

Lilacs, Roses and Irises OH MY!

12361 E. Mesquite Trail
Tucson, AZ 85747

Topics: Cold Weather Care for your plants, Roses

Garden History

In 1984 we purchased a property lot located in “Thunderhead Ranch” near the Saguaro Nat’l Park. This property was known as a fly-in guest ranch, established in 1946. The mature mesquite and palo verde trees on the property provided us a secluded area to build a private home. Our family moved in on a cold snowy Christmas day in 1986. The property elevation is from 2892 to 2890, not much slope, but cold enough that most plants do need frost protection. I cover the cold sensitive plants each winter. I do try to purchase native and cold tolerant plants. The roses, lilacs and irises do not need to be covered during winter and can tolerate the cold. The native plants in this area usually bloom two weeks after the native plants bloom in town. I started all my gardens from scratch. The walled in backyard consists of a garden shed, grass, tortoise habitat and a vegetable garden. The grass area is for the tortoises to graze and for my dog training. We supply native plants for the tortoises to mow down every year. The area has lots of prickly pear and I feed that fruit to my tortoises. In the vegetable garden I grow berries, seasonal vegetables and some tortoise food. The front yard garden has many lilacs, roses and irises. In 1990 I planted my first plant: a common lilac, this plant started my front yard gardening. The front yard has a three-foot wall to keep javelinas out. I quickly learned when a javelina wants to eat plant, they will most likely jump the wall to devour it. The front garden is certified by both the North American Butterfly Association and the National Wildlife Federation. The native walkway provides protection, food and a wonderful place to stroll with my dogs.

Garden Basics

Watering: For economic and water conservation reasons a cistern helps collect water for front yard gardens. We do use drip irrigation.

Soil: The soil on the property is soft native soil and easy to dig. When planting native plants, I mix some mulch into native soil. I purchased soil from Tanks to fill the garden and flower beds.

Fertilizer: I follow the schedules recommended for each plant. Roses get the most attention beginning in March, I fertilize every two weeks. I also use Milorganite on the roses and lilacs. Irises get fertilized starting February every two weeks alternating liquid and granulated fertilizer.

Pest Control: Very few chemicals or pesticides are used in my gardens. The grapevine in the backyard is a source of food for the Sonoran Desert tortoises and no spray is used. Ants are a constant problem; they can strip a rose bush in one day.

Gardening Philosophy: My greatest satisfaction is sitting in a garden watching the Arizona Sunrise or sunset with all the pollinators, critters and friends. . I have successfully propagated my common lilac. Both gardens contain donated or rescued plants from friends and family. I plant all types and styles of plants to enhance the viewing pleasure or to attract more birds and pollinators. I find seed collecting and propagation fun and addictive.