolor. During the hybridization process, the need for damp soils was also diminished.

## The hardy hibiscus plant

A single hardy hibiscus plant can produce dozens of show-stopping blooms that measure up to 10 inches across. Each flower only lasts a day or two, but when one flower dies, another bud opens for a long succession of blooms. My first experience with a hardy hibiscus was while working at a public park in Pennsylvania just after earning my horticulture degree. I was stunned when an unassuming shrub-like plant burst into bloom in mid-summer and continued blooming through September. The plant in that park produced dark wine-colored blooms, and for me, it was love at first sight. I've had one in my garden ever since. In my current garden, I have three of these beauties.

Though the tropical-looking flowers are this plant's main draw, the foliage is also quite lovely. Some varieties have deep green rounded leaves with slightly serrated edges, while others produce deeply cut, maple-like leaves. I even have one with burgundy foliage. Depending on the variety, hardy hibiscus plants can grow between 3 and 6 feet tall.

Each plant produces multiple, upright stems that grow from the base of the plant each spring. They are not evergreen plants, but rather they die back to the ground each winter. The clumps increase in size each year, leading to more and more blooms over time, though do be forewarned that the plants are fairly late to emerge in the spring. Mine sometimes don't sprout from the ground until mid-May. They are sturdy plants that need little in terms of nutrients or fertilizer.

### Perennial hibiscus flowers

Also known as a dinner plate hibiscus, each individual flower is between 4 and 10 inches across, depending on the variety. The blooms have five papery petals with a central protruding stamen that is sometimes surrounded by a dark "eye" at the center of the bloom. They come in shades of pink, white, burgundy, and red.

Each stem produces multiple buds, most often at the top of the stem. If you want to stagger the bloom time and keep the plant stems more compact, pinch back every other stem (or all the stems if you want) by half the plant's height in early summer, just like you would do with phlox or mums. The hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies enjoy the blooms, too.

### How hardy is a perennial hibiscus?

Hardy hibiscus is fully hardy in USDA zones 5-9 which means the plants survive winter temperatures as low as -20°F. It shrugs frost off like a champ. Since it dies back to the ground each winter, there is no need to mulch the stems through the colder months. Though it looks tropical and fragile, hardy hibiscuses are tough plants that don't require coddling.

### Where to grow perennial hibiscus plants

With at least one of its parents being native to low-lying, damp soils, hardy hibiscus is a great fit for poorly drained areas. However, it also thrives in average garden soil. Amend the soil with compost prior to planting and keep the plants well-watered during times of drought. Mine are growing in my perennial beds without any extra fuss. Yes, the flowers do look a bit like the blooms of rose of Sharon, but this is a different plant species.

- Select a site that receives full sun. Shadier conditions result in too-tall stems that flop under the weight of the flowers. A minimum of 6 hours of full sun per day works, but 8 or more hours is ideal. If the plants sprawl due to lower light levels, consider using a [peony ring](#) or [grow-thru plant support](#) to keep them upright. Some varieties are more upright and rigid while others are more rounded in form. Be sure to consider where they'll be planted when choosing a variety to add to your garden.

### Hardy hibiscus pests

- Though this tropical-looking perennial is easy to grow, it does have two pests that can become quite bothersome. Here's how to tackle them if they are an issue in your garden.



- **Japanese beetles:** If these shiny beetles begin to feed on the foliage of your dinnerplate hibiscus in summer, handpick them and drop them into a container of soapy water, or use a spray product with the organic insecticide Spinosad ([Captain Jack's Deadbug Brew](#) is one of my favorites). Don't spray when pollinators are active and follow label instructions carefully.
- **Hibiscus sawfly larvae:** These tiny green caterpillars are found on the undersides of the leaves in early summer through fall. They quickly skeletonize the leaves, rendering the plant very unsightly. Thankfully, they are easily managed with [horticultural oil](#) (be sure to get it on the undersides of the leaves), [Spinosad](#) (see above), or [insecticidal soap](#).
- **Aphids and whiteflies:** These two sap-sucking pests can occasionally be problematic, but they are easy to keep in check by encouraging beneficial predatory insects like ladybugs and lacewings.

