



The Arizona Herb Association

March 2026

A Publication for Members & Friends

<https://azherb.org>

Dear Herbies,

What's your favorite season or month of the year? March is a strong contender, given that temperatures are usually agreeable during the day and cool enough in the mornings and evenings. Perhaps you're growing some cool season crops, or getting ready to plant some seeds or transplants in your garden. My alacrity rises when I see such beautiful plants and vibrant colors at the gardening stores this time of year. So much to plant and so little time!

Whatever you decide for your garden, The Low Desert Herb Gardening Handbook is a treasured resource. You can buy a copy of the book for \$15.00 at our website or at a general meeting. I must admit, I occasionally deliberate soil health while planning my yearly garden. Sure, I'm into plant color, style, shape, and size, but I don't give as much thought to soil additions. Thank goodness that the March section of our handbook lists soil health. Good advice!

Before planting seeds or transplants, consider folding in compost or mulch, plus gypsum and soil sulfur to the existing soil base. Water deeply after incorporating gypsum and soil sulfur. Give your seeds and transplants a head start and improve your chances for a successful garden!

Finally, for those of you that have citrus trees, this year appears to be a bumper crop! I have been juicing for a few days now and can't wait to taste the mixed juice of grapefruit, orange, and tangelo. If the citrus is still in good condition (and hasn't all fallen off the tree yet), I will be bringing some to share with you at the March general meeting.

Kind regards,

Shay Emmers
AHA President



Calendar

March 2026

Thursday, March 5: General Meeting
Location: MCC Extension; Time: 7:00 p.m.
Topic: Australian Plants for your Landscape
Speaker: Rebecca Senior
Herb of the Month: Fennel Pollen
Presenter: Alisha O'Hara

Saturday, March 7: Weed & Feed
Time: 8:00 a.m.

DBG Spring Plant Sale
Thursday, March 13: Member's Day
Friday, March 14– Sunday, March 16
Time: 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Reservations required

Boyce Thompson Arboretum Spring Plant Sale
Friday, March 14 – Member Preview Sale
Saturday, March 15 – Sunday, March 30
Time: 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Saturday, March 21: Culinary Event
Theme: A Culinary Color Party
Host: Janet Coleman

Wear the color of the food you bring!
Details & Sign-up at <https://azherb.org>

Saturday, March 21: MG Spring Plant Sale
Location: MCC Extension
Time: 9:00 a.m. to noon

Saturday, March 28: Wildflower Walk
Location: Utery Mountain Regional Park
Additional information on page 8
Sign-up at <https://azherb.org>

April 2026

Thursday, April 2: General Meeting
Location: MCC Extension; Time: 7:00 p.m.
Topic: Culinary Remedies
Speaker: Herbalist JoAnn Sanchez
Herb of the Month: Ginkgo Biloba
Presenter: April Lillard

Saturday, April 4: Weed & Feed
Time: 7:30 a.m.

Saturday, April 16: Culinary Event
Theme: A Taste of Your Favorite Vacation
Hosts: Susan & Eric Adamczyk
Sign-up at <https://azherb.org>

March 2026 General Meeting

Join us at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 5, for a look at Australian plants that work well in our desert landscapes. Popular speaker Rebecca Senior will explore the fascinating *Eremophila* genus — Australia's tough, long-blooming shrubs and groundcovers that bring color, texture, and wildlife value to gardens.



These hardy “emu bushes” thrive in hot, dry conditions and are excellent hummingbird and pollinator magnets. Rebecca will also highlight a few standout small Eucalyptus species that are proving useful beyond the Aussie outback and into water-wise landscapes here at home.

Rebecca Senior is a local horticultural educator and ISA certified arborist on a mission to promote the use and proper care of beautiful low water use landscape plants. Retired in 2024 from the University of Arizona's Maricopa County Cooperative Extension, she has over twenty years' experience in landscapes, plants, and public education through roles at the UofA and ten years at the Desert Botanical Garden. Rebecca loves working with Herbies and Master Gardeners.

Do you have fennel growing in your garden? Do you make use of the fennel pollen? Before you pull those fennel bulbs, come learn from Herb of the Month Chairperson Alisha O'Hara as she tells us about fennel pollen as our March Herb of the Month.



