

the dirt



SUMMER 2022 GARDENING NEWSLETTER

Captivating cactus.

Drought tolerance comes naturally to these delightful favorites

Succulents are very popular, but did you know that the cactus—one of 60 families in this group—has a strong following, too? Its fanciful forms and striking blossoms appear in more unthirsty gardens than ever.

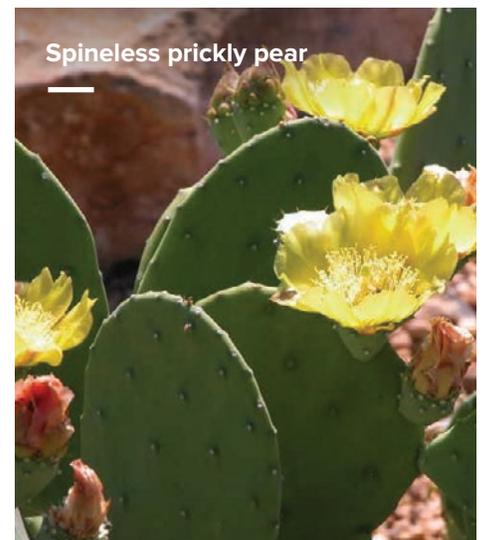
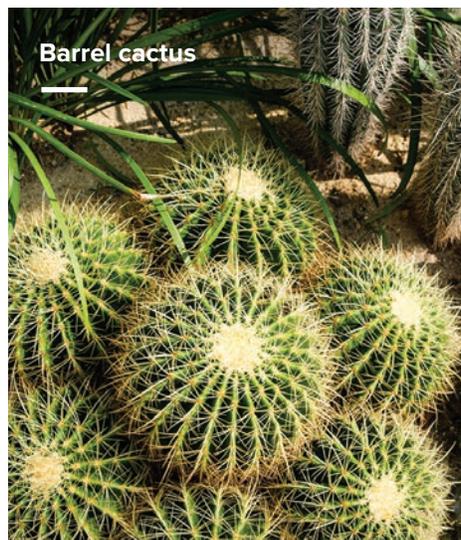
What distinguishes cactuses from the larger group of succulents are their areoles—bumps or holes that hold spines or hair. Cactus spines trap atmospheric moisture, catch rainfall, and absorb or reflect sunlight to moderate the plants' temperature. The areoles also sprout cactus-flower buds and stems.

There are more than 1,300 species in the cactus family. Many grow well, with little watering, in SoCal gardens. Their

shallow roots collect surface moisture from what sparse rainfall may occur. Cactuses need sunlight but won't tolerate "wet feet." They should be planted in well-drained soil and grouped with other low-water-use plants.

Among their myriad varieties, these three stand out for their distinctive appearance:

- **Dragon fruit** is an exotic cactus tree with edible, nutritious, flaming-pink-colored fruit. Its hanging stems grow fast—and can be trained to climb like vines.
- The **barrel cactus** has striking round forms covered in tight rows of yellow spines. It is extremely well-adapted to strong sunshine and cool nights.
- **Spineless prickly pears** grow large, bright yellow blossoms in the summer that attract hummingbirds and produce bright red fruits called tunas.



Irrigation transformation.



Andrew Chase

Andrew Chase | Director of Water Management

Andrew Chase, Director of Water Management for landscape consulting firm Monarch Environmental, is the ultimate irrigation makeover artist, transforming wasteful systems into cutting-edge networks of efficiency. “Our customers are willing to go the extra mile to be the top dog,” he says. “They want to be the best.”

You’ve spent 26 years helping people save water on their landscapes. What improvements have you seen in that time?

Chase: Smart irrigation controllers have made a dramatic difference when programmed correctly. When it comes to reducing waste from atomization, pressure-regulating spray bodies can save up to a gallon of water per minute per nozzle. Drip irrigation can also save a lot of water but the lines need to be flushed after a repair, and watch for potential clogs.

What behavior changes are you seeing?

Chase: There’s been a dramatic shift away from “reactive” irrigation. When you replace sprinkler heads with mismatched nozzles, or crank them down, the system distributes water unevenly and people end up watering longer because they have a dry spot. I still see that a lot, but not as often as before.

Monarch’s focus is on large landscapes like HOAs and commercial properties. What savings have you achieved working on a scale that large?

Chase: A community we started working with in December used 9,700 CCF in April 2021 and we were at 4,040 CCF for the same period this year. In terms of dollars, the community was often in Tier 4 usage and their monthly water bill went from \$21,500 to just \$7,000. We’re really excited about that.

How has the drought affected your work?

Chase: Climate change makes efficiency tools more important. Over the last six years, we’ve seen irrigation requirements rise significantly, and we’re encouraging clients to take advantage of turf and irrigation rebate programs to help supplement the costs of landscape upgrades.



Impressive water savings with sprinklers running, before and after irrigation upgrades by Monarch.

