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toll free 800-840-8509 • phone 623-247-8509  
fax 623-247-6354 • email sales@mswn.com

## WINTER HOURS

7:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday  
Closed Weekends and Holidays

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**OCTOBER 30–  
NOVEMBER 3**  
**American Society of  
Landscape Architects  
(ASLA) 2003 Annual  
Meeting & Expo**  
New Orleans, LA. Contact 888-999-  
ASLA or click on [www.asla.org](http://www.asla.org)

**NOVEMBER 5–8**  
**California Contractors  
Association Convention**  
Merger Hotel, San Antonio, TX.  
Information: Contact the CLCA at  
916.830.2780 or visit [www.clca.org](http://www.clca.org)

**NOVEMBER 6–8**  
**Desert Green VII**  
Henderson Convention Center,  
Henderson, NV. Information: Contact  
ML Robinson at 702.257.5529,  
robinsonm@UNCE.unr.edu. For  
exhibitor information, contact Helen  
Stone at 702.454.3057,  
helen@swtreesandturf.com

**DECEMBER 10**  
**2003 Turfgrass and  
Landscape Institute**  
Ontario Convention Center,  
Ontario, CA.  
Information: Contact the Southern  
California Turfgrass Council at  
800.500.7282, 818.764.5016 or  
visit [www.turfcouncil.org](http://www.turfcouncil.org)

**JANUARY 13–15, 2004**  
**Utah Green Industry  
Conference and  
Trade Show**  
Dixie Center, St. George, UT  
Information: Contact the UGI at  
801.484.4426 or visit  
[www.utahgreen.org](http://www.utahgreen.org)

**JANUARY 28–30**  
**ProGreen Expo 2004**  
Colorado Convention Center,  
Denver, CO  
Information: Contact the ProGreen  
Expo office at 800.397.6665,  
303.756.1079 or visit  
[www.progreenexpo.com](http://www.progreenexpo.com)

November/December 2003

## DESERT ADAPTED PERENNIALS

The western United States has been gripped by one of the worst droughts on record. Many cities within our sales area have been forced to implement tough restrictions on irrigation. Some have even limited the number of days per week in which irrigation controllers may be operated, forcing landscape contractors to rethink their current planting schemes for color beds. We would like to offer some practical solutions, not to mention a bevy of tough but colorful perennials that we consider great alternatives to short-lived annuals.

Of course, as with any maintenance activity, proper timing will be critical for success. As we have all heard, fall is the best time for planting, as the days are warm and nights are cool, creating ideal conditions for root development and quick establishment. Spring would be the second best season if winters were less than mild.

Landscapers may have to renegotiate the maintenance contract to allow for a conversion from conventional annuals, which are typically produced in 4 inch diameter or smaller packs. Most agreements hinge on a specified number of plants per bed to be installed at precise intervals. With some dialogue the contractor may convince the client that the use of perennials will mean less frequent change-outs,

thereby reducing labor costs. Coupled with the fact that most perennials are produced in containers larger than 4 inches, the number of plants per bed will be fewer as well. This could equate to big savings for the client in the long run, although the initial cost could be slightly higher. Be sure to talk this over before preparing a quotation. Offer to change one bed as a sample.

The use of perennials, especially those adapted to the arid Southwest, will likely require a modification in the irrigation system. As many perennials grow taller than annuals, overhead spray will be out of the question. Besides it is water wasteful. The use of in-line drip tubing, soaker hoses or micro-irrigation will be far more efficient for use on perennials. The conversion could be completed on the premise of water savings alone.



Once you have completed the modification of the irrigation system to a more water efficient drip system, be sure to modify your irrigation habits as well. Desert adapted perennials require less water than common annuals. Once established, many of the recommended plants are quite water efficient and might suffer from too much water. Utilize a soil probe, a screwdriver or even your finger to determine if the soil is moist. Space applications of water to provide deep soaks but less frequently than for annuals. You will find many of these perennials will develop strong, deep root systems as a result.

The use of surface mulching should not be overlooked either. This will aid in water retention and modify the variation in soil temperature. Be creative and find a source of organic material that might be readily available in your area. Anything from

wood by-products to nut or rice hulls may be used to modify soil temperatures and retain moisture. Be sure to provide a modest source of nitrogen if wood products are used, as the decomposition will rob your plants of nutrition.

