

NatureScape Gardens

4902 W Paseo de las Colinas

Tucson, AZ 85745

Topics: Composting, Gardening as you age

Garden History: I chose the plural, gardens, when I selected the name because there are three distinct yet related gardens surrounding my house. Each garden has a unique purpose, and the gardens are designed to harmonize with each other as well as with the desert and its many inhabitants. My husband designed our house which we completed in 1975. We put in one very small mesquite right away and other drought tolerant trees over the years. My house has many windows with great views of the mountain ranges and most of my one acre lot is natural desert. Although I have lived here for nearly fifty years, I did not seriously begin cultivating my gardens until 2014.

When I adopted an “indoor-outdoor” cat who demanded 24/7 access to the outside I decided to create specialized garden habitats around the house. I gradually transformed my small walled garden into a **Catio Garden** by adding a cat door and a twenty-four inch extension to the garden wall. I relocated most of the plants that are frequented by birds to the north and west garden areas. The Catio now has mostly native plants that readily reseed—desert milkweed, Indian mallow, queen’s wreath, and Sonoran-honeysuckle. My Catio in-ground kitchen scraps composting system has resulted in limited areas of soft soil that the cats use as their primary litter box.

My cats generally ignore butterflies but, sadly, not moths, so the **Flutterby Garden**, on the east side of the house, became a necessity. It is still in development and currently includes brittle bush, desert milkweed, ruellia, and giant Gregg’s mist flower.

My third garden area, that I call the **Sanctuary Garden**, wraps around the north and west sides of the house and its focus is birds. This garden owes its success to a combination of plants and a small water feature. With the exception of four hummingbird feeders, I do not feed the birds; instead they find nourishment from a combination of native desert plants/trees—desert willow, creosote, desert hackberry, and cultivated plants—pomegranate, Tecoma stans, aster, and Baja fairy duster. The small water fountain on the deck has resulted in a steady stream of birds who are seeking water; I am now regularly visited by twenty plus bird species.

Another beloved feature of my gardens is its rain chain, wind chimes and moving garden sculptures. Each is located so they can be enjoyed while in the garden or from inside my house.

Garden Basics

Watering: I use a six station drip irrigation system that has lines that run around the house, soaker hoses to water the trees, and garden hoses. While most of the plants I have are drought tolerant, I am not as water thrifty as I want and need to be. Reducing the amount of water I use without changing the feel of my garden is my major gardening challenge.

Soil: With the exception of potted plants, I select drought tolerant plants and plant them directly into the desert soil. For potted plants I use potting soil from either Desert Survivors or Tanks. I don’t “clean up” the desert, instead I try to use trimmings as a light mulch.

Fertilizer: With the exception of potted plants, I do not use fertilizer or soil amendments.

Pest Control: I don’t mind the damage done by insects and have never used pesticides. When insects do appear in large numbers within a few days another insect comes along and nature restores itself. Javelina are a challenge! They eat whatever they choose so I protect a few plants with circles made from stucco lath.

Gardening Philosophy: I am a lazy gardener; I love being outside in nature but I really don’t want to work all that hard and I want to be able to do most of the work myself. I choose native and/or drought

tolerant plants because I know they are needed by birds, butterflies, and pollinators. I add garden sculptures to compliment nature.