SCULPTURE IN THE DESERT

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Topics: Redirecting Rainwater Flow

Garden History

We purchased our home in the summer of 2008 and have since fallen in love with Tucson and the Sonoran Desert. Having come from the Pacific Northwest, the flora and fauna were new to us. We started asking questions, taking classes and then enrolling in the University of Arizona Pima County Master Gardener Program classes to learn more about our new environment.

When we first moved in, the gardens outside the walls were overgrown and inaccessible. We started cleaning up the area to allow us to plant agaves, cactus and other desert adapted plants. We tried to make several different pathways through the yard with a few places to sit and enjoy the yard – each with a different viewpoint.

As we started to plant, we discovered caliche. We have learned that it is a “favorite” among gardeners and we managed to break it up with picks, shovels and good hard work. The next problem we had (and we love animals) is the nightly visits from javelina and deer, who either munched on our plants or dug them up. For those plants that we wanted to protect until they grew larger, we added small fences around them. Others we covered with netting to save the new growth from the deer and their fruit from the birds.

We strive to have a low maintenance garden and try to choose plants that essentially take care of themselves. Our trees provide shade and a multitude of micro-climates around the yard.

Both of us enjoy art and sculpture. We incorporated several pieces around the gardens and will probably continue to add more as time goes on. We also consider some of our plantings to be natural sculptures.

Gardening Basics

Watering  Most of our yard is on drip irrigation with the exception of the established trees, cacti and the agaves. We water new plantings with a hose until they are established. Water from our roof scuppers is directed to rocky areas below and then on to plants nearby. Our goal is to use as little supplemental water as possible.

Soil  Sometimes, depending on what we are planting, we add garden soil to the desert soil. If available, we also use organic mulch from Arbico.

Fertilizer  The fruit trees are fertilized three times a year with a combination of citrus spikes and citrus fertilizer. The rest of the yard is treated once a year with Miracle Grow, applied with a hose and applicator.

Pest Control  Deer and javelina are our biggest problem, although ground squirrels have recently found a home in our rock walls. We are still searching for a solution to the squirrels. Insects are not a big issue for our garden. We either use a soapy spray or hand pick them, both of which seem to work well.

Gardening Philosophy

We love working in the garden, watching things grow (although not everything makes it), and just sitting and looking at the garden. We love to share the garden with our guests. Thank you for coming.