Bring your enthusiasm, a friend, and some food to share at our meeting break. A recipe or list of ingredients is most helpful to those with dietary concerns. **A reminder to please bring your own plate and utensils. Pack them up now so you don't forget.**

If you can't attend in person, you can join us via Zoom at the link below.
Meeting begins at approximately 7:00 p.m.

Join Zoom Meeting Link (for February through December general meetings):

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85141170155?pwd=2bEbsoHmiH0kevN1sMvablfM8j45qG.1>

Meeting ID: 851 4117 0155
Passcode: 383611



February General Meeting Review

Provisions, Pleasures and Poisons of the Sonoran Desert

By Ken G. Sweat, PhD

At our January meeting, Dr. Sweat, Professor at Arizona State University's West Campus and Senior Global Futures Scientist discussed plants that have been used for food, in religious



ceremonies and as poisons for centuries by people in our Sonoran desert.

From highly nutritious mesquite beans to hallucinogenic and often fatal sacred *Datura*, he explored various uses of the local plants by both native and modern cultures. These plants served as calories, cures and characters in their tribal legends.

Provisions

Using references, including the book "Gathering the Desert" by Gary Paul Nabhan, Dr. Sweat explained that the Gila River Indian Community, the Ak-Chin Indians, the Salt River Pima-Maricopa tribes and the Tohono O'odham peoples were living in the Sonoran Desert when the Europeans arrived. They found the native people using **Saguaro** ribs they called *Kui:pud* to harvest ripe fruit from the saguaro cactus. The saguaro fruit could be made into jam or cooked and thickened into a syrup (*sitol*) that was poured on mesquite flour pancakes. More importantly, a wine called *na:we* was made by boiling the fruit. It is used in ceremonies to pray for good rainfall so the desert will flourish. The saguaro is an "indicator plant for the Sonoran Desert and most activities for these ancient cultures happened within two days walk of this cactus."¹



The ripe fruit called "tuna" or "cactus apple" of the **Englemann prickly pear**, *Opuntia engelmannii*, were also eaten, along with the young cactus pads called "nopales" which taste a bit

like green beans. Additionally, the Cochineal insect that exudes a white substance on the cactus pads and produces carminic acid (used as a bright red, stable dye) was taken back to Britain and Spain and became a globally traded commodity. This highly coveted dye medium was used to make colorful

robes for the religious clergy and for coloring the "red coat" uniforms the British wore in our Revolutionary War. At that time, colorful clothing was only for royalty.

One of the primary food staples was that of **Mesquite**, *Prosopis*, which grew in a *bosque*—a closed-canopy floodplain forest of mesquite trees. Dr. Sweat mentioned that 120 years ago, Casa Grande was surrounded by one such *bosque* of mesquite. Andrés Pérez de Ribas at the start of the seventeenth century said he witnessed, "a principal form of sustenance in its season is the pod of a tree which is called mesquite. These pods, when ground to a powder, they drink it mixed with water. This drink, being somewhat sweet, is to the people what carob is to the Spaniards."²

The wood of the trees was used for charcoal to flavor steaks. Padre Eusebio Kino began breeding Spanish Criollo cattle in the Sonora area in the 1680's. These were some of the hardiest cattle in the world. They browsed on the leaves and pods of



many shrub species, including mesquite. Mesquite trees benefitted from having their seeds eaten by cows and horses, because "cow pies" left behind served as

fertilizer for the seeds. As many as 1,600 germinable mesquite seeds have been found in a single cow pie.

Velvet mesquite, *Prosopis velutina*, and Screwbean mesquite, *Prosopis pubescens*, were two species Dr. Sweat mentioned as more important than grains for some native cultures. The mesquite is in the Fabaceae family, formerly known as Leguminosae. The beans were ground on metates, even one found worn into the rock on Tempe Butte.

The indigenous people also grew corn (**Zea Maize**). This maize was domesticated from a grass called Teosinte and selected through history for taste and size of kernels.