One of the most important decisions for the landscaper will be the selection of plant material. Perennial plants vary considerably in size, texture and more importantly, sun and moisture requirements. These considerations will be critical for success. Be sure to match compatible plants in mixed beds. Obviously, plants with similar water requirements should be grouped together. Planting beds located on slopes should have the most xeric plants on the upper side and plants that can tolerate some extra water near the bottom.

One critical factor will be dormancy. Consider when plants will have their peak appearance and when they go dormant or deciduous. Lantana would be a great example. This plant is spectacular during the summer months but loses appeal upon leaf drop after first frost. This may be an opportunity to combine annuals or wildflowers within the bed once the dormant plants have been cut back for the winter. Once growth resumes in the spring, the annuals or wildflowers may be removed.

Because perennial plants live longer, it would be a good idea to maintain a few backup plants just in case a plant or two is lost, whether it were the result of natural causes or

an accident. If this is not possible, try to utilize plants that can be easily replaced by your local supplier. Also, remember that some species are not particularly long-lived in cultivation, such as the Penstemons. For this reason, it may be best to group these plants in small drifts rather than huge beds, which might spotlight the occasional loss.



Remember that perennial plants are not necessarily maintenance free. Just like annuals, the removal of spent flower blossoms will encourage new flower development. By simply removing the seed heads, new flower buds will continue to arise. Many home gardeners strive to keep the older flower stalks for as long as possible in order to harvest the seed for future use.

Commercial landscapers would rather rejuvenate plants for continued floral development.

Utilize similar color schemes as you would with annuals. Often we are tempted to use many color combinations, which tends to make the planting beds look too “busy.” The use of two, and no more than three colors is preferable. A color wheel will help you select the best combinations. By using the primary colors of red, yellow and blue you may combine direct opposites to give the best contrast. For example, yellow and blue are great contrasts. Gradual combinations would be equally complimentary such as blue to violet or yellow to orange. White and almost any color look great together, especially white and red. Red, orange and yellow are warm colors. Blue, green and pink are cool colors. The use of lighter shades will help to brighten shady areas.

Plants that would do well in shady locations include many of the Aloes, Columbines, Bulbines, Chuparosa, Loose-flowered Lobelia, Scarlet Monkey Flower, Evening Primrose species, several of the Penstemons (*P. pseudospectabilis* and *P. parryi* in particular), the aromatic Lavender Spice™, Ruellia, Autumn Sage Sierra Linda™, and California Fuchsia. Remember that the density of shade will often determine the extent of flowering and overall height.

Most planters that previously contained annuals will be located in full sun. The vast majority of the plants that will be covered in the remaining paragraphs will be suitable for full or partial sun situations. Many will be fine for use in medians and reflected sun as well. We suggest that you do a bit of homework prior to placement just to be on the safe side.

Often a backdrop will be useful to better display more colorful plants in the foreground. These are plants that are primarily grown for their foliage. The sages, also known as wormwood, provide a nice gray color. The low growing *Baccharis* hybrid ‘Starn’ (#11240) Thompson™ provides a rich medium green. *Euphorbia rigida*, also known as the Gopher Plant, has a unique blue-green color to the foliage, as well as chartreuse flowers in the spring.

Some succulent plants do very nicely in planter beds including a variety of ice plants. Consider the yellow flowering Rocky Point Ice Plant or the purple flowered iceplant known as *Drosanthemum speciosum* ‘Rosea.’ These look great planted amongst rocks and boulders where they can cascade and drape.

There are many other cascading perennials to consider. Large spreading plants include the purple flowering Trailing Indigo Bush, the gold flowering *Gazania* ‘Sun Gold.’ The prostrate Rosemary ‘Huntington Carpet’ has aromatic foliage and tiny blue flowers. Coral Fountain has tubular red flowers that hummingbirds find irresistible. The somewhat tender Yellow Dot will

thrive in light shade. These perennials look best in raised planters where the trailing effect has maximum impact.