### Hardy hibiscus varieties

There are many different varieties of perennial hibiscus, each one with its own merits. Here are some of my favorites:

- **The 'Disco Belle' series:** This series includes selections such as 'Disco Belle Pink', 'Southern Belle,' and 'Dixie Belle' among others. They come in a range of colors.
- **'Lady Baltimore' and 'Lord Baltimore':** Two very popular selections that produce many flower buds per plant.
- **'Brandy Punch':** A bright pink selection with a deep red eye and red-tinged stems.
- **The 'Luna' series:** This series includes selections with white flowers, red flowers, and pink flowers.
- **'Midnight Marvel':** The lovely, burgundy-tinged foliage makes a great backdrop for the huge, deep red blooms.
- **'Kopper King':** Produces huge, bi-color blooms that measure a foot across. The foliage is copper-colored and highly serrated.

I hope you'll find a place in your garden for the hardy hibiscus. These resilient plants are powerful bloomers that provide a kick of color to the summer garden. They're a great way to bring a touch of the tropics to a temperate garden.

\*EDITOR'S NOTE: JEFF ANDERSON RECOMMENDS THIS WEBSITE:

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.wilsonbrosgardens.com%2Fhibiscus-rose-of-sharon-plants.html&psig=AOvVaw0DOyGfZNg7sL4baEp\\_Pnif&ust=1680206193172000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CBAQjhxqFwoTCMjr6Pz1gf4CFQAAAAAdAAAAABAJ](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.wilsonbrosgardens.com%2Fhibiscus-rose-of-sharon-plants.html&psig=AOvVaw0DOyGfZNg7sL4baEp_Pnif&ust=1680206193172000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CBAQjhxqFwoTCMjr6Pz1gf4CFQAAAAAdAAAAABAJ)

Additionally Color Your World has carried hardy hibiscus in the past.

**PLANT OF THE MONTH – June**  
Angelita Daisy  
(*Tetaneuris acaulis*)



**PHOTO SOURCE:**

[https://www.google.com/search?q=angelita+daisy+\(tetaneuris+acaulis\)&rlz=1C1GCEA\\_enUS927US927&oq=angelita+da&aqs=chrome.4.0i512j69i57j0i20i263i512j0i512i4j69i61.13472j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#imgrc=KylMdQwPGZlzyM](https://www.google.com/search?q=angelita+daisy+(tetaneuris+acaulis)&rlz=1C1GCEA_enUS927US927&oq=angelita+da&aqs=chrome.4.0i512j69i57j0i20i263i512j0i512i4j69i61.13472j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#imgrc=KylMdQwPGZlzyM)

Tetaneuris acaulis is a North American species of flowering plants in the sunflower family. Common names include angelita daisy, stemless four-nerve daisy, stemless hymenoxys, butte marigold, and stemless rubberweed. Tetaneuris acaulis is widespread across much of the western and central United States, west-central Canada (Alberta, Saskatchewan) and northern Mexico (Chihuahua, Coahuila, Zacatecas). It grows in a variety of habitat types in foothills and subalpine regions, and high prairie, badlands, and plains.

This plant is happy in full sun and is extremely drought tolerant. It is a host plant for the white-lined sphynx moth.

SOURCE: [https://calscape.org/loc-california/Tetaneuris%20acaulis\(\)](https://calscape.org/loc-california/Tetaneuris%20acaulis())

## “WEED” OF THE MONTH

### Purslane

Susan Mahr, University of Wisconsin - Madison



Common purslane, *Portulaca oleracea*, is a highly variable, weedy plant in the purslane family (Portulacaceae) with a wide distribution. Although it is likely native to North Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent, it had reached North America by pre-Columbian times and was in Europe by the late 16th century. It is now naturalized in most parts of the world, both tropical and temperate – equally at home in flower beds, cultivated fields, and roadsides or other disturbed or waste places. It has been grown for more than 4,000 years as a food and medicinal plant and is still cultivated in many places today.

