



Can overwatering really harm our

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desert vegetation?

Within the last month this column described how to construct a water hole for wildlife. One suggestion was to locate it so that any overflow would not result in over-watering any desert growth to its disadvantage. I've heard similar suggestions before. For example, when we first moved here seven years ago, someone said, "Don't plant flowers around the base of a saguaro. If you do, and water the flowers heavily, the saguaro will absorb too much water and burst."

Now I'd sure appreciate it if you would take a minute to write to this column and tell us whether that has been your experience. Have you ever seen a native desert plant in the ground in your yard get so much water that it suffered as a consequence? In my limited experience, just the opposite seems to be true — my native plants don't seem to be able to get enough of it! True, most of them (not all) manage to survive with the skimpy supply that nature provides in this area, but they seem to appreciate all the extra that I provide, intentionally or unintentionally. Some

examples: At the west end of the house stands a saguaro, which was a straight beanpole before the house was built. Half the water which runs off the roof has to flow by its base, and since the driveway dams up the flow for the most part, most of it sinks in. After absorbing that runoff for a year, a "grapefruit" popped out on the side of the saguaro. That grapefruit has now developed into an arm a yard long, and around it are clustered four watermelon-sized arms. The plant is real fat and growing like heck, but hasn't burst — yet! A blue palo verde, also located in the path of this runoff, and that also gets soaked by hose, is making remarkable growth. Little-leaf palo verde also benefits from soaking and fertilizer. Desert lavender, that grows so scrubby and compactly on the dry hillsides, grows tall and straggly when watered.

And an example that is not a native is a cereus that grew from a cutting Andy gave me several years ago. This year I planted a tomato near it and have watered the tomato almost daily. The tomato isn't doing any good, but a lot of the water reached the roots of the cereus, which is growing like mad. Andy came by and counted 37 flower buds. Seven of them have already opened — what a fragrance! And the remaining 30 look like they'll pop open tonight. In contrast is a medium-sized ocotillo that was beyond the reach of my hose, growing in a level, rocky area. It had never leafed out and bloomed as well as the others on the lot and finally came to an end this year, apparently from lack of enough moisture.

There's another reason I wish you would write in with your experience in watering — that's because we don't know whether anyone reads this column, and we'd like to know. Just write "Dear Desert Place, care of News/View."