Traditional practice was to eat the corn treated with lime from limestone or with juniper ash, a process which released niacin (Vitamin B3). Thus, the disease pellagra, with its symptoms of inflamed skin, diarrhea, dementia, and sores in the mouth, was avoided. Pellagra outbreaks followed the introduction of maize into Europe, as the traditional method of processing the corn was not brought back to the Old World along with the corn.



In addition to corn, other staple foodstuffs grown in the Sonoran Desert were **squashes**, *Cucurbita sp.* and **tepary beans**, *Phaseolus acutifolius*. These beans are known for their high protein and fiber content, and thrive in harsh, hot, and dry conditions, making it possible to grow them with minimal water, even only variable and minimal monsoon rains.

Chichicoyotas **gourds** have a horrible taste that does not leave the tongue, so these bitter squash were used historically to wean babies.

Pleasures

Another plant domesticated by indigenous people was Cotton, *Gossypium hirsutum*, with its fibrous ovary providing fiber for cloth. Cotton is an example of a crop that was domesticated in more than one area: Pima cotton in the Sonoran Desert and Egyptian cotton in Asia.

Agaves, a succulent native to the Americas, were a source of starches and used to make a tequila-like drink. Two species of agaves farmed by Hohokam settlements in southern Arizona and northern Sonora, Mexico, are *A. murpheyi* and *A. delamateri*. Other agaves found in the Sonoran Desert include *Agave Americana*, *Agave parryi*, *Agave lecheguilla* and *Agave tequilana*, from which tequila is made.

Dr. Sweat posed the question “How do you make tequila from agaves?” and provided this answer: “Prevent sex!” He explained that for tequila you don’t want the agave to grow a bloom stalk, but rather want all the sugar in the “head” of the plant. Dr. Sweat went on to describe the origins of the fermentation process found in ancient Aztec ruins at Teopanzolco near modern Cuernavaca, Mexico. He mentioned that distillation was done over 3,000 years ago in Mesoamerica before any European contact.

The **Devil’s Claw**, *Proboscidea parviflora*, was used in basketry by the Tohono O’odham and Pima and other varieties, both wild and domesticated, were used by virtually every tribe in the American

southwest and northwestern Mexico.³ Seed pod shape helped with the dispersal of seeds; the seed pod evolved to “latch” onto an animal’s leg. The raw seeds and immature fruit were frequently chewed on by Southwestern Indians.



Chili peppers, chiltepins were part of the Seri creation story. They stimulate the flow of saliva and gastric juices to help digestion.⁴ They are analgesic and relieve gastric flatulence.⁴ While “hot” to mammals, they don’t taste hot to birds!

Poisons

Peyote was used by South American tribes. The United States Government Indian policy facilitated the use of peyote here when they tried to ban Indian practices by introducing tribes to Indian schools. The Indian children “rebelled” by using peyote.

Sacred Datura, is a member of the nightshade family. Alkaloids in the plant disturb cardiac rhythm, corrupt cardiac activity, and stop the heart. Hornworms eat sacred datura.

Locoweed, a poisonous plant disrupts protein synthesis of grazing animals.

Dr. Sweat provided this QR code for those who would like to view his presentation.



- 1“Gathering the Desert,” page 5.
- 2“Gathering the Desert,” page 62.
- 3“Gathering the Desert,” page 138.
- 4“Gathering the Desert,” page 125.

Photo Banner: from left to right, Chris George and Bernie Arnecke represented AHA, selling plants and merchandise at the Master Gardener Tomato Event held February 21; At the February 7 Weed & Feed, Showy Milkweed showed off blooms and seeds, Teri Thorpe got our W&F group going, powdery mildew was evident on the coreopsis, and basil was pruned and ready for volunteers to take home.
Photos by Sandy Cielaszuk

February Herb of the Month

Wood Sorrel

By Rachel Diamant

For our February Herb of the Month, herbie Rachel Diamant introduced us to Wood Sorrel, a plant that grows abundantly well in her yard.