It is considered quite nutritious because it is unusually high in omega-3 fatty acids (found mostly in fish and flax seeds) and contains significant amounts of vitamins A and C, as well as calcium, iron, magnesium and potassium and antioxidants. It also contains high amounts of oxalates (just as spinach does) so should not be consumed excessively by those susceptible to forming kidney stones. It is sometimes used as fodder and is fed to poultry to reduce egg cholesterol and was also used traditionally as an ointment for burns. Some other common names include garden purslane, little hogweed, pusley, and wild portulaca. It's called *pourpier* in France and *verdolaga* in Mexico.

Purslane is a fast-growing herbaceous annual with succulent leaves and stems. Even the oblong cotyledons (seed leaves) are succulent. The multiple smooth, reddish stems originating from a single taproot are mostly prostrate, forming a mat covering up to 3 feet in diameter. Depending on the amount of moisture available, the plant may be quite low-growing or more erect up to 16" tall.

The alternate leaves are clustered at stem joints. The individual leaves are quite fleshy, storing lots of water when available. Each flat green leaf is oval to spoon-shaped, broadest near the rounded tip, and without any indentations along the often reddish margin. They rarely have petioles and are attached directly to the stems.

Plants will flower whenever moisture is sufficient. The  $\frac{1}{4}$  –  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch wide yellow flowers have five (sometimes four) notched petals, numerous yellow stamens, and several pistils that are bunched together in the center. They typically open only on hot, sunny days from midmorning to early afternoon. The flowers occur in leaf axils at the stem joints or terminally, with just a single one opening in each leaf cluster at a time.

Although pollinators will visit the flowers, the plants are self fertile so almost all flowers will go on to produce numerous tiny brown to black seeds in a small pod. When the seeds are mature the ovoid capsule bursts open along a transverse groove to release its contents.

Purslane grows in full sun in almost any soil, from muck high in organic matter to heavy clay. It does best in warm weather, and young plants will remain small and stunted when conditions are cool. Although it prefers regular water it can tolerate drought. It is easily dug or hoed out where unwanted but these plants should be removed from the garden as cut stems from larger plants will root readily at the nodes to become re-established, and seeds will mature in the pods even if the plant is pulled and left with its roots turned upward. Seeds can remain viable in the soil for several decades. The plant is frost tender and will be killed by the first freeze in fall.

Purslane is easily grown in the vegetable garden from seed, ready for harvest in 6-8 weeks. Sow in fertile, well-drained soil and thin to 4 to 6" apart. The entire plant can be harvested or the stems can be cut back to within two inches of the crown and the plant will regrow, providing edible leaves for most of the summer (although successive sowings may be preferred for more tender young leaves). When grown as a food crop, water regularly as moisture-stressed leaves are not as palatable as those from well-watered plants. Purslane has few pests, although in some parts of the country purslane sawfly, *Schizocerella pilicornis*, and a leafminer weevil, *Hypurus bertrandiperris*, will damage or kill the plants. In many places outside of North America purslane is commonly eaten as a fresh or cooked vegetable. In the US it can occasionally be found in specialty stores or at Farmer's Markets.

The stems, leaves and flower buds have a slightly tart or sour and salty taste. The intensity of flavor is influenced by the physiology of the plant. In hot, dry conditions purslane switches to photosynthesis using Crassulacean acid metabolism (C4) as a means of conserving moisture. In this system the leaves trap carbon dioxide at night (instead of during the day as with normal photosynthetic process, when open stomata would allow valuable water to escape through transpiration) and convert this to malic acid. Then the malic acid, which has a sour flavor, is converted to glucose for storage during the day. So leaves picked early in the day when malic acid concentrations are highest will have the tarest flavor. There are several named cultivars that are grown as crops, but few are available in the US.

