



Guardians of the Gardens

*By: Sheilah Britton - Master Gardener Volunteer
SaddleBrooke and SaddleBrooke Ranch Master Gardeners*

Fred and Pat Flanagan lived in the Northeast for 35 years before visiting the Southwest. “We fell in love with this place,” says Fred, “and when we first visited SaddleBrooke, we decided it was the place we’d settle.”

They bought a home in SaddleBrooke in 1999 but it was 2006 before they actually made the move to the high desert. The Flanagan’s were avid gardeners before moving to the Southwest. “We had everything in our garden” Fred recalled, “all kinds of beans, tomatoes, peppers, strawberries, you name it.” Pat grew up with her Dad having a greenhouse in their backyard.” I was used to seeing how everything worked. All the neighbors would bring things that looked like dead twigs and, in a week or two, Dad had them looking healthy and back to normal.”

Living where we do, past gardening has little effect on one’s success or enjoyment in a desert landscape. The couple began experimenting with what would work and where they thought plants would best thrive, but when they heard about a Master Gardener program, they knew it was what they needed to do. They registered and by 2008 had become certified and active in the small group of eight Master Gardeners.



Fred & Pat with gift of gratitude for their many years of service

Master Gardeners are required to contribute volunteer hours on an annual basis and the Flanagan’s found that responding to other residents’ garden questions and concerns was an excellent vehicle for learning and discovering. By 2011, much of the plant call work eventually ended up with Pat and Fred, and in the beginning that worked. Fred recalls when all that changed. “About the middle of January, we had 3 days when it never got above 15 degrees and we had 40 calls the first day and 40 calls the second day and no one else was around at the time. We ended up doing all the calls.”

The resulting months of 2011 continued to promote and expand plant calls under the seasoned and watchful eyes of Pat and Fred. As the Ranch became part of the Master Gardener domain, others participated in research and residential visits, but it was still run through the Flanagans. “Pat and Fred’s commitment over the years has built up a loyal following and many word of mouth recommendations over the years,” says Master Gardener, Alison Lang.

Now calls average about 110 a year, with most of them being inquiries regarding citrus, irrigation, or plant identification. “If they’re new to the Southwest, they are just like we were when we arrived,” says Pat. And the Flanagan’s have gained much knowledge through their research and visiting residents’ gardens. When asked about difficult or unsolvable issues, Fred recalls just one. “Witches’ broom. No one had a clue, and it was spreading fast. It took more than a year, but we finally identified it through someone at the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix.”

The Flanagan’s are stepping back from the lead on plant calls, just as we have begun to change some of our processes with more use of social media, digital photography, and more Master Gardeners available to channel the requests. “Pat

and Fred for many years tirelessly served this community,” says longtime Master Gardener Zann Wilson. “They are the poster children of our program and deserve our recognition and gratitude.”

<https://extension.arizona.edu/saddlebrooke-master-gardeners>