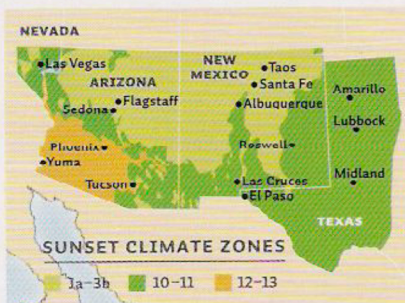


# What to do in your garden December



## Planning

**Design help** Sunset climate zones 10–11: The city of Albuquerque has teamed up with three New Mexico landscape-design luminaries—David Cristiani, Judith Phillips, and George Radnovich—to offer six free Xeriscape garden designs and plant lists online ([www.cabq.gov/water-conservation/xericrebate.html](http://www.cabq.gov/water-conservation/xericrebate.html)). The designs make great templates for any homeowner seeking to install an attractive, water-thrifty garden. Zones 12–13: The Arizona Municipal Water Users Association has been promoting water-wise landscape design since the 1980s. Visit the website ([www.amwua.org/conservation/landscape.htm](http://www.amwua.org/conservation/landscape.htm)) for downloadable plant lists, drip-irrigation guides, and brochures with attractive examples of water-wise gardens.

## Planting

**Bear grass** Zones 10–13: An accent plant that's maintenance-free is native bear grass (*Nolina microcarpa*). The 3- to 6-foot-tall clump of fountainlike foliage with curly-tipped leaves creates a striking accent in a border. In summer, bloom stalks topped with greenish white flowers rise several feet above the foliage. Plant in full sun or partial shade and water one to two times a month once established.

**Flowers** Zones 10–13: Set out transplants of calendulas, cyclamens, dianthus, pansies, petunias, poppies, snapdragons, and sweet alyssum.

**Hot vines** Zones 10–13: To add raging red color to the garden from fall into winter, look for one of these two new vines. Hacienda creeper (*Parthenocissus*) is a compact selection of Virginia creeper (*P. quinquefolia*) that was discovered at an old hacienda in Mexico. Leaves turn deep red in fall, and where temperatures are mild (staying above the low 20s), they remain on the vine until flushes of bright green leaves appear in spring. Hacienda creeper forms a dense screen when trained on a chain-link fence; it can also be used as a vigorous groundcover. *Vitis californica* 'Roger's Red' grape, which originated from a wild species in Northern California, has proven itself durable even through hot Phoenix summers. It produces small grapes, but its primary draw is the intense red and yellow leaf coloring that appears after a fall chill.

**Native Christmas trees** Zones 1a–3b: Consider Douglas fir or Colorado blue spruce. Zone 10: Try Arizona cypress, piñon pine, or Rocky Mountain juniper. Zones 12–13: Arizona cypress is your best bet. After the holidays, transplant the tree into the garden or grow it in a big pot.

## Maintenance

**Care for poinsettia** Place plants in a bright, sunlit room away from drafts and heating vents. Leaves may drop if plants are moved from a warm to a cool location or vice versa. Water when the top inch of soil feels barely moist to the touch.

**Pick salad greens** Zones 12–13: Winter greens planted in the fall should be ready to harvest now. To add a regional spin to the salad bowl, gather some tubular red flowers of chuparosa (*Justicia californica*). The cucumber-flavored blossoms appear in profusion this month at about the time the plant drops its leaves. Harvest and use immediately. If you don't have a chuparosa in your garden, you can find one at the nursery now and grow a crop of flowers for next year. —SCOTT CALHOUN

## Tip from the test garden

**HOW TO PLANT RARE-ROOT ROSES** After bringing home bare-root roses from the nursery, soak their roots in a bucket of water for up to 24 hours to replenish lost moisture.



**FOR PLANTING IN THE GROUND**, dig a hole deep and wide enough to accommodate the roots, leaving a mound of soil in the center. Set the plant in the hole; spread roots over mound. The bud union (the grafting point) should be at or above the surrounding soil level. Fill remainder of hole with soil; water well. **TO GROW ROSES IN POTS**, partially fill a container with potting soil, creating a mound of soil in the center whose top is about 2 inches below the pot rim. Then follow above steps for planting the rose.