

Desert Wildlife Refuge

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Tucson, AZ 85749

Garden History

We purchased our home in a new subdivision 40 years ago where a few small mesquite trees, acacias, creosote, cholla and barrel cactus were scattered about on a desert acre corner lot. We brick patios in the backyard, a pool and brick patio on the side yard, as a wash runs through the back of the property. We have always embraced the desert beauty and knew we wanted to add native and drought tolerant plants, along with cactus, succulents and agaves to attract wildlife. Our yard is registered with the National Federation of Wildlife. We did the work ourselves over the years as time and budget allowed.

Our garden reflects our past on Tucson's south side, where our parents repurposed items out of necessity. These barrio-style gardens have shrines, plants, and cuttings growing in any vessel that can be found, from tires to kitchen containers. Our hidden barrio garden reflects that style. A natural pathway lined with decomposed granite and river rock in the front yard was created by our two children riding their bikes. We planted brittlebush from seeds throughout the front garden for the birds and to create a natural desert setting. The Jerusalem sage and wildflowers around the fountain in the back is loved by the birds. *Salvia greggii* and the desert willow tree are favorites of the hummingbirds. The front entry has many succulents in pots including euphorbias which are poisonous and not touched by the javelinas. A sea of Mexican golden barrels flows by the poolside garden along with a small cactus rock garden made from cuttings and pups from the yard. Gregg's mistflower, Arizona and pine leaf milkweed are big favorites of butterflies. We have a small covered raised bed salsa garden in the back and may expand the veggio garden in the future.

Gardening Basics

Watering: There are drip irrigation lines to the vines and drought tolerant plants and potted geraniums in the barrio garden. We have reduced the drip lines as the plants matured. The native plants and trees are not on drip. We do our best to be water-wise, cutting back on plants requiring more water, and have chosen to add more cactus and agaves to our garden for the texture and color they provide. When I hand water I use a soil probe and water deeply and less often.

Soil: Our native and drought tolerant plants are planted in native soil, and we purchased cactus soil to make small mounds when planting cactus to allow for easier planting and good drainage.

Fertilizer: I use Happy Frog organic fertilizer for my small salsa garden. I seldom fertilize our native and drought tolerant plants but if I do, I use organic all-purpose fertilizer from Mesquite Valley Growers, called Special Blend, once or twice a year.

Pest Control: We have a very diverse desert garden and no problems with pests that a good jet spray from the hose won't tackle. We have created a garden that can be enjoyed by humans and a large variety of wildlife and have not had to use chemicals in our garden.

Gardening Philosophy: Gardening should be fun and enjoyable and a reflection of who we are. We have a responsibility to respect the desert and wildlife around us, be as water-wise as possible and always try to learn and share with others.