

Gardening for scent

What could be more delightful than walking next to a garden spot and encountering different scents along the way? While we generally associate fragrance with flowers, the leaves of many plants have wonderful aromas.

As spring comes in, we gardeners begin to plan and plant, often basing our choices on such things as color, water thriftiness, ease of care, etc. Why not try using a different sense? We often comment on the scents of blossoms, but we rarely create a garden using pleasant smell as a major criterion. This is unfortunate, since many plants with delightful scents can fit into a water smart garden. A few are native to our challenging environment, but even among introduced varieties, there are drought tolerant fragrant plants.



Acacia

Among desert plants, many of the *Acacia* varieties produce yellow flowers, but some of them are known to have attractive smells. These include *Acacia constricta* “white thorn acacia” (the word thorn does indicate a certain problem, however), and *Acacia rigida* “blackbrush acacia”. Both of these are well adapted to Southern Nevada’s climate.

Creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*) is underutilized as a garden plant, although it will grow well under many conditions. The leaves

have a distinct scent, which is certainly pleasant, although not perfume-y. Some members of *Artemisia* such as wormwood also have fragrant leaves.

In spring, the exquisite Texas mountain laurel has heavy clusters of sweet smelling purple flowers. While its flowering season is not long, and it does not otherwise have an aroma, it is a member of the legume family, whose members actually help improve soil fertility. This can make it a valuable addition to a landscape.

Both the flowers and the leaves of lavender are famously fragrant, and it is relatively easy to grow, as long as the soil is minimally amended with compost. The purple floral spikes of *Buddleia*, “butterfly bush,” are not only scented, but they also attract butterflies. The leaves of *Vitex* have a scent, although the flowers do not.

Berlandiera lyrata, a.k.a chocolate flower or chocolate daisy, actually does smell like chocolate. This could be a problem for those who cannot resist chocolate in any form.

Golden currants (*Ribes aureum*) will grow here; the scent of its flowers is described as “spicy”. Of course, currants are tasty, although these tend to be quite seedy.



Creosote Bush

Some of our most common kitchen herbs will tolerate Mojave conditions, if there is water and the soils are improved with a little compost. Everyone has seen rosemary in xeric gardens; why not place it next to a path? The leaves generate an unmistakable scent when they are brushed. Peppermint is another durable garden plant that will scent the air when it is touched. Remember to place it in a pot, since it can become invasive.

Other culinary plants can offer dramatic aromas. Several varieties of thyme, oregano, sage and basil look striking and make the air smell like the proverbial herb garden.

A garden can not only look beautiful, it can smell lovely as well!
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