

The Gardens at La Finca

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**Topics: The Basics of Garden Design
Re-vegetating with Rescue Plants**

Garden History

We began The Gardens at La Finca in 2014. The four acre property was overgrown and wild due to years of benign neglect. We used the “wild” condition of the property to our advantage, spending over a year pruning trees and native shrubs, identifying micro-climates and getting to know the wildlife that call La Finca home. A plan for our gardens unfolded as we observed seasonal changes, migration habits of the wildlife, water runoff patterns and our view of the gardens from both inside and outside of our home.

We chose to leave the northern approach to La Finca largely untouched. The panoramic vistas of the Catalina, Rincon and Tucson Mountains speak for themselves. We designed and installed a colorful cactus garden to greet visitors, which features a “barrel pond” and numerous specimen columnar cacti. Shade is provided by mesquite, Texas ebony and acacia trees. The vast majority of our plantings throughout our gardens have been selected to attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.

The southern side of our home is the hub for relaxation and entertainment with panoramic city views at night. Fruit trees, specimen trees (carob, spiral eucalyptus) and old growth native palo verde trees provide protection and shade. A short nature walk amid hardy native and non-native adaptive trees, plants, grasses and vines ends at our enclosed vegetable garden, which provides seasonal food for all residents of La Finca, including the birds!

Gardening Basics

As transplants from Wisconsin, we have had to learn a lot about the fundamentals of desert gardening. It is fair to say that we started from scratch, but met the challenge head on and with enthusiasm.

Watering: Our plan incorporated a three-zone drip irrigation system and passive and active water harvesting. Various areas are contoured to slow and capture the natural course of run-off water and a thousand gallon cistern harvests water from the roof.

Soil: Since we seldom amend our desert soil, we dig square holes to encourage outward growth of roots as they free themselves from their round pot pattern. Occasionally we will add compost from our bins depending on plant needs.

Fertilizing: All new plantings get a sprinkle of slow release fertilizer to welcome them to La Finca. In February, May and September we assess the plants and apply fertilizer as needed.

Pest Control: We are fortunate to have a livestock fence around a large portion of the property to deter javelinas. Rabbits and birds are a problem we gladly tolerate, deploying caging to protect new tender plants when necessary. As to other plants, especially those in the vegetable garden, we ascribe to the adage that the “footsteps of the gardener are the best approach to pest control.”

Gardening Philosophy: We find great joy in our home and gardens and consider the protection of the natural setting and native habitat to be foremost in all design decisions. We plan, organize and implement ideas to emphasize and enhance the natural beauty of our desert landscape.