Purslane is used in many cuisines around the world, especially in salads, soups, stews, and tomato sauces. When cooked, purslane becomes mucilaginous and will act as a thickener in soups or stews. The seeds are also edible.

## RECIPE OF THE MONTH – MAY

### Italian Chopped Salad

Source: <https://www.thegraciouspantry.com/clean-eating-italian-chopped-salad-recipe/>

#### Ingredients

- 4 cups chopped romaine lettuce
- 2 cups chopped tomatoes
- 2 cups cooked chickpeas (if canned, then drain and rinse)
- 1 cup sliced black olives
- 1 cup chopped red onion
- ¼ cup chopped sun dried tomatoes (finely chopped)
- 2 cups chopped cucumber
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- salt and pepper to taste

#### Instructions

- Combine all the chopped salad ingredients in a large bowl and toss well, then serve.

What else can you add to this salad? Here are some suggestions:

- Roasted garlic cloves
- Pepperoncini
- Grated cheese such as provolone cheese, mozzarella or parmesan.
- Sliced turkey or ham
- Fresh herbs such as fresh parsley or fresh basil

#### Salad Dressing Variations

For the dressing, you can try using red wine vinegar, lemon juice, dijon mustard, salt, and black pepper for an alternative homemade Italian vinaigrette. You can also add dried herbs such as dried oregano. Make a big batch and store leftovers in jars with a lid for future salads. Nothing beats a good homemade Italian dressing! Simply whisk or shake well before each use.



## RECIPE OF THE MONTH – JUNE

SOURCE: <https://www.southernliving.com/recipes/tropical-chicken-lettuce-wraps-recipe>

These no-cook lettuce wraps are impressive enough for a party but easy enough to pull off on the busiest weeknight. The chicken salad, which is livened up with a touch of jalapeño, lime zest, and honey, earned rave reviews in the Test Kitchen. Assemble the wraps and serve them family-style on a large platter, or set out all of the components in bowls and let everyone help themselves. It's not often that you come across a 15-minute recipe that's light but filling enough for a meal. These lettuce wraps pack a little heat and a little sweet. Wrapped in tender butter lettuce and garnished with cashews for crunch, these lettuce wraps have more flavor and texture than you would expect in their small package. Filled with sweet mango and a hint of lime juice, one Test Kitchen professional said these wraps are "a wonderful taste of the tropics." Lettuce wraps are easily portable, so we recommend making extra chicken mixture to pack for lunch during the week. The chicken mixture, mango, cashew, and cilantro leaves don't have to remain in lettuce wraps, though. Serve this tropical creation in a whole-wheat wrap or over a bed of leafy greens for a healthy lunch or dinner options. With this healthy recipe, there are enough possibilities to add it to your weekly rotation.

### • **Ingredients**

- 5 cups shredded rotisserie chicken (from 2 chickens)
- 3 tablespoons thinly sliced scallions
- 3/4 cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 teaspoons minced jalapeño chile (from 1 chile)
- 1 teaspoon lime zest plus 1 Tbsp. fresh juice (from 1 lime)
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper
- 12 butter lettuce leaves (from about 2 heads)
- 1 cup 1/2-inch cubed mango (from 1 mango)
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped roasted, lightly salted cashews
- 1/4 cup packed fresh cilantro leaves
- Lime wedges

### • **Directions**

1. Toss together shredded chicken and scallions in a medium bowl. Whisk together mayonnaise, honey, jalapeño, lime zest, lime juice, salt, and pepper in a small bowl. Gently stir mayonnaise mixture into chicken mixture until combined.
2. Divide chicken mixture evenly among lettuce leaves (about 1/2 cup per leaf), and top evenly with mango, cashews, and cilantro leaves. Serve with lime wedges.