In the genus *Oxalis*, there are over 500 species of sorrel, and, with the exception of the polar regions, there are species which grow worldwide. Examples include:



- Oxalis corniculata*: Creeping Wood-Sorrel, common in Arizona
- Oxalis pes-caprae*: Bermuda Buttercup
- Oxalis acetosella*: European Wood-Sorrel
- Oxalis dillenii*: Slender Yellow Wood-Sorrel
- Oxalis debilis*: Large flower Pink-Sorrel

Distinguishing characteristics of Wood Sorrel leaves and stems:



- Form: Creeping stems up to 8" long; stems root at nodes; have tubers
- Leaves are dark green (sometimes tinged with purple); palmate compound with three notched leaflets up to 1" wide (heart shaped); leaves fold closed at night.

The flowers are golden yellow for most species, with five petals up to 1/2" wide, five sepals, and ten stamens. The fruit of this plant has a capsule-like appearance. These seedpods may contain only a few or up to hundreds of seeds.

This prolific plant is found in Arizona from the lower Sonoran to Conifer Forest Zones.

It is a perennial plant but has a dormant period. In the Sonoran Desert, plants start to come up in late October or early November, depending upon temperatures and rain. Blooms can appear year-round in some climates; in the Phoenix area, the plants are robust from December – April/May in shady, moist areas of lawns and gardens. When temperatures climb into 90's+, the plant dies back; it remains dormant through the hot summer until temperatures drop again in the fall.

Creeping Wood Sorrel is nonnative; the plant was introduced from southeast Asia and can spread and become invasive in your garden.

Rachel described two "look alike" plants that could be confused with Wood Sorrel.

1) White Clover has leaflets that are not deeply notched and not heart shaped. In addition, white clover has compound flowers versus the simple five petal flowers of wood sorrel.

2) Buttercup has pinnately compound leaves versus the palmate compound leaves of wood sorrel. Additionally, Buttercup flowers

have distinctly shiny petals; wood sorrel flowers do not. Buttercup has toxic properties and can cause oral blisters and irritation.

Culinary Uses:

All parts of the wood sorrel are edible, and can be eaten raw or cooked. Leaves have a sour, lemony flavor from the oxalates in the plant tissues. Use as a salad topping, a trail "snack," or for making tea.

Safety Precautions:



The use of this plant is NOT recommended in "high doses" for pregnant women, young children and people with weak kidneys or kidney stones because of the oxalic acid it contains. Seek advice on safe doses from a medical professional. Rachel provided this recipe for **Wood Sorrel/Sour Grass Tea**

Gather wood sorrel leaves.

Place the leaves in a container and add boiling water (1:3 ratio).

Let it steep for 5 to 15 minutes. Strain, sweeten to taste. Optional: add ice.

Medicinal Uses:

This plant contains ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) and is rich in Vitamin A as well as antioxidants. Native



Americans traditionally used Wood Sorrel leaves, chewing them to alleviate nausea, mouth sores, and sore throats. Leaves were also brewed into a tea to combat fevers, scurvy, and urinary infections and fashioned into poultices to treat sores and ulcers.

References:

Epple, A., & Epple, L. (2021). *Plants of Arizona* (3rd edition). Guilford, CN: Falcon Guides.
Feral Foraging: <https://feralforaging.com/wood-sorrel/>
Native American Ethnobotany: <http://naeb.brit.org/>

Honey Lemon Ginger Tea Tonic

On February 13th, I spoke at the Washington Garden Club on Native Tea Plants. I was delighted by a tea shared at their meeting. Their President, Dana, had prepared it to give to her garden club member Kristi earlier in the week, who had not been feeling well. Kristi got better and made this tea for the Washingtonians to try. She served it warm in small teapots we shared. It is a healthful and VERY tasty tea. Mike Hills, you can use some of your raw honey stash for this recipe!

Honey Lemon Ginger Turmeric Cold Killer Tea

Prep Time 5 minutes, Total Time 15 Minutes

Easy to make and highly effective, this recipe combines honey, lemon juice, ginger, and turmeric to help you feel better fast. This will make two servings, save the second in the refrigerator for just before bedtime.

- 1/2 cup honey, preferably raw unfiltered and as a local as possible
- 1/2 cup lemon juice, fresh squeezed is best
- Zest from one lemon
- 1 – 2 tablespoons freshly grated ginger
- 1 – 1-1/2 tablespoons fresh ground turmeric
- Fresh ground black pepper to taste

1. Mix all ingredients together.
2. Heat enough water for a couple of cups of tea.
3. Add half of the mixture to a tea strainer, steep in hot water for 4 - 6 minutes.
4. Remove strainer with ginger pulp, or let the ginger steep for another 5 minutes then remove.

