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The Paver

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Overwatering our Native Cacti

During these hot days of summer the plants in our yards will need more water. While this seems to be a simple statement, how our plants take in that water is the correct question to ask. While trees need slow and deep watering less frequently and shrubs need slow and shallow watering more frequently we tend to leave the native cacti on their own. Most plants take water through their roots. Cacti are fairly unique in the fact that they take in most of their water through their needles. This enables them to literally grow out of the side of a rock in little to no soil. The needles on cactus act like pin cushions and absorb the moisture in the air and wick that moisture back to the plant. The hot summer monsoon, which brings us that dreaded high humidity, is the very thing that "waters" the cactus in the desert. The years that create problems are the ones that are hot and dry all year long. It is during these times in the year that we can spray down our cactus and create artificial humidity around the cactus. This is the reason that many desert cacti will not grow in other climates. Understanding how these plants use water enables us to care for these cacti more efficiently. Typical cacti will absorb less than 25% of water through its roots. The root is designed to act as an anchor to hold the cactus upright. For this reason watering the base of cactus over an extended period of time will tend to rot the root of the cactus. If we are going to water the roots this needs to be done on a dedicated system and only done very sparingly. Understanding our native plants is very important however the main rule of thumb should be if you don't know enough about a desert plant leave it alone. They have survived long before we came and will survive long after we have left.

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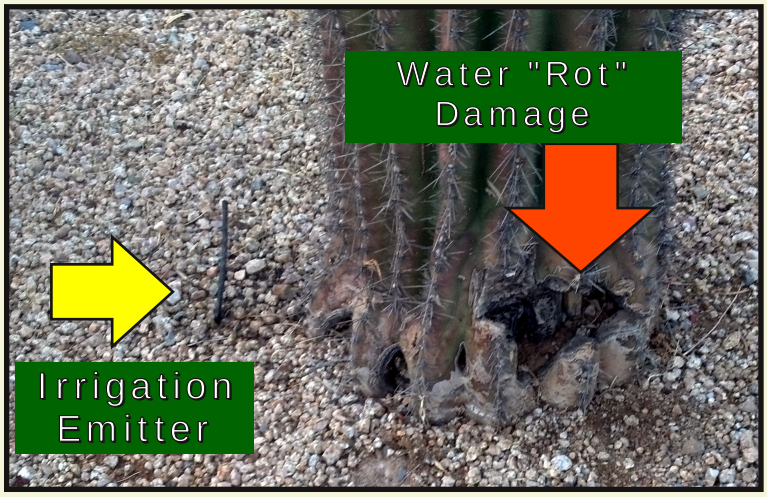

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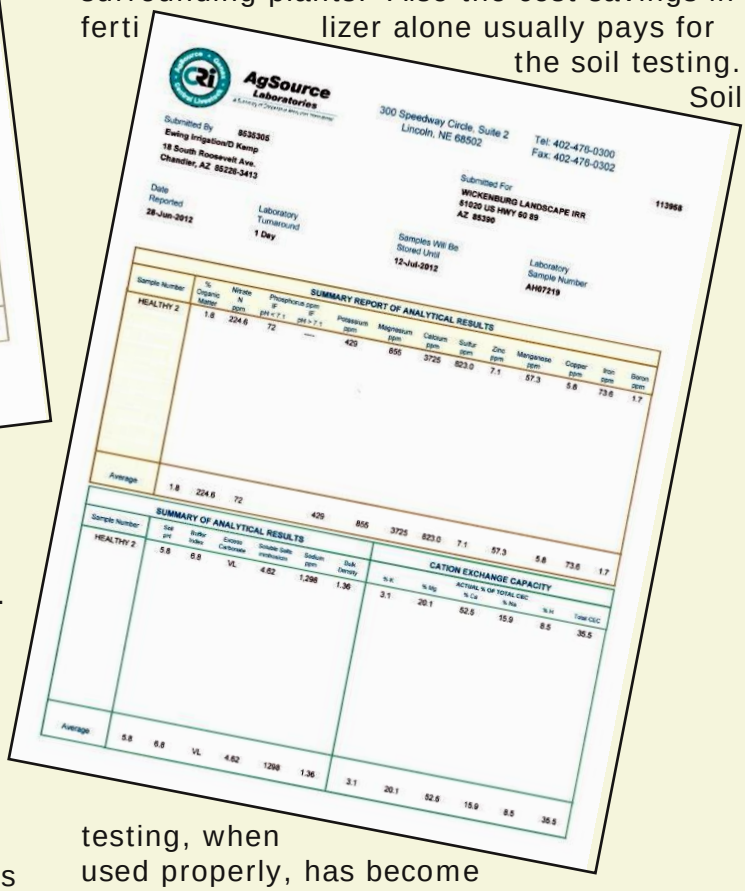
Knowing your soil

In today's world with all the technology that surrounds us we forget that this same technology exists in landscaping and irrigation. Soil testing is one of these

areas. Gone are the days that soil testing was reserved for only agriculture farmers and the high end million dollar landscapes. Today soil testing is available at a very reasonable cost. So much so that it is common to take multiple tests several times a year. Soil testing is becoming more valuable and as we start to embrace this tool we are better able to ensure that our yards are as healthy as possible. The information received from these tests helps us add or reduce certain levels of fertilizer that is injected directly into the irrigation system. Testing also warns us of toxic levels of minerals that would adversely affect or even kill certain types of plants in our yards. Armed with this abundance of information we are able to better and more accurately diagnose and treat struggling plants in our landscapes. In almost all cases soil testing is very cost effective because we are able to pinpoint the exact problem and treat accordingly instead of the old method of shot gun treatment. This method would include adding numerous items to the soil until the right one was found; however we could not remove the unneeded items that are not part of the plants solution leaving a potential buildup of chemicals/fertilizers that posed a risk to the surrounding plants. Also the cost savings in ferti lizer alone usually pays for the soil testing. Soil



testing, when used properly, has become a vital tool in helping us keep our clients' yards as healthy as possible while ensuring that issues in their soil are handled proactively in the future.