Smaller spreading plants that become mostly dormant in winter include the Cardinal Flower known as Raspberry Fuzzies™ and *Lantana montevidensis* or Lantana ‘New Gold.’ Here is an opportunity to plant winter annuals or perhaps seed with wildflowers such as Cape Marigold (*Dimorphotheca*), California Poppy (*Escscholzia*), or Bluebells (*Phacelia*). Simply cut back the shrubby perennials prior to the installation of compatible annuals or seeding with the wildflowers.

One of the plants that may go summer dormant is the white flowered Rain Lily. The more evergreen *Zephyranthes* x ‘Prairie Sunset’ has an apricot flower. Both of these plants work great when inter-planted with other perennials such as *Ruellia* or even some of the smaller grasses.

Small evergreens include the mounded, yellow flowering *Damianita*, the lavender flowered Prostrate Germander and a variety of *Verbenas* in several colors. One of the most endearing is the groundcover known as *Sierra Gold*™, which has delicate, ferny foliage and yellow spikes during the summer months. This plant is semi-deciduous but if cut back it recovers quickly in the spring.

Some plants that are virtually bullet proof “road-side weeds” could be utilized in planter beds as well. These would include the Large-

flowered Blue Star, the yellow flowered Bahia, Chocolate Flower, Sundrops, Purple Prairie Clover, Fleabane, the Buckwheats, Blue Flax, Blackfoot Daisy, Golden Dogweed, Paper Flower, Angelita Daisy, and finally the Desert and Prairie Zinnias.

In areas where there might be an over abundance of moisture consider the red flowering Bat-faced Cuphea or the lovely green foliage of Fernclover. *Yerba mansa* is a very salt tolerant groundcover that loves moist soils. It has white flower spikes and large leathery, dark green leaves.

Larger flowering plants include the Butterfly Bushes or Milkweeds, Purple Coneflower, *Gaura* ‘Siskiyou Pink’ and ‘Whirling Butterflies’, Texas Fire Bush, Colorado Four O’Clock, Russian Sage and several of the true sages including the Mexican Bush Sage. You might even consider the various Globemallows such as *Louis Hamilton*™ and *Papago Pink*™.

Even smaller grasses may be used in mass plantings to fill a bed. Some that might prove suitable include the Purple Three Awn, Mexican Feather Grass, or several of the *Muhlenbergias* such as *El Toro*™ and *Nashville*™. We also have a number of sedges that might be interesting to try in mass plantings. The California Meadow Sedge, the Texas Meadow Sedge and the Berkeley Sedge all have the potential to bring softness to a planter.

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*To see photos of these plants and more, check out our website at [www.mswn.com](http://www.mswn.com)*



# DESERT ADAPTED PERENNIALS

There are numerous alternatives to planting annuals. We think that by using a bit of imagination and some good planning, one can achieve a long lasting color bed using perennials. Here are some good choices. Please give our sales staff a call today to assist you in creating a great combination.

Botanical Name	Common Name	DESERT ELEVATION		LIGHT INTENSITY		
		Low	Medium	High	Sun	Shade
Acalypha monostachya	Raspberry Fuzzies™	x	x		x	
Aloe barbadensis	Medicinal Aloe	x			x	x
Aloe variegata	Partridge Breast Aloe	x				x
Amsonia grandiflora	Large-flowered Blue Star	x	x		x	x
Anemopsis californica	Yerba Mansa		x	x	x	(moist)
Aquilegia caerulea	Colorado Blue Columbine	x	x	x	x	x
Aquilegia chrysantha	Golden Columbine	x	x	x	x	x
Artemisia filifolia	Sand Sage		x	x	x	
Artemisia frigida	Fringed Sage		x	x	x	
Artemisia ludoviciana	Prairie Sagebrush	x	x	x	x	
Aristida purpurea	Purple Three Awn	x	x	x	x	
Asclepias subulata	Desert Milkweed	x			x	
Asclepias tuberosa	Butterfly Bush		x	x	x	
Baccharis hybrid 'Starn' (#11240)	Thompson™	x	x		x	
Bahia absinthifolia	Bahia		x		x	
Berlandiera lyrata	Chocolate Flower	x	x	x	x	x
Bulbine frutescens	Yellow Bulbine	x	x		x	x
Bulbine frutescens	'Hallmark'	x	x			x
Calylophus hartwegii v. fendleri	Sundrops	x	x	x	x	
Carex pansa	California Meadow Sedge	x			x	x
Carex perdentata	Texas Meadow Sedge	x	x		x	x
Carex tumulicola	Berkeley Sedge	x			x	x
Chrysactinia mexicana	Damianita	x	x		x	
Cuphea llavea	Bat-faced Cuphea	x			x	x(moist)
Dalea capitata	Sierra Gold TM	x	x	x	x	
Dalea greggii	Trailing Indigo Bush	x	x		x	
Dalea purpurea	Purple Prairie Clover		x	x	x	
Drosanthemum speciosum 'Rosea'	Purple Ice Plant	x			x	
Echinacea purpurea	Purple Coneflower	x	x	x	x	
Erigeron divergens	Native Fleabane	x	x	x	x	
Erigeron karvinskianus 'Profusion'	Santa Barbara Daisy	x	x		x	x
Eriogonum fasciculatum v. poliofolium	Flattop Buckwheat	x	x		x	
Eriogonum wrightii	Wright Buckwheat	x	x	x	x	
Euphorbia rigida	Gopher Plant	x	x	x	x	
Gaura lindheimeri	'Siskiyou Pink'	x	x	x	x	x
Gaura lindheimeri	'Whirling Butterflies'	x	x	x	x	x
Gazania rigens	'Sun Gold' Gazania	x			x	