By Lee Ann Aronson

Must-Have American Dishes Culinary Event February 1, 2026

At our inaugural 2026 culinary potluck, held on February 1, the evening was a celebration of beloved, go-to dishes — the kind you make for

friends, family, and special gatherings — with a meaningful twist.

Finn, Liz and Dan Lonetti's foreign exchange student, was the featured guest and members were asked to help gather a collection of must-have recipes for Finn to take back to Germany. Finn loves to cook and was excited to taste our Herbie dishes so he can share these American favorites with his parents and grandparents when he returns home.

Everything was delicious, but the top three were my Cranberry Apple Casserole, "Spinach" Dip made with home-grown chard and corn, and Mesquite Cornbread!



Must Have American Dishes Culinary at the Lonetti's
Photo by Dan Lonetti

Our next culinary is February 21 when we will celebrate a "Taste of India" with Diane and Chris Knudsen.

Drew Templeton
Culinary Chair

Spinach Corn Dip

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil (EVOO)
- 10 ounces baby spinach (or chard)
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 2 cups corn kernels (from 2 cobs or thawed from frozen)
- 1/2 to 1 jalapeño (or 1/2 to 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper)
- Handful basil leaves, roughly chopped



8 ounces cream cheese, cut into 1-inch pieces
 1/2 cup sour cream
 3 ounces fresh mozzarella, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
 1/2 cup grated pecorino or Parmesan cheese
 1 to 2 limes, halved
 Pita chips, flatbread, crusty baguette or corn chips for serving

Heat a medium 10" to 11" ovenproof skillet over medium heat. When hot, drizzle with 1 tablespoon of oil and then add the spinach leaves, a few handfuls at a time, adding in more as it wilts, and toss until all the leaves have wilted. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Stir and press the spinach to release as much liquid as possible, and cook about 3 to 4 minutes until most of the liquid has evaporated (no need to drain it).

Reduce the heat to medium-low. Drizzle the spinach with the remaining 1 tablespoon of EVOO, add the garlic and stir for 1 minute. Fold in the corn, jalapeño, basil, cream cheese, sour cream and mozzarella. Cook, stirring until the cheeses melt and the mixture is thick and creamy, about 3 to 4 minutes.

Top with pecorino; place the skillet in the oven and broil on high until golden and bubbly, 4 to 5 minutes. (Watch it closely to prevent burning.) Allow it to sit for 2 to 3 minutes. Squeeze the lime juice over to taste and serve.

Served by Elizabeth Trembath-Reichert, who used fresh chard from her garden instead of spinach

Drew's Cranberry-Apple Casserole

Serves 10-12



I make this so often, from October through December, that I buy extra cranberries by the bag when they first come on sale and toss them in the freezer. This way you are always ready to mix this up. Great side dish or as a dessert.

Filling:

4 cups unpeeled, cored, chopped apples (I mix Granny Smith with red apples such as MacIntosh or Rome. DO NOT USE "Red Delicious" or it won't be delicious).

1 bag cranberries Note: If you cannot get cranberries, pitted tart cherries would be a good substitute.

1 cup sugar

Mix fruit with sugar till well coated. If using frozen cranberries, don't bother to thaw them out. Put into a large greased casserole or 13"x9" baking dish.

Topping:

1 cup brown sugar

1 cup flour

3 cups oatmeal

1 cup pecans, broken into pieces

1 teaspoon salt

1 stick of butter, melted

Mix dry ingredients, then blend with melted butter. Spread topping over fruit. Bake at 350° for 1 hour.

Note: don't worry too much about the amount of fruit. If you have a BIG casserole or baking dish, you can do up to four big apples and a bag and a half of cranberries with the original amount of sugar.