## HONEY DO LIST – May

### ORNAMENTALS:

- Continue planting container-grown plants, providing extra water and shade as temperatures rise.
- Fertilize spring and summer-flowering bedding plants every 2-4 weeks using products with higher phosphorus content.
- Reduce irrigation to irises as they stop blooming to allow rhizomes to “rest.”
- Continue fertilizing bulbs until leaves begin to die back, and then discontinue.
- Deadhead flowers, and pinch back chrysanthemums to maintain a compact form.

### TREES:

- Increase watering frequency and depth to 18 inches as temperatures rise.
- Continue zinc sprays on pecans.
- Continue cover sprays to pome fruits (apples, pears).
- Harvest fruit as soon as it ripens and remove diseased or buggy fruit quickly.
- Use shade cloth or tree wrap to prevent sunburn.
- Plant palm trees, watering frequently until established and then reduce frequency to about once every 2 weeks. Fertilize established palms.
- If you did not place netting on fruit trees in April, do it this month.
- If you do not have an irrigation system, build up basins extending to the dripline and fill with water regularly.

### VEGGIES, FRUITS, AND HERBS:

- Pinch back side shoots on tomatoes to increase fruit production.
- Shade plants to reduce beet leafhoppers and prevent sunburn.
- Watch for early signs of curly top on tomatoes and peppers and remove infected plants promptly.
- Plant sweet potato slips.
- Continue planting other summer veggies like squash and corn.

### LAWNS AND ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

- Continue planting warm-season turf species. Keep moist but not soggy.
- Fertilize established warm-season turf (1lb N/1000 sq ft).
- After mid-month, discontinue cool season grass fertilization.
- Water at least once a week to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. Mow as needed to maintain turf quality and rooting depth. Mow at the greatest height recommended for your turf species.
- If needed, apply a pre-emergent herbicide for control of late summer weeds. Read The Label! Water well after applications.

### CACTI AND SUCCULENTS

- Separate yucca and agave pups from the parent plant. Allow the pups to dry in the shade for a few days before replanting.
- Continue to cut back frost-damaged cactus. To maintain shape and size of prickly pear, remove young pads.
- Continue to set out warm season succulents and water newly planted ones as well as established plants every 2-3 weeks. Watch for sunburn (pale surfaces, yellow patches).
- Divide aloes by cutting out plants along the edge until you have reduced the size of the clump by at least one-half.

- Do not prune yuccas except to remove dead or diseased stems.
- Water large cactus, ocotillos, and large yuccas at least once a month through September. Water agaves, smaller yuccas, prickly pear and smaller cactus every 3 weeks throughout the summer. Barrel cactus and beaver-tail prickly pear do not need as much water, but watering every 5-6 weeks will maintain vigor. Succulents planted in the ground do not need fertilizer, but fertilize container-grown plants with a water-soluble fertilizer this month. Use it at half-strength.
- Remove cactus pads affected by dry rot.

**ROSES:**

- Continue to plant container grown roses. Plastic pots are better than clay for water-retention.
- As in April, water early in the day to discourage powdery mildew.
- Roses will slow down as the days heat up. Roses receiving over 6 hours of sun may need shade cloth protection. If you have been using liquid fertilizer, switch to a granular or slow-release fertilize, or discontinue all fertilizer until September.
- Maintain heavy mulch, but keep away from the main stem to avoid too much moisture.
- Container roses may need daily watering, but soil supporting plants in the ground should be allowed to dry out slightly between watering. Some of my fellow master gardeners and I have irrigation, so we just water on the regular schedule (3 days a week). The goal is to get down to a depth of 16 to 18 inches.
- Do not prune roses in May other than to deadhead or remove diseased or dead canes.

**PESTS:**

- Spider mites increase with temperatures. Blast with water or use an appropriate insecticide.
- Continue to spray for aphids, powdery mildew EARLY in the day to avoid sun damage.
- Continue to treat iris borers, and watch for other harmful worms and caterpillars. Use BT or handpick.



