

# *Sacramento Garden Notes*

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*Written & Published  
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## **But that doesn't grow here and other reasons there are exceptions to the "rules":**

When I first started growing Angels Trumpets here over 20 years ago at 18<sup>th</sup> & W in midtown, many nurseries said they wouldn't grow here, period.

Why? Because since they wouldn't stay evergreen year round like in the bay area but would often frost back, they assumed they wouldn't.

Yet, many people (not all) with the right conditions or willing to take the extra care to protect them, do fine with them.



Above, Pink Angels Trumpets (*Brugmansia x Insignis Pink*) in bloom in early November with *Brugmansia* 'Charles Grimwaldi' top of next column.

This past year, I've watched a few plants while walking the dogs in the next neighborhood, that also fall under that category.. and I'd like to explain why I think that is true.

One is a variety of tropical Hibiscus that froze to the ground last winter but came back like gang busters the second the weather warmed up and is a 4 ft by 4 ft shrub now.

Why did this tropical survive and regrow? I think there are several reasons. First it is in front of the house in a Southern exposure. Second is obviously the lower stems were planted below ground ( many propagators don't put enough node underground, but use surface cuttings (more cuts per plant that way), which means unless you plant down there is nothing for a plant to return from, allowing protected growth buds to return from, and third was the drought.

The low winter rain fall prevented a major cause of loss of tropicals in winter.. rotting of the roots. It is also possible, with all the new hybridizing being done, this one variety is more cold tolerant than others.

I still don't recommend the tropical Hibiscus types.. and even this specimen may not make it over a normally wet winter, but it does go to show that with the correct spot (microclimate) that even items that die for

99% of people who try them can make it.

Another example of something said not to grow here is the bush Poinciana below.



Again it froze to the ground last winter with our 25 degree freeze but came back and bloomed from May to when the pic was taken on November 17<sup>th</sup>.

Again it is on a southwestern corner of the house, right up against it and is surrounded by driveway on 2 sides. The picture below shows the old stems from last season at the base of the plant.



Seeing this "it doesn't grow here" plant made me do a bunch of online research, and it turns out some varieties are hardy in USDA zone 8, plus there are a lot of new hybrids between types. Considering many areas of Sacramento are USDA

zone 8, or even 9 in warmer spots, it would seem the "common" knowledge is wrong and it can be grown here. The picture below shows its size on Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>. Blooming is slowing due to recent cooler temps, so it isn't as spectacular as earlier, but it is still blooming.



So maybe some of the "common knowledge" needs another look since Sacramento is warmer than the surrounding suburbs. Especially since this plant is drought resistant and loves hot sun. Its botanic name is *Caesalpinia pulcherrima* and there are several hybrid color forms I'm trying for next year.

### **Things to do now –**

Rose pruning starts in mid December and runs through early February, though if you wait too long they may already have started new growth, since this usually occurs by late January here.

While pruning roses, you can take cuttings. Some people use rooting hormone, some don't but I would encourage removing the leaves from cuttings since they tend to fall from the cuttings anyway and the dropped leaves mold. Put cuttings into pots in a good potting soil or into the ground and keep them moist but not wet.

If you need to move plants, December can be a good time. Most items are dormant, the weather is cool and damp but usually not as wet as January and February. Plus root growth on many hardy

plants resumes in late December or early January allowing a good long rooting in period before the dry heat of summer.

Perennials can be divided now, for the same reasons.

Keep watch on the 7 day weather forecast, since frost/freeze warnings are often not put out till a few hours before, its better if you have some advance warning to prepare at protecting tender items.

Remember to watch plants under eaves, in pots, under patios and such, since they dry out even in wet weather. It is easy to forget them and lose them from drying out.

Bare root plants and Spring Planted bulbs come into the nurseries and retailers towards the end of the month or right after New Years.

The best selection (and best condition) is right after they come in, however some items are cold sensitive and should be held in a cool, dry location until warm weather.

Caldium is very cold sensitive and takes temperatures in the upper 70's to mid 80's to sprout well. So this item is best started indoors.

Dahlias aren't as sensitive, but waiting till mid Feb or later to plant, unless starting them in containers can keep them from rotting in cold wet weather and soil. If starting in pots, put the pots against the south side of the house were they will get lots of sun and will be protected a bit from cold by heat radiated by the house.

### **January Plant Propagation Class**

A 4 hour class on plant propagation from seed, cuttings and division, including a hands on workshop where you'll put down starts to take home.

You can choose either Wed January 14<sup>th</sup>, or Saturday January 17, from 9am to 1 pm. Cost is \$35 per person. Make checks payable to Bob Hamm and mail to 1689 Vallarta Circle, Sacramento, CA 95834. This is where the class will be held.



Above shows the color of a Maple tree recently put in as a street tree. Maples are one the the plants that are being planted around town now as street trees, but 29 years ago when I moved to Sacramento, the accepted wisdom was they wouldn't do well here.

## **Renewal Call for 2015!**

**Do you like Garden Notes?**

**Do you want to see new perennials for the 2015 Sales?**

**Do you want to help Garden Notes continue for 2015?**

**If you get them by email:** I ask you to please send a donation of \$10 or more for the coming year. Make checks payable to Bob Hamm and send to:

Bob Hamm, 1689 Vallarta Circle, Sacramento, CA. 95834

Any amount received above cost of the newsletter and maintenance of the computer access needed for it (above \$10) will go towards new plant material/supplies for 2015 Sunburst Projects Fund Raising and you will receive a tax receipt for the amount .

In the past several years I have turned your donations into almost 3 times as much for Sunburst through the plant sales.

**For those that receive printed, mailed copies,** the renewal cost is \$25.00 a year and you will only receive a tax receipt for amounts above that.

Also, a reminder that if you want to deduct donations from your 2014 taxes, you have to make the donation by Dec 31, 2014.

Thank you!

**Tropicals Notes; A new monthly column concerning Begonias and other tropicals used as yard plants in protected spots, potted plants, house plants and greenhouse plants.**



Above, a “Christmas Cactus” coming into bloom. These tropical epiphytes (grow on trees) succulents are both daylength and temperature dependent to bloom. They need long night/ or chill temps to set buds. The easiest way to get them to bud is to leave them outdoors in fall till buds show. All of the plants I have are now either blooming or in bud and can now be brought into the house to enjoy the blossoms.

Once buds begin to set, they will continue to develop regardless of lighting and warmer temps will speed the bud development.

After bloom fades, keep the plants on the dry side (but dont let shrivel!) and protected from frost until late February or early March when growth is ready to begin and regular watering can resume.

There are a huge range of Begonias, and while some grow too large to make good houseplants, there are many smaller growers that will fit wonderfully on a windowsill,

under lights or in a bay window. One older variety that has proven itself, has an extremely long bloom period and is fairly easy to grow is Begonia 'Tom Ment'.

It is a very compact Cane Type ( aka Angel Wing type) with bright orange flowers that continue for months on end. A picture of my blooming plant is below, the picture doesn't show the true orange of the flowers.

The plant is less than a foot tall in a 5 ½” pot, and will bloom in even a smaller pot.



Among the new species of Begonias recently brought into cultivation, several have proven winter hardy (though deciduous) as far north as Washington D.C., with winter temperatures reaching into the teens.

I am currently propagating a number of these types. These plants will be available come spring. Below is a picture of the lights in the garage with plants being started for spring.

