



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Cooperative Extension

Pima County - Master Gardener

Tucson Mountain Retreat

Garden History

We built our home in 2001 on a 1.3-acre natural desert lot, preserving as much native vegetation as possible—mesquite, ironwood, palo verde, white thorn acacia, prickly pear, cholla, and Creosote. In 2007, we added a stucco wall, and hardscaping, including a flagstone patio and an outdoor kitchen, which became the heart of our outdoor living. Over the years, plants were added or removed, but the garden truly began to flourish when I became a Master Gardener in 2024. Since then, the space has evolved into a colorful, lively retreat for both people and wildlife, featuring many native trees, several small fruit trees and a variety of agaves and other plants that add structure and seasonal interest.

Garden Basics

Water and Irrigation: Much of the garden relies on drip irrigation, while many drought-tolerant and native plants survive on their own or with minimal hand watering. Passive rainwater harvesting and small cisterns further extend the benefits of natural rainfall.

Soil and Fertilizer: Most plants grow directly in native soil. Containers are planted with mixes of potting soil, compost, perlite, and coconut coir, tailored to each plant's needs. Fertilization follows recommended best practices but remains light-handed.

Pest Control: Insects are welcome guests, helping maintain balance naturally. Occasionally harvester ants become problematic and are managed first by filling their holes and, if needed, with diatomaceous earth. Two playful young dogs see the garden as their own private playground. Limiting their impact, while giving them the space they need, is a constant challenge.

Garden Philosophy

I love color and an active garden full of all kinds of pollinators and wildlife. Plants that require constant pampering rarely thrive here, so the focus is on resilience and enjoyment. I delight in the seasonal transitions—from the blooms of the Palo Verde to the ironwood trees—and in watching wildlife explore the space. Gardening is a source of calm and joy, offering a place to relax and reconnect with the outdoors. Staying informed through U of A publications and Master Gardener talks helps me refine my approach while maintaining the garden as a sustainable and evolving retreat.