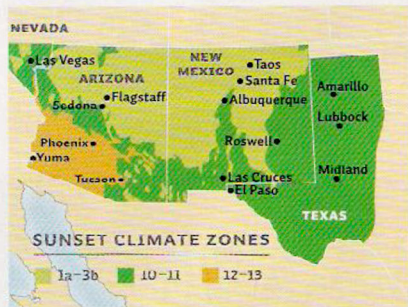


What to do in your garden

October



Planting

Desert trees Sunset climate zones 12–13: October is the single best planting month for most trees. For beauty and shade, consider Arizona mesquite (*Prosopis velutina*), which has an umbrella-like structure. The multibranched tree looks equally at home on a rustic ranch or outside a contemporary desert house. Or choose desert ironwood for its silvery evergreen canopy. For a distinctive Sonoran desert look, plant ‘Desert Museum’ palo verde; its multiple green trunks and yellow spring flowers can brighten any landscape. Look for trees at nurseries that sell native plants.

High-elevation screens Zones 1a–3b: For a rugged, native, evergreen screen, try curl-leaf mountain mahogany

(*Cercocarpus ledifolius*). The 5- to 12-foot tall plant with handsome leathery leaves can be trained as a shrub or pruned into a small tree. For a deciduous hedge or multitrunk small tree, consider white-barked New Mexican privet (*Forestiera neomexicana*). Its black, olive-like fruit attracts many birds, while its unusual bark garners compliments from neighbors.

Spider lilies Zones 12–13: In fall, these unusual bulbs produce 1½- to 2-foot-tall leafless stems topped by stunning clusters of spiderlike blooms. Strappy green leaves appear after flowers die down. *Lycoris radiata* has coral red flowers with prominent spiderlike stamens; golden spider lily (*L. aurea*) has bright yellow flowers with shorter stamens. Plant in the ground or in pots early in the month. Choose a site that receives winter sun and summer shade (such as under the canopy of a deciduous tree). Zones 1a–3b, 10–11: Grow in pots, outdoors in summer and indoors in

winter. Look for spider lilies at Plants for the Southwest in Tucson (www.lithops.com or 520/628-8773).

Sweet peas Zones 10–13: For fragrant color in February and March, plant sweet peas early in the month. Start from seed while the weather is mild for the best germination and strongest plants. Two very fragrant heirloom varieties are ‘America’ (crimson with ivory stripes; introduced in 1896) and ‘Cupani’ (maroon and purple; from 1699). For added impact, grow sweet peas on tornato cages next to garden gates or patios so their sweet scent can be appreciated at close range.

Wildflowers Zones 10–13: October is prime time to plant wildflowers in the low deserts. Sow seeds of arroyo lupine, California desert bluebells, desert marigold, Mexican gold poppies, owl’s-clover, and Parry’s penstemon now for a vibrant display in spring. Before planting, remove weeds and roughen up the soil with a heavy rake. Broadcast seeds evenly and

lightly rake them into the top quarter-inch of soil, keeping the area moist for four to six weeks until seeds germinate and develop a root system. Wild Seed (602/276-3536) sells native Southwest wildflower seed by the packet, ounce, and pound.

Maintenance

Install a directional sprinkler Garden beds that are irregularly shaped or long and narrow are difficult to irrigate without wasting water, especially when working with hose-end sprinklers. But the Noodlehead sprinkler was designed for just such a purpose. Composed of 12 mini sprinklers on short lengths of flexible tubing, the head allows you to put water exactly where you want it when attached to a hose or sprinkler riser. You can even point each mini sprinkler directly at the root zone of a particular plant, to help it get established. (\$17; www.noodleheadsprinkler.com or 541/549-8909). —SCOTT CALHOUN

Tip from the test garden

PLANTING TREES AND SHRUBS Fall is the best time to do this; cooler weather allows roots to become well established through winter. Follow these steps to get ornamentals off to a good start.



STEP 1 Dig a hole no deeper than the rootball and about twice as wide. Set the container in the hole and lay a shovel handle at the top of the rootball, bridging the hole. 1- to 5-gallon plants should sit about 1 inch above soil level.



STEP 2 Remove the plant from its container, loosen matted roots, and set plant in the hole. Fill hole halfway with soil, then soak well. Rercheck the rootball’s elevation and adjust if necessary. Finish filling the hole with soil and water thoroughly.