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Fancy Plants

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Alan and Teresa Clark

When the tropics meet the desert, fascinating flora blooms in Lindon

By Ashley Dickson

A few years ago Alan Clark wasn't much of a gardener. Then he noticed his neighbor's Joshua Tree.

"I saw that and thought, 'That's not supposed to be able to grow here,'" Alan says. "So I started researching and found

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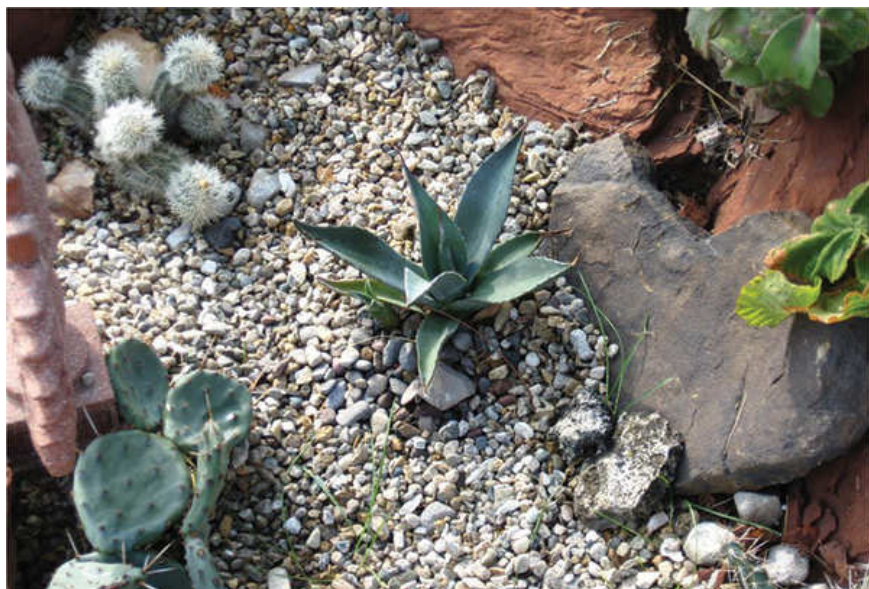
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a whole slew of things that can grow here that really add a different look to your yard — a completely different look than you normally see.”

The different look Alan went for was tropical. And recently, he's added a desert.

“Once you get into it, it's compulsive,” Alan says. “You kind of go bananas with it.”

Some of his latest experiments include just that — bananas. Palm trees, trunking yuccas, elephant ears and cannas are a few others. Here is a sampling of the fancy plants Alan grows in his Lindon garden.



One of the hardiest of the agave family, the New Mexico Century Plant thrives through snowy winters.

“But desert-type plants need perfect drainage,” Alan says. “Lots and lots of gravelly soil is a must.”

After years of slow growth, the mature plant blooms and attracts hummingbirds with its flowers.



The Tree Cholla is a candelabra-shaped cactus that fits into the xeric (dry environment) category. And the cold Utah winters won't scare it — “it'll be under a foot of snow and it just comes right out of it,” Alan says.

“When we're thinking in xeric terms, there are tons of plants that don't need a lot of water, so you can go for that desertscape look,” Alan says.

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If not for the Utah mountains in the background, the location of this photo could be confused with a tropical paradise.

The trunking *Yucca torreyi* (on the left side of the photo) is often mistaken for a palm tree. With age, it produces a spike of white, fragrant bell-shaped flowers.

The showy orange Bengal Tiger flowers are considered by many to be the most beautiful of the canna plants. This plant blooms profusely for most of the summer, and the almost fluorescent flowers can reach up to four inches across.



The Moy Grande — a particularly unique hibiscus hybrid — boasts the largest flowers in the neighborhood. The tropical shrub reaches a mature size of about 5 feet tall, and the open-faced pink flower can be a foot across. Alan Clark says each delicate bloom only lasts one day, but the Moy Grande is very prolific — sometimes 20 flowers will bloom in a day.

"Some of the tropicalesque gardening is experimental," Alan says. "If you try four plants and one stays alive, that one plant is well worth it for me. You learn what works and what doesn't."



Though its bananas are not edible, the Musa Basjoo is a hardy Japanese fiber banana plant. The big green leaves add a tropical look to Alan's yard, but the plant is tough enough to withstand ground temperatures to negative 20 degrees when mulched properly. It can also be potted through the winter to guarantee survival.

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Ashley Dickson

Ashley Dickson is a Virginia native now living in Boston. She graduated from BYU with degrees in journalism and home and family living, then spent three years writing and editing for Utah Valley Magazine. She left the mountain West to earn a master's degree in library science and now splits her time between motherhood, editing for a financial research firm, and keeping a connection to Utah by writing for UtahValley360.

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