



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Cooperative Extension

Pima County - Master Gardener

Microclimate Menagerie

Garden History

When we moved here in 1999, the property held just two plants—an Arbor Vitae in front and a male Mulberry in back. Over time, that bare landscape evolved into a diverse collection of microclimates, each with its own character. The front yard now flourishes as a xeriscape of cacti, agaves, wildflowers, and other desert-adapted plants. To the north, the patio shelters a shade garden of herbs, succulents, and native volunteers beside a 27-year-old lemon tree grown from seed. The covered back porch, added in 2015, provides an ideal haven for potted plants that prefer morning sun and afternoon shade.

A caged raised bed, built in 2024, serves as our vegetable garden, shaded by roll-up cloth and surrounded by Arizona natives, a Mexican blue palm, and a Desert Willow—both acquired at a Master Gardener sale. A carpet of Frog Fruit borders the brick path, while a long-dead Mulberry now supports a towering night-blooming Cereus. Rainwater collected in a 360-gallon tank nourishes the willow, nearby pots, and a thriving Asparagus patch. The “Secret Garden,” enclosed by vines and 26 pots of flowers and succulents, offers shelter from wind and cold. True to its name, the Microclimate Menagerie hides 49 animal depictions—some obvious, others waiting to be discovered.

Garden Basics

Irrigation: Drip systems run along the patio and walls, while trees rely on passive wells or emitters. Everything else is hand-watered with care, on a seasonal schedule.

Fertilizers: Arizona’s Best Citrus and Vegetable Foods, along with Miracle-Gro Bloom Booster and All Purpose formulas, keep plants thriving.

Pest Control: The garden maintains a healthy balance of insects and lizards. Green Lacewings overwinter in the Cat’s Claw, managing most aphids, thrips, and mites. Milkweeds get a soapy rinse, and sticky traps deter whiteflies in the vegetable cage. Hornworms are removed by hand, leafhopper eggs are cleared when found, and a thriving lizard population helps keep many pests in check. Caterpillars are always welcome—after all, they become butterflies.

Garden Philosophy

A good garden provides food, beauty, and variety. A great garden offers more—it heals when you’re sick, comforts when you’re down, gives purpose when you’re restless, and brings peace every single day.