

# An Old Arizona Garden

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**Topics: Creating a Certified National  
Wildlife Habitat Garden  
Gardening in the Shade**

## Garden History

The Moorish revival home was built in 1926, the corner lot of that era being 1½ times larger than others. We purchased it in 1998 from the second owners who had lived here for more than fifty years.

We began with the date palms, the Aleppo pine, the juniper and arborvitae. These had been planted in the 1950's by the previous owners. For the first 10 years we were part-time residents and gardening was limited to caring for the existing trees and for the two rosemary bushes we had planted to mark the entrance. In 2010 we began to remodel - a slow process that also involved many plantings. Ultimately our garden reflects memories of gardens from all of our time together, using plants we remember from our past gardens: queen's wreath, cat's claw, creosote, night blooming cereus, bougainvillea, pomegranate, mesquite, ironwood, palo verde, succulents and cactus.

We believe in reusing and recycling, so visitors notice re-purposing of found objects: doors, screens, trellises, etc. We value art, especially metal art and ceramics and this is reflected in our garden. Our "Old Arizona Garden" has the four elements that are required for a Certified Natural Wildlife Habitat: food, water, cover and places to raise young (National Wildlife Federation). Features with running water (pond, fountain and flowing rocks) bring birds and lizards. Native plants, leaf litter and stacked wood and stone provide nesting places and ample seed for feed. The west yard is self-contained and provides a safe habitat for our 30+ year old desert tortoise "Old Bean". We built his winter house using guidelines from the Arizona Desert Museum. A gift of red roof tiles from a neighbor inspired covered porches and a hacienda style sandbox for the grandchildren.

## Gardening Basics

**Watering:** We water by hand and by nature as we enjoy this contact with the natural world.

**Soil:** Our soil has been amended with compost and mulch, but it is the original desert dirt (sandy, but no caliche). We did not bring in topsoil or manure and we top dress our native flower beds with crushed granite.

**Fertilizer:** Osmacote fertilizer is applied to blooming plants and fruit trees once a year. The Aleppo pine, "Grace", gets an annual application of fish fertilizer.

**Pest Control:** BT and a spray of soapy water are used for pest control, which is needed only occasionally, except for the Santa Rita prickly pear which attracts the cochineal beetle and must be treated more often.

**Gardening Philosophy:** We find that caring for the garden is both relaxing and educational and that "one is never nearer to heaven than in the garden."

**Personal Gardening Secrets or Advice:** Don't try to make your Arizona garden like your garden "Back East". Have a lot of fun learning what thrives here and enjoy the journey.

"Of all the roads you take, make sure some of them are dirt" -John Muir

