

## Small Backyard Garden – Watering and Location

By Pam Niesl

Prior to moving to Gold Canyon I lived In Laveen Arizona. I started with a bare dirt backyard and over the next 9 years of planting and yard care, I ended up with a full garden atmosphere. When looking for a home in Gold Canyon I knew that, nearing retirement, I didn't want to start over. I chose my current home for the already developed backyard garden. I enjoy daily garden maintenance chores and am always adding and moving things. These are some of the things that I've learned about watering and location in my small garden yards. Some yard photos:



## Watering and Location

For me the two most difficult aspects of Arizona gardening are watering and plant location. Because it is so hot in the valley area, I thought that if my plants were dying plants they must need more water. I was surprised to find that often I was overwatering. I learned that it is important to research a plant before I buy it to determine whether it can handle the heat and the best sun direction for it. Also “full sun” doesn’t necessarily mean it can handle full sun in this part of Arizona. No amount of water is going to help a plant planted in an inappropriate location.

On occasion, I’ve had plants that were desert adapted and I overwatered them. For example, I saw a lot of brittlebush growing wild where I live. I thought it would be a great plant to have in the yard since it tolerated heat. However, the leaves on mine started dying in the hottest part of summer. I watered more, but the leaves continued to die. I learned that the brittlebush is almost summer deciduous; that its leaves can die in summer but come back as it gets cooler. Master Gardener and landscape company owner, Tom McDonald, wrote an article recently about “Plant Pathology” in which he discusses overwatering:

*“Desert plants have adopted strategies to deal with drought, allowing them to thrive in this land of extreme temperatures and scarce water. Consequently, they have few defenses against saturated root zones which encourage the growth of a multitude of bacteria and fungi that can turn a flowering shrub into a lifeless shuck of its former self. Ironically, the symptoms of an over-watered plant resemble a wilted plant that is starved for water. However, in the case of over-watering, wilting is caused by a microbial pathogen that either destroys the roots, or clogs the vascular tissue that transports water. Both of these are irreversible conditions.”*

The yard photos below show another water and location issue:



My house was built in 1989. I have no doubt that the saguaro was on the land when the house was built. I think the owner didn't research how big the Tipuana Tipu tree gets and that it is fast growing, before planting it, so they are very close together. However, the problem that I have with the placement is actually more to do with watering than size. If the saguaro receives too much water, it swells up, the base eventually rots, and the saguaro falls. When it rains, a lot of water runs off the overhang on my patio, which is right next to it. I discovered how much when I placed four 5-gallon buckets along it and they filled up in less than 20 minutes. To prevent all this water from saturating the saguaro I put up a gutter and rain barrel. I use the water for hand watering and if it gets too full, I have a hose attachment to drain it elsewhere.

I also use water runoff from my roof top AC unit to my advantage (photo below). I like canna lilies but they need a lot of water. I bought some PVC pipe and made a connection from the pipe that drains the water off the roof to over a canna lily pot. The hotter weather, the more water to the pot. I can direct the pipe away if the pot is getting too much water.