# DESERT ADAPTED PERENNIALS (Cont'd)

Botanical Name	Common Name	DESERT ELEVATION		LIGHT INTENSITY		
		Low	Medium	High	Sun	Shade
Hamelia patens	Texas Fire Bush	x			x	x
Justicia californica	Chuparosa	x	x			x
Lantana montevidensis	Purple Trailing Lantana	x	x		x	
Lantana	'New Gold' Lantana	x	x		x	
Linum lewisii	Blue Flax		x	x	x	
Lobelia laxiflora	Loose-flowered Lobelia		x	x		x
Malephora lutea	Rocky Point Ice Plant	x	x		x	
Marsilea macropoda	Fernclover	x	x		x	x(moist)
Melampodium leucanthum	Blackfoot Daisy	x	x	x	x	
Mimulus cardinalis	Scarlet Monkey Flower		x	x		x(moist)
Mirabilis multiflora	Colorado Four O' Clock		x	x	x	x
Muhlenbergia emerslyi	El Toro™	x	x	x	x	
Muhlenbergia rigida	Nashville™	x	x	x	x	
Nassella tenuissima	Mexican Feather Grass	x	x	x	x	
Oenothera spp.	Evening Primrose	x	x	x	x	
Penstemon pseudospectabilis	Canyon Penstemon		x	x		x
Penstemon parryi	Parry Penstemon	x	x	x		x
Perovskia atriplicifolia	Russian Sage		x	x	x	
Poliomintha maderensis	Lavender Spice™	x	x			x
Psilostrophe cooperi	Paper Flower	x	x		x	
Psilostrophe tagentina	Paper Flower	x	x	x	x	
Rosmarinus officinalis 'Huntington Carpet'	Prostrate Rosemary	x	x		x	
Ruellia brittoniana	Ruellia	x			x	x
Russelia equisetiformis	Coral Fountain	x			x	x
Salvia leucantha	Mexican Bush Sage	x	x		x	x
Sphaeralcea ambigua	Louis Hamilton™	x	x	x	x	
Sphaeralcea ambigua	Papago Pink™	x	x	x	x	
Sphagneticola trilobata	Yellow Dot	x			x	x
Tetranneuris acaulis	Angelita Daisy	x	x	x	x	
Teucrium chamaedrys 'Prostratum'	Dwarf Germander	x	x	x	x	
Thymophylla pentachaeta	Golden Dogweed	x	x		x	
Verbena spp.	Verbena	x	x		x	
Zauschneria californica	California Honeysuckle	x	x	x	x	x
Zephyranthes candida	White Rain Lily	x	x	x	x	x
Zephyranthes x 'Prairie Sunset'	Rain Lily	x	x	x	x	x
Zinnia acerosa	Desert Zinnia	x	x	x	x	
Zinnia grandiflora	Prairie Zinnia		x	x	x	

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