Topics: Principles of Xeriscape Gardening

Garden History

When we purchased our property in December, 2011, it was covered in grape vines and fruit trees. While the vines were pretty and we had loads of fruit, the water bill was like having an extra mortgage. We decided to move to a more water-friendly xeriscape garden, taking out twelve citrus trees and twenty grape vines and replacing them with water-wise plants such as cactus, agave, aloe, red yucca and rosemary. We designed the garden surrounding the house to take advantage of the run-off from the roof. We also brought in mulch for the plants around the house both to help retain water and to improve the quality of the soil.

During monsoons, we discovered that rainwater would flow down our property from the house above ours, washing out parts of the front yard each time. To prevent this wash-out and to take advantage of the water, we brought in rock and designed a rainwater harvesting pond and a check dam to retain the water and prevent erosion.

A few thorny palo verde trees which intruded into the driveway and front walk were removed from the front yard. We also removed a tangle of cat claw, which had completely covered a large meandering mesquite tree near the front of the house. This opened up a pretty area for planting aloe, cactus and agave.

There is a small walled-in area around the front of the house and a fenced-in raised bed vegetable garden in the rear of the house, but the rest of the property remains open to natural habitat.

Gardening Basics

**Watering** In addition to the water-harvesting pond and check dam, we use a variety of irrigation lines to irrigate our garden. There is a line for the remaining five fruit trees and five grape vines, a line for the potted herbs and plants, a line for the vegetable garden and a line for the xeriscape garden. All of these lines are on different schedules, depending on the plants they are watering, and are adjusted seasonally.

**Soil** The soil is amended with generic organic amendments. There are two composters on the side of the house where we compost everything – our food scraps as well as our yard debris. We use a chipper for larger debris.

**Fertilizer** The vegetable garden is fertilized with compost in the spring and fall, the fruit trees with manure in the spring and organic fertilizer is applied when and where needed.

**Pest Control** We use Bt to keep the skeletonizers from decimating our grape vines in the summer months. A rebar enclosure in one area keeps the javelina from destroying the vegetable garden and contains our Desert Museum adopted tortoise habitat. We enjoy the many bunnies, bobcats, coyotes and small critters that live with us and don’t consider them to be pests.

Gardening Philosophy

We strive to have a garden that is as beautiful and lush as possible while remaining water-wise and easy to care for.