Prepared by Drew Templeton



Mesquite Cornbread

3/4 cup each cornmeal and all-purpose flour

3/8 to 1/2 cup mesquite meal

2 teaspoons baking powder

1/2 teaspoon each baking soda and salt

1 cup soy milk

2 eggs

1/4 cup honey

3 tablespoons oil or 1/4 cup butter

Combine dry ingredients. Combine the wet ingredients and stir into the dry until just mixed. Spread into greased 8" x 8" pan. Bake 20-25 minutes at 350°. Test for Doneness: the cornbread is finished when the top is golden brown and a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. For a southwestern kick add 1 tablespoon chipolté powder (smoked jalapeño) and 3/4 cup fresh or frozen corn kernels.

Prepared by Bernie Arnecke for Feb. 1, 2026 culinary

Taste of India Culinary Event February 21, 2026

Article by Diane Knudsen, Photos by Todd Templeton



On Saturday, February 21, seventeen herbies gathered at Diane and Chris Knudsen's home to savor the Tastes of India. It was a beautiful evening, with unseasonably warm weather.

Hazel and Les Davis brought an appetizer, Cucumber Raita with Pita. They also brought a Chaat Fruit

Salad that included Chaat Masala and cilantro.

Kathy Eastman made a colorful Radish, Red Onion and Pomegranate Salad. Nancy and Jerry Greenberg made Baingan Bharta Masala, an eggplant dish. Pam Schuler's dish was Chicken Tikka Masala. Vi Le and Haley brought Paneer Aloo Gobi, a hearty cauliflower, potato and tomato curry.

Chris and Diane Knudsen made Indian-Style Curry with Potatoes, Cauliflower, Peas and Chickpeas. Their friends, Helen and Brian Maxwell, prepared Murgh Makhani (Indian Butter Chicken) with Rice. Chris and Gary Lueck cooked Tadka Dhal, a hearty lentil stew, as well as a dessert – Gajar ka Halwa, a carrot and cardamom pudding. Donna and Keith Lorch brought a dessert, Rasmalai, made with soft cheese patties in a sweetened creamy milk sauce. They also brought Nankhatai, traditional Indian shortbread cookies.

The group was enthused about exploring new recipes, especially since they are chock full of spices and flavor. The top three dishes were Baingan Bharta Masala Eggplant Dip from Nancy Greenberg, Nankhatai Biscuits from Donna Lorch, and Butter Chicken with Rice from Helen and Brian Maxwell (Diane's friends and soon to be new members).



You can find the recipe for Murgh Makhani (Indian Butter Chicken) made by the Maxwells at the link below

<https://wskg.org/episodes/2021-04-30/americas-test-kitchen-murgh-makhani-ep-2113>

Donna Lorch's Nankhatai, Indian shortbread cookie recipe can be found at the link below. Donna commented that she made her own ghee and powdered sugar for use in the recipe.



<https://spicesnflavors.com/nankhatai-recipe/>



Nancy Greenberg's recipe for Baingan Bharta Masala can be found at

<https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1014830-baingan-bharta?smid=ck-recipe-iOS-share&cqs=c>

Wildflower Hike at Usery Mountain Regional Park

Join us on Saturday, March 28, 2026, for a wildflower hike at Usery Mountain Regional Park, led by Herbie Rachel Diamant. Come explore what is blooming in the desert and then join fellow Herbies for a picnic lunch.



We will meet at the Visitor's Center at 8:30 a.m. Wear sturdy close-toed shoes and comfortable, loose-fitting clothes. As always, bring water, a hat and sunscreen; add snacks for the hike and a picnic lunch and beverage for afterwards.

There may be an entry fee, unless you have a Maricopa County Parks annual day-use entry pass.

Welcome New AHA Members

Jane Haynes Scholarship Recipient:
Liane Reid
Zip Code: 85296

Becki Anderson
Zip Code: 85142

Jeannie Beeff
Zip Code: 85013

Esteve Giraud
Zip Code: 85014

Diane Knudsen, Membership Chair



Diane Knudsen and Sandy Cielaszyk worked on cutting back the asparagus plants, while Kathy Eastman, Elizabeth Trembath-Reichert, and Quin Lonetti worked on removing grass and various weeds from the bulb garden. Rain lily bulbs were thinned, and there may be some available for sale at our association events.

Milkweed seeds were collected. Some seedpods were “bagged” and a monarch caterpillar was spotted on the showy milkweed. Seeds from the potted tree tobacco were removed to prevent the plant from spreading.



