

Cacti, Citrus and Chickens...Oh, My!

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**Topics: Raising Chickens in an Urban Garden
Passive and Active Rainwater and
Greywater Harvesting**

Garden History

In 2011 we fell in love with our house on the corner – especially with the gardens. The variety of plants, cacti, trees and mini-ecosystems was a little daunting at first. We did have a lot of unfortunate losses when changes were made. What changes, might you ask? Removal of grass and some large trees that were diseased or were fatally affected from the hard freezes of 2011 and 2012 for one and then just the struggle of finding out what these existing plants wanted from us.

The two large grapefruit trees wanted water daily since they were used to being surrounded by grass. For nearly two years we tried to wean them onto a more traditional watering schedule, but they really didn't want to cooperate. Once it was clear that we had lost this battle, the solution was to install a gray water line from our shower when we put in the new bath addition. That way we supplement the daily water they want with the gray water when we shower. They are happy with that arrangement!

In addition to the existing plants, there are the occasional replacements, the addition of trees to help bring shade to the property (choosing more native species) and watching the saguaros' water diet by limiting the spread of their roots. We installed rainwater tanks to help with watering those trees, planted bushes to bring in various birds and butterflies and constantly adjusted the veggie and herb gardens.

Can't forget the ladies – Lucy, Olive Oil, Carmen and Blondie. Not only do they provide us with an abundance of eggs and fertilizer, but with lots of entertainment as well!

Gardening Basics

Watering: There are many different watering systems on the property: some drip, some flooding and some hand watering, as well as rain water, gray water and good ol' city water.

Soil: Each side of the yard really has slightly different consistency to the soil. Some areas have more clay, others are sandier. Potting soil is used in all pots. Veggie/herb bins all get an updated mixture of compost, composted manure and new soil with each seasonal rotation.

Fertilizer: Fish emulsion is given to most flowering plants, veggies and herbs; citrus food to all citrus (with those in pots getting fertilized more often than those in-ground) and rose food and espresso grounds to roses.

Pest Control: We let nature do a lot of the pest control. We do spray BT on the grapevines and some neem oil or dish soap on the veggies and herbs since they can't wait for the natural solution.

Personal Gardening Secrets and Gardening Philosophy: Pay attention and try to plant items that are right for the environment they are put in. Plant what makes you happy and what you're willing to take the time to nurture. Feel free to experiment. Sometimes you succeed, sometimes you don't. All plants won't work the way you expect, but you never know unless you give it a try!

