

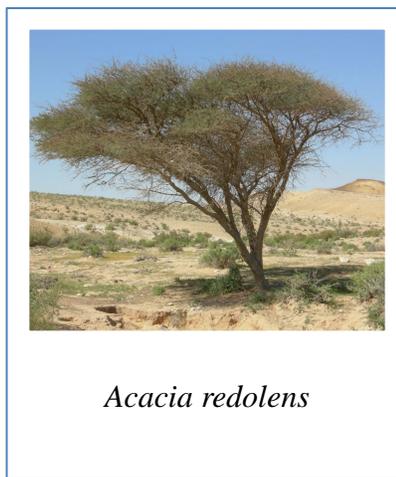
## Colors are possible

There are some serious challenges to life in Southern Nevada – scanty rainfall, insane drivers on the highway, soils with virtually no fertility – but this is our home. Home is the place where we hope to have the opportunity to create our own personal spaces, indoors and out. In trying to limit the amount of water that we do not want to waste in landscapes, unfortunately, we sometimes find ourselves stymied. Replacing lush green grass with rock seems harsh, and losing shade trees can be a tough trade-off for conservation. How can we be creative yet environmentally sound?

Even a water thrifty garden can be full of color. The coming of spring and summer is time to plan, and thinking about color can guide our plant choices. A great number of plants can survive or even thrive, producing floral displays despite limited water and intense sunlight. Look at some of the many plants that will cover bare ground with a green, low water use blanket. Many desert-adapted low growing plants work well as groundcovers – these include gazania and some of the ice plants –not only have succulent foliage, but also produce flowers in vivid shades of red, magenta or orange. Some of these will suffer if they experience a severe frost, but will usually come back.

In general, lantana is considered a small shrub, but some lantanas prefer to grow close to the ground. In the summer, look for a display of lavender or gold. These are usually sterile varieties, which limits the problems presented by plants that produce fruits and seeds.

Acacia is a genus whose members can be trees, shrubs or ground covers. Prostrate acacia (*Acacia redolens*) will produce yellow puffballs in spring, spread out up to ten feet, yet not reach a height of more than three feet. Indigo bush (*Dalea greggii*) has tiny leaves, and grows less than two feet tall, but spreads out several feet. While it looks rather barren in the winter, its spring extravaganza of purple makes up for that bleakness. People from other parts of the country will recognize morning glory (*Ipomea purpurea*) as a vine with spectacular flowers in pink, white or purple. Ground or bush morning glory (*Convolvulus mauritanicus*) is a near cousin with similar flowers, but this plant asks little more than good drainage. It blooms from spring to fall on stems



*Acacia redolens*



*Asparagus Fern*

that grow not much more than a foot tall.

Asparagus fern (*Asparagus densiflorus* “*Sprengeri*”) produces a surprising amount of greenery. It will spread out in a partially shaded spot outdoors. A well-established plant might die down with frost, but it can be cut back to encourage new growth.

Some plants that grow well and low to the ground are not the best choices. Mexican evening primrose has lovely pink flowers, but it might be too enthusiastic and successful. Similarly, honeysuckle will thrive, but can become invasive.

In all, there is a terrific variety of plants to cover the ground that once held turf. These new choices can be green and colorful, while being water-smart!

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