Photo Source: Pinterest



## HONEY DO LIST – June

### ORNAMENTALS:

- Plant heat-tolerant plants such as Madagascar periwinkle, portulaca, marigold, penstemon, and four o'clock.
- Start seeds for fall-flowering annuals now for transplant later
- Remove spent flowers from annuals and perennials, as well as spent stalks from irises.
- Pinch back chrysanthemums and lantana.
- Watch for signs of water stress and sunburn. Increase watering but watch for hot hose water!

### TREES:

- Time for the second fertilization of fruit trees 2 years and older. Use 1/10 N per 1 inch of trunk diameter.
- Continue with cover sprays to pome fruits and zinc sprays for pecans. Maintain orchard sanitation.
- Place a paper lunch bag over clusters of grapes and tie shut.
- Plant palms, and fertilize established plants this month, using a specific palm formula.
- Prune suckers on desert willow and acacia.
- Deep water trees once a month throughout the summer.
- Watch for pecan nut casebearer on nutlets, web worms in shade trees, and bagworms and spider mites on evergreens. A strong jet of water may dislodge mites.
- Thin trees before the monsoons near the end of the month. Remove all weak and crossing branches and thin up to 25% of the canopy from trees prone to blowing over.

### VEGGIES, FRUITS, AND HERBS:

- There is still time to plant corn and squash.
- Harvest bulk onions when tops turn brown.
- Maintain even moisture supply to tomatoes to reduce cracking and blossom end rot. Shade tomatoes and peppers to prevent sunscald and pest damage.
- Keep ripening fruit off the ground to reduce disease and insects.
- Pinch back basil to keep it from flowering.

### LAWNS AND ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

- Seed head formation in Bermuda turf may be due to a nitrogen deficiency. Fertilize warm-season grasses, but not cool-season grasses now.
- Raise mower height, especially for cool-season grasses, to allow deeper rooting and to provide extra shade for the plant crown.
- Watch for grub worm damage this month. Watch for adult May or June beetles flying around. Treat the lawn in late June or early July.

- Cut back Pampas and other ornamental grasses
- Give your lawn mower a tune-up.

### **CACTI AND SUCCULENTS:**

- Separate yucca and agave pups from parent plants. Allow pups to dry in the shade for a few days before planting.
- Continue to set out warm-season succulents, watching for sunburn. Water new plantings weekly and established plants every 2 -3 weeks.
- Do not prune yuccas unless needed for dead and diseased stems
- Water large cacti, ocotillos, and large yuccas at least once a month from now until September. Beaver-tail and barrel cactus can be watered about every 5-6 weeks.
- Succulents in the ground do not require frequent fertilization. If fertilizing, use half the strength of what is recommended for houseplants.
- Watch for pests like cactus longhorn beetles and snout weevils.

### **ROSES:**

- Continue to plant container grown roses. Plastic pots are better than clay for water retention.
- Water roses and other plants susceptible to powdery mildew early in the day.
- Many roses slow down as the day heats up. If exposed to more than six hours of sun a day, you may want to provide some artificial shading. Also, use granular or slow-release fertilizer rather than liquid fertilizer.
- Apply heavy mulch, up to 6" around your roses, but keep from the main stem to avoid too much moisture on it.
- Water frequently but let the soil dry out slightly between waterings. Once the soil is dry 6" below the surface, water again, usually every 3-4 days to a depth of 16 to 18". Roses in pots may need daily watering.
- Do not prune roses in the summer except to remove dead flowers or canes.

### **PESTS:**

- Spider mite populations increase with the heat. Blast with a spray of water or appropriate insecticide.
- Irises are susceptible to iris borers. Signs include a sudden decline of a flower stalk or failure of buds to open, coupled with a dark, watery mass on leaves. Cut off and destroy the infected part. Systemic insecticides can also be used to prevent infestations; apply per label instructions.
- Eliminate places where water may collect to prevent mosquitos from breeding.

