

## **Rescue, Reuse, Reclaim - and Roses**

**Topics:** Cacti and Succulents & Rainwater Harvesting

### **Garden History**

We moved to Tucson in early 2020 just as the pandemic shutdowns started. Getting help was quite a challenge. We loved our location and mountain views, but it seemed we were using a lot of water, and there was no shade for the south-facing backyard brick patio. There was a nice-sized but empty raised bed, a lemon tree as well as a dwarf orange tree and a few, unkempt shrubs in the back. There was a VERY empty side yard with no plants at all – only gravel with caliche under it. Unfortunately, we lost the lemon tree in a storm before the first year was out. There was almost nothing to “un-do” except the expanse of turfgrass. We “exchanged it” for artificial turf which gives a nice flat area for our grandson and rescue dog. I joined some desert gardening groups once the pandemic restrictions lifted and began to rescue and propagate some cacti and succulents. I always wanted to take the Master Gardener class. I applied and was accepted; it’s been quite helpful for me AND my plants! While all that was going on, we made our own garden design plan and very slowly implemented it over 4+ years. Rescue plants don’t seem to be present in the order you need them, so having patience and having pots ready to use was a must. Rescues and propagation now make up about 80% of the plants. We put in a blood orange and replaced the lemon tree. Since we enjoy roses, we used the empty raised beds for the 13 different Arizona-suitable roses we now have; we use them for color in the garden and to enjoy in vases indoors. We installed a very tall pergola for shade and unobstructed views, put in “HOA-compliant” rainwater harvesting, and redesigned the back patio. Last winter, we had the confidence to put in a small stand-alone raised bed where we grow leaf lettuce for salads. We also have solar panels with battery storage – it’s our desire to have a low-impact, low-maintenance home.

### **Garden Basics**

**Irrigation:** Except for May and June, all the drip irrigation to the raised beds (roses, honeysuckle, star jasmine, and a large planting of colorful lantana) and 3 citrus trees come from the back water harvesting tanks. In the two dry months I switch to municipal water. Mulch is a key part of keeping the moisture loss down for the raised beds. During the fall and winter, I hand-water lettuce from the side-yard water tanks. There are only 3 plants that need water in the front yard; the rest are a variety of cacti.

**Fertilizer:** Roses and citrus are on a Sonoran-desert-based schedule. See Master Gardener publication AZ 1304 about roses at website: [extension.arizona.edu](http://extension.arizona.edu).

**Pest Control:** I successfully treated a grub infestation with beneficial nematodes before planting the blood orange and regularly inspect for aphids and thrips which I treat with blasts of water. Only rarely do I need to treat the roses with chemical controls.

### **Garden Philosophy**

Low maintenance and low water use is important. We use the water-harvesting for the higher-demand citrus, roses, and raised bed plantings. Cutting roses for indoor vases is fun and they smell wonderful. Having shade and the use of pots for succulents and cacti on the patio gives both color and variety year-round. It also allows the rescued plants a temporary home. If the cacti get too large, they are trimmed and shared or propagated for neighbors, fellow gardeners, and friends.