A monarch caterpillar was observed on a branch of the showy milkweed, with the opening milkweed seedpod behind it.

Photo by Stuart Mecklar



Quin Lonetti removed seed pods from the potted tree tobacco.

Photo by Liz Lonetti

Weed & Feed February 7, 2026

With Pam Perry and Mike Hills both home “under the weather,” Teri Thorpe stepped up to welcome herbies and master gardeners to February’s Weed & Feed. Housekeeping items were addressed, attendees were encouraged to visit the AFGC website to participate in the sustainability challenge, tasks for the morning were noted, and the morning’s volunteers went to work.

Inside the Palo Verde room, Katherine Tarr set out plants and seeds for sale. Bernie Arnecki set out materials needed for volunteers to package seeds for future sales. There was a discussion of seeds needed; we have plenty of sacred datura seeds, but might need more calendula.



Outdoors, groups got busy with the morning’s tasks. Perry Green worked on pruning the second pomegranate tree. Ron Brennan did a bit of pruning on the twisted myrtle and the moringa trees. It was recommended that we wait on

cutting back the queen’s wreath vine since that was pruned way back last August after the trellis went down in a wind storm and needed to be set back in place.

We gathered afterwards in the Palo Verde room for conversation and snacks. Donna Lorch brought dark bread and delicious egg salad; others brought a nice variety of snacks and fruit.

Join us next month on Saturday, March 7, for another Weed & Feed workday.

By Sandy Cielaszyk

You won’t want to miss our April meeting when Herbie and Herbalist JoAnn Sanchez will speak on culinary remedies. She will walk us through the process, ingredients, and best practices for preparing simple, supportive culinary preparations designed for everyday wellness.

Mark April 2 on your calendar now.

Flower Power: The Mighty Saguaro

Mother Nature has gifted Arizona with the Saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*). As the largest cactus in the United States, this slow growing-giant, which can reach 50 feet in height, graces the earth for upward of 150 to 200 years or more. Living exclusively in the Sonoran Desert, the plant has earned the nickname "Guardian of the Desert" - not just because of its longevity, but also due to its culinary and medicinal properties. We are talking about flower power.



Saguaro blooms in May
Photo by Lee Ann Aronson

Sparked by lengthening daylight, warming days and winter rain, white blossoms 3 inches in diameter circle crown-like at the tips of the saguaro stem and arms beginning as early as April, with peak season usually from late May to early June. Each bloom lasts for less than a day, but the cactus produces many blooms throughout its season. Bats, moths, white wing doves and bees are drawn to the melon-like flower fragrance, and, through pollination, trigger the blossoms to create an average of 150 bright red fruits, egg-shaped in size and form, which mature June through July.

Let the good times roll; during the hottest time of the year, many desert dwellers are ready to party with the sweet mild flavored fruit as the main course. When ripe, the fruit explodes like popcorn, offering as many as 2000 tiny seeds for the taking. Guests interested in this nourishing and free source of food and moisture include finches, woodpeckers, bats, tortoises, javelinas, coyotes, and humans.

Saguaro fruits are a renowned delicacy among the tribes of the United States and Mexico. During the dry time prior to the monsoon, Southeastern Yavapai, River Pima, and Tohono O'odham People

depended on the saguaro as a primary source of food.

Tohono O'odham, monsoon, and saguaro fruit have been joined in partnership for a very long 'time. Due to the simultaneous arrival of the monsoon and the ripened fruit, the Tohono O'odham created a sweet syrup to make ceremonial wine marking the beginning of the agricultural season.

Aside from the spiritual significance, sweet edible pulp is a perfect ingredient for fruit preserves, wine, and jams. The fruit can be eaten fresh or sun-dried to be preserved. The pulp, which is very high in protein, can be dried into cakes and the seeds ground into flour. Even [recipes for delicious soup](#) exist.

The buds and fruit of the giant cactus provide not just food sources, but also nutritious medicinal superpowers. Watch out wrinkles, fine lines and dark spots. The antioxidants overflowing with Vitamin C in the buds and fruit protect humans from free radicals that produce aging. Our gums, teeth and hearts also benefit from this vitamin C.