# FUNNY PAGES

When it's windy and you're wearing the straw hat you got at a dollar store.



off the mark.com by Mark Parisi

## REBEL INSECTS

offthemark.com

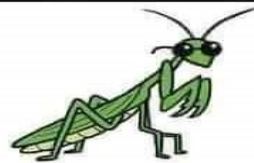
Get a signed print: ctmCartoon@gmail.com



BUTTERFLY THAT PREFERS MARGARINE



CARPENTER ANT THAT'S A PLUMBER



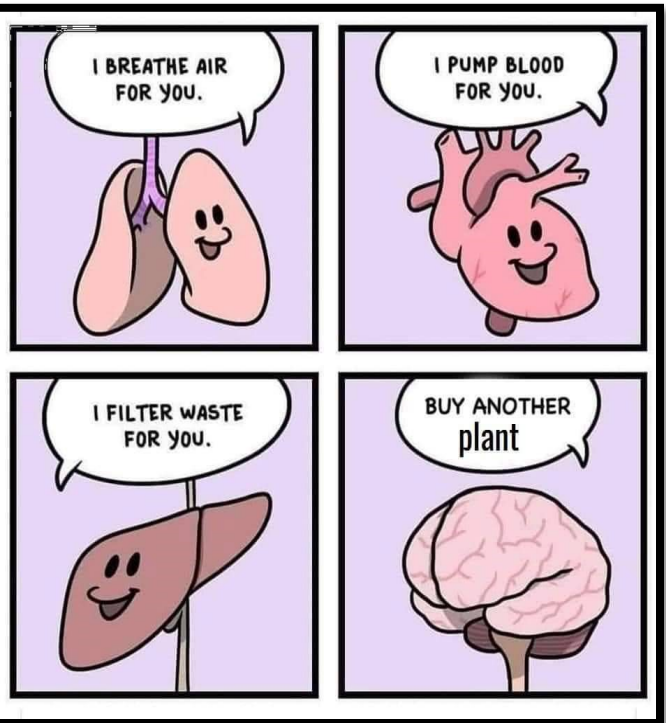
PRAYING MANTIS THAT'S AN ATHEIST



YELLOWJACKET IN A PURPLE SWEATER

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MARK PARISI



# UPCOMING EVENTS

- MAY 3<sup>RD</sup>

Las Cruces Water Festival, Young Park 7:30 am – 1:30 pm

We will start set up at 7:30 am. Students will start arriving at 9:00 am and leaving at 1:30 pm

- MAY 7<sup>TH</sup>

- Art In The Garden, Picacho Hills 10:00 am – 4 pm

- May 9th

Lunch and Learn, Branigan Library Roadrunner Room, Noon

Linda Miller and Randall Shadd will discuss maintenance of irrigation systems

- May 10<sup>th</sup>

Master Gardener Monthly Meeting, Branigan Library Roadrunner Room 9:30 am

- MAY 13<sup>th</sup>

4H Contest, NMSU Skeen Hall, 10 am – 4 pm

\*Also, in May, we will be discussing Council Positions, and in June we will be voting on those positions. These possibly include Secretary/Treasurer, Communications Secretary, Speaker Coordinator, Events Coordinator, and possibly other positions.

- June 8<sup>th</sup>

NMSU Cooperative Extension Specialty Crop Convention, 8 am – 5 pm at Grapevine Plaza, 3900 W. Picacho Avenue. To sign up, follow link: <https://rsvp.nmsu.edu/rsvp/>

- June 13<sup>th</sup>

Lunch and Learn, Branigan Library Roadrunner Room, Noon

Jill Bills will discuss “Future Master Gardeners,” an introduction to gardening with children.

- June 14

Monthly Master Gardeners Meeting, 9:30 am, Branigan Library Roadrunner Room, 9:30 am.

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We need programs for our monthly meetings, especially May and July. A 30-40 minute presentation on any gardening, plant, or nature related topic you'd like to teach us about would be great. It can be a PowerPoint, a demonstration, use a white board, or any method or medium you prefer to employ.

Please contact Dot Wyckoff or Sylvia Hacker if you'd like to volunteer!