



Happy Valley Ranch 1 HOA

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly – Three Common Desert Plants

Many people new to the Sonoran Desert are not familiar with the predominant plants surrounding our homes. What are bursage, brittlebush, and desert broom? All are common to Happy Valley Ranch, and are native to the Sonoran Desert but two are invasive. Overgrown brittle bush and desert broom can present a fire hazard.

The following pictures may help residents distinguish between them, and provide information you can pass on to your landscapers if you use them.

Bursage (the Good)

This plant is also known as the triangle-leaf bursage (http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/triangle_leaf_bursage.htm) and is the predominant ground cover in the Lower Sonoran Desert. It provides shade and protection for a variety of cacti seedlings and animals. The plant protects the desert soil from the heat and grows slowly (pruning is not needed and actually weakens the plant). It is drought deciduous – in dry months it conserves water and the leaves look dead. Unfortunately, landscapers who do not understand this will remove it thinking anything not green is a weed. This would be similar to removing an oak tree in the winter in the northern states because the leaves are brown.



Bursage will have burrs throughout the plant, has small leaves and thin woody stems

Bursage should never be pruned. If the plants are so close that they are a fire hazard, they should be selectively thinned (remove the minimum number possible).

Brittle Bush (The Bad)

Although brittle bush has dense yellow flowers in the spring and looks appealing, it is an invasive plant which competes for water and will spread into any disturbed ground. After several years, brittle bush growth slows and flower production drops off. When dense, the plant grows in spindly single stems with no flowers, presenting an upward path for fire. Older plants and thick growths should be aggressively thinned. This will promote new plant growth and a significant flower display in the spring.



Brittle bush leaves are a gray-green color and with space grow into a hemispherical shape.

Desert Broom (The Ugly)

Desert broom's normal habitat is in the stream beds or washes. Unfortunately they are extremely invasive and will spread along roadsides or anywhere they get water. They can grow to 5-10 feet tall and present a serious fire hazard to fire department personnel. They also stay green longer in dry spells so landscapers often leave these "green plants" untouched and remove bursage that look dead. Once desert broom get large, they are difficult to remove and grow back when cut down unless you apply RoundUp concentrate directly to the fresh cut. RoundUp works best during the warmer months of the year. If you identify a Desert Broom during the cooler months, cut it back to stop its growth, wait until spring arrives, make a fresh cut and apply RoundUp



Desert broom is the green plant to the left Large Desert Broom

Other Invasive Plants

See <http://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/codes/nativeplant/Weeds> and <http://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/Assets/Public+Website/bldgresources/invasiveweeds.pdf>

A Word on NAOS

If you are unfamiliar with the location of the Natural Area Open Space dedication to the City on your lot, contact the Architectural Committee and we will send you the lot information (available at <http://eservices.scottsdaleaz.gov/maps/my-neighborhood> - if you prefer to unscramble the application). The City ordinance says this area is to remain untouched; however, in conversations with City personnel, they do not object to removing desert broom and brittle bush from the NAOS. The Association encourages homeowners to remove desert broom and other invasive plants (buffle grass, fountain grass, etc). All are serious fire hazards and prevent native plant growth.

If you want more information or have questions, contact the Association Architectural Committee at Arch@hvr1.com We can put you in touch with Arizona Master Gardeners and McDowell Sonoran Preserve stewards who understand the desert environment and can help you make informed decisions about your landscaping.