Fruit and buds are vegetarian friendly. Normally meat products are needed to access Vitamin B, but plentiful amounts of Vitamin B 12 make up the fruit and buds of the saguaro. Vitamin B, complements of saguaro fruit, also has been linked to stroke prevention and maintenance of the overall health of the nervous system.

Dehydration, always a danger in the arid desert, can be countered through hydration provided by the fruit of the saguaro. The high concentration of water in the saguaro fruit can put cucumbers, watermelon and other produce with high water content to shame. Many [health benefits](#) have been attributed to the saguaro fruit.



Saguaros standing guard over the Sonoran desert.

Photo by Lee Ann Aronson

Given the benefits of the buds, seeds and fruit of the saguaro, we can say with great confidence that this cactus is truly the Guardian of the Desert and its inhabitants.

Kathleen McCoy
Herbie, Master Gardener, Master Naturalist

Saying Goodbye to our Herbie Friends

Cheri Czaplicki

I love this March 12, 2016 photo of Cherie Czaplicki in her element at a Master Gardener Real People for Real Gardens tour sharing her Master Gardener container gardening information.



Cherie was on the AHA Board of Directors in 2007 and 2008. Cherie and Jon also liked to host culinary events. Their June 14, 2008 theme “Summer Salads, West Coast Wines & Decadent Desserts” speaks to both their love of food and always an amazing time spent wandering in Cherie’s garden – this time sipping west coast wines, homemade Sangria and Jamaican Hibiscus tea.

Cheri was featured in a November 1999 column in the Arizona Republic’s Home section for her garden. We recently learned from Donna Lorch that Cheri and Jon had both passed, Cheri in January of 2025 and then Jon in December of 2025.

—Lee Ann Aronson

“She and Jon, were such an accomplished, friendly, accommodating and delightful couple.”

-- Donna Lorch

Jim DiMaria



This photo is from the June 15, 2012 culinary event co-hosted by Jim and Julie DiMaria and Barbara and Tom Freehill. Their theme was “Good Old

Summertime” and was described as a cross between an old fashioned “progressive dinner” and a summer potluck. The families lived just across the street. There were appetizers and beverages at the DiMaria’s, then dinner served at the Freehill’s, followed by dessert back at the DiMaria’s.

Jim loved cooking and in the September 2012 newsletter shared his recipe and tips for his cherry cheesecake. One tip included using his heat gun to

release the cheesecake from the bottom of his springform pan. He inverted it on a serving dish for cutting so his pan bottom did not get cuts from serving cheesecake on it. He also served a Cornbread Casserole that evening and he won two out of three best recipes that night!

Our December 13, 2015 holiday party at the Valley Garden Center featured fun, food and chilies galore (2016’s Herb of the Year), including a chili cookoff with four varieties of chili, made by Todd Templeton, Jim DiMaria, Mike Hills and Vee Jacques.



Jim DiMaria was voted the chili champ!
Photos this page by Lee Ann Aronson

Chef Jim’s Award-Winning Chili

1 pound lean ground beef (95%)
1 small sweet onion; chopped
1 can Bush’s dark red kidney beans; 14.5 ounces
1 can Campbell’s tomato soup
1 can Bush’s seasoned black beans; 16 ounces
1 can Ranch Style pinto beans with jalapenos
1 can stewed tomatoes; 14.5 ounces
1 tablespoon garlic salt
1/4 teaspoon chili seasoning
Holy moly peppers (however many you choose to use. I used about 8 medium pepper, with seeds and veins to taste)

Sauté ground beef until well cooked. Drain grease; add onions; sauté till onions are lucent. Without draining; empty all the canned items into a large Dutch oven or heavy pot. Heat pot on low; add meat mixture. Add salt and chili seasonings.

Clean and chop peppers, removing seeds and veins. Add to pot. Add seeds and veins (to taste) for desired heat. Cook for about 4 hours, being careful not to burn the bottom. If you do burn the bottom...start all over!

“I’m so sorry. He was a very special person I will always keep him in my heart. My sincerest condolences to Julie.” —Beatriz Cohen

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“There is no problem on earth that can’t be ameliorated by a hot bath and a cup of tea.” –
--Jasper Fforde