

**To Prune or Not to Prune -** By Stan Southwick



For over 30 years, I've been designing landscapes in Southern Nevada and for over 30 years, I've been looking for a good maintenance company. We spend hours selecting and arranging plant material to fit specific spaces, create a specific look or provide an eye-catching view. Designs are carefully thought out to take full advantage of the many characteristics of the plant material selected. But, no matter how much care put into a design, it only takes a few seconds for a gas-powered hedger to destroy the look and weaken the health of the plant. Not only will shearing ruin the look of most desert plant material, but it removes flowers, stimulates growth (causing more

pruning and more growth), and weakens the health of the plant. I don't know why maintenance companies must always cut something.

Over the next few SLAM articles, we will give helpful hints how to prune different types of plants. This month we will start with an easy one, ornamental grasses. Grasses add a great accent to the landscape and they look great until they go dormant during the winter months. The dormant period is the time to cut the grasses back. Too often grasses are sheared into little squares or round balls. Leaving a brown hay bale. The brown grass blades do not turn green again. The blade is dead and must be removed. It is best to cut your ornamental grass completely down as close to the ground as possible sometime between January and March. New blades of grass will spring up as soon as the weather warms and you will be able enjoy the beauty of the grass again.

One word of caution, do not confuse Hesperaloe, Nolina, or Dasylirion with a grass. These are all evergreen accent plants that need no pruning. The only real maintenance needed is to remove any dead leaves and old dried up flower stalks.

Happy pruning... and throw away your hedge shears!

"Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted."  
— Albert Einstein

**Favorite Flora:**

**Senna phyllodinea- Silvery Senna-** By Jon Marenfeld



This month's favorite flora is a great background or informal hedge shrub that can tolerate our harsh southwestern climate. *Senna phyllodinea*, commonly known as the Silvery Senna or Silver Leaf Senna, is native to the arid regions of Australia. This *Senna* has shiny silver-grey, sickle-shaped, phyllodes instead of true leaves which are a smart desert adaptation for reflecting the sun and reducing sun exposure to it. The shrub has an upright, airy, and rounded form, if left to grow to its natural shape. Typically, the *Senna phyllodinea* reaches 6 feet high and wide and is covered by bright yellow pea-like flowers, that attract bees and hummingbirds. The flowers are

followed by flat papery brown seed pods that remain on the shrub. As the pods age they darken and will eventually fall to the ground. Birds tend to love eating the seeds.

The Silvery Senna requires a minimal amount of care. Plant this shrub in a location that can allow it to grow to its full size. *Senna phyllodinea* prefers to be planted in full sun and reflected heat locations with well-drained soils. In too much shade the shrub will become rangy and leggy. Watering is simple. Once established it needs very little water to thrive. Pruning and cleanup is simple. Just use a broom, rake, or blower to clean up the seed pods and trim the shrub sparingly to remove dead or dying branches. When sheared the Silvery Senna will become rangy and sparse. Pair this shrub with other xeriscape plants, in a rock garden, such as Acacia or Mesquite trees, prickly pear and/or barrel cactus, Valentine Emu Bush (*Eremophila maculata* 'Valentine'), and Trailing Lantana (*lantana montevidensis*).

Photo of the Month



Balboa Park Succulents  
San Diego, CA  
Caryl Davies