Reflections from the Executive Director

Happy New Year! Today I’m enjoying our new home out in Marana and wondering how January 2020 is already going into its last week. Time just seems to fly by, but I’m trying to make every day count.

Desert Survivors is looking amazing! Our production was up in 2019, and it’s lovely to see the retail area almost full of beautiful plants that are getting ready to come into their own in the next few weeks. I can’t believe our spring sale is only six weeks away—we still have so much to do! Let me tell you about the projects we’ve been busy working on.

By the time of the sale, we hope to have fresh clean water stations in the nursery. We’re trying to encourage disuse of plastic water bottles, so we’ve installed stations where you can refill your own water bottles with filtered water. To further entice you, we’ll also have beautiful water bottles for sale. There will be a couple of choices, from larger double-wall thermal bottles to smaller single-wall reusable bottles. The smaller bottles, along with our new bumper stickers, are printed by Tanline Printing, a local screen print company. The larger bottles are credited to our nursery director, Jim. We’d love your feedback on this project!

Program Services has been busy working on the maintenance of our buildings and possibly adding new structures to increase indoor space for our clients with intellectual developmental disabilities. We certainly need more room inside to get all our clients out of the summer’s extreme heat and winter’s cold mornings.

I can’t sign off without extending my heartfelt gratitude to all our supporters. The 2019 end-of-year tax credit donations were record breaking, and that money has allowed us to complete these different projects. Another big thank you goes to the Stonewall Foundation for its continued support. There are now four gentlemen being supported in jobs thanks to its continued generosity. The support of our friends and members is what continues to make Desert Survivors better for everyone. Whether you’re making a tax donation, buying or renewing a membership, or taking home one of our beautiful plants—you’re making a difference. Thank you from all of us at Desert Survivors. I look forward to seeing you at the sale!

Karen Wilson
Executive Director

SPRING Plant Sale

Members Sale
Mar. 7 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
20% off to members

Public Sale
Mar. 10-14 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
10% off to public
20% off to members
**Featured Plants Spring 2020**

**Thelocactus tulensis**

(Cactaceae)

Just as there’s no common name for this little globose cactus, there’s no common form—it grows in highly variable forms in both natural and cultivated plants. Native to the eastern Chihuahuan Desert, it can be found between 2,500 feet and 4,500 feet in the cactus hot-spots of Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí, and Tamaulipas. This range includes three additional subspecies, including *T. tulensis subsp. matudae*, which we sold last fall. At nearly four years old, *Thelocactus tulensis* flowers freely in the warmer months—typically summer for plants in habitat and early spring for plants grown in Tucson, where it’s warmer. Seed from the crop grown at Desert Survivors was collected in Huizache from plants with dark spines and yellow flowers. Magenta, purple-pink, white, and sometimes red are more common for this cactus’s flowers, so the yellow is a rare color that lucky Desert Survivors customers may see. Spines, especially new ones, can also show a range of colors (brown, orange-red, and almost black) but turn gray as they age. Low winter sun, temperatures, and moisture levels will produce beautiful reddish-purple coloration on the solitary stems, which reach about 9 inches by 6 inches and can branch as they age. Like many *Thelocactus*, plants require porous soils, full sun with afternoon shade, and low water.

**Lycium andersonii**

Anderson wolfberry (Solanaceae)

The genus name was first used by Greek physician and pharmacologist Dioscorides in the 1st century CE to describe a thorny shrub with medicinal properties from Lycia. It’s believed that he was referring to a species of *Rhamnus* or *Berberis*, but the genus name was later applied to this group of thorny, medicinal shrubs that many of us know and love. Approximately 80 to 90 species are known worldwide, with 21 species native to North America and 10 species to Arizona. Anderson wolfberry is widespread in southern Arizona and is found across a broad elevational gradient (between 800 feet and 5,600 feet). These thorny shrubs typically reach 5 feet in height and width but can get bigger with lusher conditions. Lavender flowers usually form in the early spring (January through March), but it’s not uncommon to see blooms in August during the monsoon season. Butterflies, hummingbirds, and bees pollinate the flowers. Tasty, edible, reddish berries mature after pollination and are relished by birds, wildlife, and humans. Closely aligned Chinese species of *Lycium* are highly nutritious and rich in antioxidants (anthocyanins). Wolfberry is a larval host for the Elsa sphinx moth (*Sagenosoma elsa*).

Jim Verrier & Nate McDonald

Plant Nursery
 FEATURED PLANTS CONT’D

**Solanum hindsianum**
Sonoran nightshade (Solanaceae)

A showy ornamental species, Sonoran nightshade is widely distributed in Baja California and Sonora (Hermosillo, Guaymas, and San Carlos). In the United States, it is known only from a small population of approximately 30 plants in the Puerto Blanco Mountains, located in the Organ Pipe National Monument of southwestern Arizona. Large lavender flowers with yellow anthers are produced during the monsoon season and fall. This species is a larval source for hawkmoth carpenters. Their blooms attract carpenter bees and have evolved to undergo buzz pollination, a process where the bees emit strong sonic vibrations that release pollen from the flowers’ anthers. Once successfully pollinated, green fruits with lighter green stripes form and mature to a dark brown color. *Solanum hindsianum* is somewhat frost-sensitive, so it needs to be placed in a warmer spot in the yard. Once established, plants are somewhat drought tolerant but benefit from periodic irrigations. They are highly recommended!

**Lippia graveolens**
Mexican oregano (Verbenaceae)

This shrub is native to southcentral Mexico in Oaxaca, Coahuila, and San Luis Potosí. Although plants are found roadside near Álamos, Sonora, they’ve likely escaped from cultivation—Mexican oregano is extensively used as a garden herb. It and Mexican honeysuckle (*Justicia spicigera*) are among the few plants we cultivate that stretch beyond our usual bioregional range of 500 miles from Tucson. Mexican oregano is a woody perennial that can grow up to 5 feet tall and 3 feet to 4 feet wide. A profusion of small white flowers forms in the spring, monsoon season, and fall. These blooms are highly attractive to butterflies and especially hummingbirds, who repeatedly visit the small white inflorescences, probably due to a high oil or nectar content. Plants are somewhat frost-sensitive, so it’s important to put them in a protected microclimate. Even if this plant is grown as an annual, a large amount of oregano can be produced in a single year.
Program Services

We’re springing into 2020 with such a great team here at Desert Survivors. Our team is so diverse and filled with so much personality that there’s never a dull moment. Winter didn’t stand a chance!

Our on-site team is working hard to create more room to grow more plants and more indoor space for our clients to work. Have you swung by La Vuelta Pit Stop recently? We’re adding a new building with the goal of creating a café in which to train clients who want to build new work skills. You may also notice a diverse group of plants, since our teams are creating a garden along the Chuck Huckleberry Loop (aka the Loop).

Off-site, our teams continue to provide maintenance along the Loop and the main core of downtown. We want to give a big shout-out to Kathleen and Russ with the Downtown Partnership and Pima County workers Charlie, Robert, Armando, and Sebastian: Thank you for partnering with Desert Survivors to give our clients the opportunity to work within the community and for treating our clients with kindness and respect. We are proud to work alongside them as the Green Team.

We have so many great ideas that I could tell you about, but I’ll save that for the next newsletter. I’m so proud of the whole team at Desert Survivors. Everyone works hard to get work done, but, most importantly, to work together, learn from each other, grow with each other, and create meaningful relationships. It’s a huge accomplishment that we continue to work on every day—one that creates the success that happens here at Desert Survivors.

David Garcia
Program Services Director