

Garden Casa Kay T  
4850 W Kay T Drive  
Tucson, AZ 85745

Topics: Desert Tortoise Habitat; Orchards and Raised Bed Edibles

**Garden History:** Casa Kay T consists of both cultivated landscape/gardens and open desert on 3.5 acres in the Tucson Mountain Foothills. The property sits on a small plateau at approximately 3050 feet with classic Sonoran desert vegetation. Wildlife is abundant on about 2 acres of natural Sonoran Desert.

The front yard features several microclimates: the southwest corner receives direct west sun and is a great spot for brittle bush, red bird of paradise, varieties of milkweed, and torch cactus. A shaded rain garden with aloe is nestled close to the house. The center of the circle drive has older palo verde trees shading the house and in the far front, ironwood trees, and lechuguilla bask in full sun. The backyard displays cactus and succulent gardens. The tortoise pen on the southeast is home to the resident desert tortoise. His habitat is dominated by two mesquites that shade and protect his burrow. This protected microclimate is the warmest, yet shadiest part of the property and is a popular spot for birds and the occasional deer that hops the fence.

Behind the garage, an enclosed garden structure supports raised beds for veggies. Flowers and shrubs around the garden attract pollinators and in summer, gourd plants climb up the structure's west side providing shade for vegetables. It is cooler downslope towards the north, and a collection of fig, pomegranate, quince, and apple trees are growing just old enough to expect a harvest soon. Citrus are planted in containers that can be moved to maximize sun and protect from frost.

The property is recognized both by Tucson Audubon's Wildlife at Home Cardinal Level program, and National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat program.

**Watering:** The backyard area, north driveway, and circle center are contoured to maximize rainwater flow into tree basins. Gutters direct water into perennial shrub areas in the back and into catch basins in the tortoise habitat and rain garden. A five-channel drip system provides supplemental water to plants around the house. Water to the garden and orchard areas is supplied in part from a 1,000-gallon rain harvesting tank on the north side of the garage; overflow is directed to the east orchard. Drip irrigation on timers supplies additional water as needed.

**Soil:** All the garden areas were created by clearing native desert, so the soil is very rocky. The soil in the raised beds of the vegetable garden was brought in. Both rock and organic mulches are used to amend the soil and increase water retention.

**Fertilizer:** Mostly compost, organic fertilizer, and worm castings are used in the raised beds in the garden, fruit trees and pots. Tumbler composters create some of the compost, and two vermiculture worm beds provide the worm castings. Desert plants are rarely, if ever, fertilized.

**Pest Control:** Fencing, raised beds, pots, and clean up are the keys to pest control in the maintained gardens. Packrats are trapped and rattlesnakes are moved to the wash. Integrated Pest Management is used in the vegetable garden and orchard.

**Gardening Philosophy:** We live in a desert and respect that environment by focusing on native or desert adapted plants to create a comfortable living space and grow food. Water is conserved and used wisely.