

## **The Art of Gardening**

2836 West Wagon Wheel Drive  
Tucson, AZ 85745

### **Topics for Discussion: Making bee houses, a demonstration**

#### **Garden History**

We moved into our tract home 36 years ago at the base of the Tucson Mountains. The scraped desert yard came with two mesquite tree sticks and lots of desert rocks. That first year we managed to dig a large hole five feet past the caliche, for an Arizona Ash tree we named Adrian. We knew we wanted to plant her in the north side backyard for the umbrellaed microclimate effect we wanted. We have never regretted planting Adrian Ash that first year.

One year later we realized the blinding sunlight reflected from the desert rocks, had to go. We needed to create a shady outside living space to enjoy the summer days and evenings. We hired a landscape architect who made the place come alive with hardscape and plantings in the backyard.

With the backyard now going in the right direction, we started on the front yard. We had donations from friends, and we planted everything. We also used found materials to further develop the xeriscaped front garden. Like I said, lots of rocks were available in the yard, especially when you dig a hole. We were able to construct a dry rock retaining wall that still exists today. Native stones and purchased river rock are part of the esthetic. Many of the original cacti and plantings are mature and add drama to the newer and younger specimens planted more recently. Initially we didn't have rhyme or reason, but as time went on, we knew we wanted a fully packed xeriscape south exposure front yard. My source material was the English country garden but with a Southwestern twist.



Over the years, mesquites, roses, veggies, and many flowers have come and gone. But citrus, fig, pomegranate, pecan, grape, and olive, persist. We have planted a small golden barrel cactus each year we have been here, and they remain prominent in the xeriscape yard.

As water becomes increasingly scarce, our goal is to transition to native and low water use plants in the next several years. Grasses are our new fun experiment, and we do love the native plant options.

#### **My Garden Basics**

**Irrigation:** The xeriscape garden is hand watered as needed. Fruit trees and the backyard are on drip irrigation, after many iterations of the learning curve. Rainwater harvesting is directed from roof gutters to tree basins and barrel containers. I plan to capture some gray water also.

**Soil:** Sandy/rocky desert soil with annoying caliche is throughout the property. Soil is reconditioned as needed for non-desert plants. Leaf matter from Adrian Ash is composted yearly and provides two large wheelbarrows of the best home-grown worms and garden gold.

**Fertilizer:** I rarely fertilize due to occasional deadly applications. I will give bone meal to bulbs, and citrus will sometimes get their holiday feeds.

**Pest control:** I don't use any pesticides except BT dunks in the fountain for mosquitos. Predator dragonflies have naturalized in the fountain. My fingers are the best tool in my pocket.

**Garden Philosophy:** I plant what I like with particular attention to color, shape, form, and structure. I feel connected to my plants, they respond to me as I speak to them. It is a safe place to relax the mind and be creative. *I like to plant a lot of companion plants; everyone likes to have a sister close by.*

**Personal Secret:** I love plant volunteers; they know where there's a good spot to grow. They are some of my best specimens.