Heart-leaved penstemon,
Keckiella cordifolia

Shoot for new heights!

A mix of tall and low-lying plants creates 'landing zones' perfect for pollinators.

White blossom ceanothus towers over lower-lying tufts of bee's bliss blooms—creating a vertical biosphere that draws birds, butterflies, bees and other tiny creatures to a garden.

Height adds an important dimension to any landscape. It enhances visual interest, and provides a mix of elevated spaces where pollinators and other species can feed, get a drink, seek shelter, or scope out their environment.

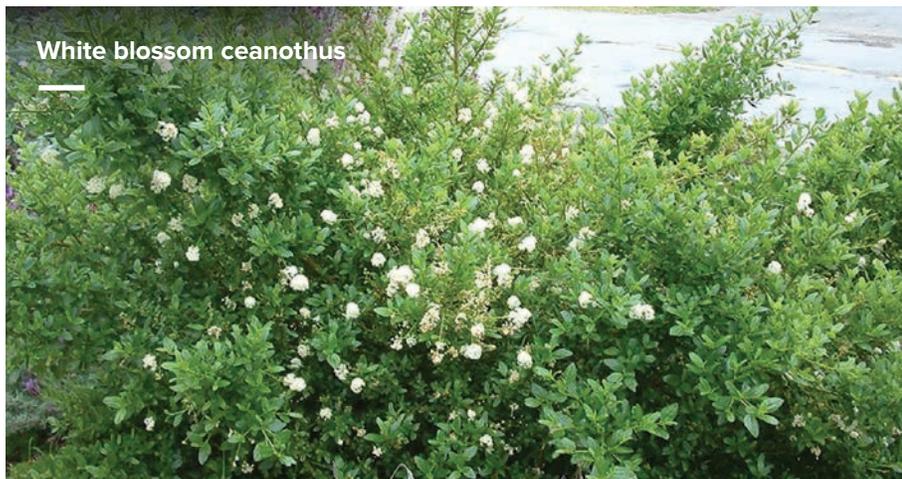
This includes not only the stature of plants, but hardscape elements such as stone, rocks and decorative branches.

Biologists call these perpendicular perches "stratification," but we refer to them as "landing zones."

It's an important aspect to landscape design that we address in Episode 1 of IRWD's new video series, The Shed Show, so be sure to check it out. You can also search through a variety of plant options at our website, rightscaperesources.com/plants.php.



Bee's bliss sage



White blossom ceanothus



Check out The Shed Show!

IRWD's fun and informative new video series—starring landscape guru Juan Garcia—features everything you need to know about creating a beautiful landscape without wasting water. Visit IRWD.com/ShedShow to watch Episode 1 about creating your own pollinator garden!



IRWD landscape guru Juan Garcia hams it up talking about landing zones in The Shed Show.



Juan's tip of the season.

Beat the summer heat

While tending your garden, take care of yourself, too.

Begin by working in the cool morning hours—but as the sun sets in, be cautious and wear protective gear. Breathable long-sleeved shirts and loosely fitted pants can protect your arms and legs from sunburn, scrapes and scratches. Otherwise, be sure to use plenty of sunblock and a knee pad, if needed.

Stay hydrated by drinking lots of water. Keep a hat close by, wear comfortable footwear, and protect your hands by wearing gloves. Other gear like cooling towels, fans and sunglasses can help, too. Happy gardening!

Participate in our webinars and community events

July 13 | Noon | Composting 101

Join us for a webinar presentation with UCCE Master Gardeners of OC, addressing traditional composting and vermicomposting (using worms). Sign up at RightScape.com/events.

July 13 | 6 p.m. | Tap Water 101

Want to learn more about your drinking water? This webinar is a special opportunity to meet IRWD's water quality experts and ask them questions. Sign up at RightScape.com/events.

Aug. 17 | Noon | Control Your Controller

Learn how basic irrigation timer programming concepts and landscape techniques will help you save water and money. Sign up at RightScape.com/events.

Looking ahead.

Your garden to-do list

- **June – Compost, then sweep:** When pruning trees and shrubs, compost your trimmings instead of putting them in the green waste. When you're done, use a broom to clean up your hardscape.
- **July – Mulch:** Replenish bare planting areas with 3 inches of mulch to save water and suppress weeds. It also breaks down and helps build up healthy soil. A little goes a long way!
- **August – Plan for planting:** If you're looking to remove or add plants to your landscape, now's the time to start planning. Begin working on your plant list in time for fall planting.

Tap our online resources

Visit IRWD.com/rightscape for rebates to help offset the cost of turf removal, weather-based irrigation controllers, efficient sprinkler heads, drip kits and more. Plus, check out our plant database at RightScapeResources.com.

Need to contact IRWD?

Customer Service: 949-453-5300

Email: CustomerService@IRWD.com

Website: IRWD.com

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