

Garden C: TOM & SUE

Tom and Sue Saari's peaceful garden oasis was featured in the 2016 Master Gardener's Tour and incorporates a wide variety of plants to compliment the beautiful native vegetation on the 3.7 acres of Sonoran desert that surrounds their home. Critter-proof front and rear courtyard walls protect an array of lush plantings. A transitional zone that blends native plants with desert-adapted species is found immediately outside the walls flanking a network of gravel pathways that meander into the surrounding desert. Benches are strategically placed along the paths to take advantage of the magnificent views. The property includes a planting ramada with a composting area, water and art features, as well as vegetables, grapevines and lemon, orange and limequat citrus.

Tom and Sue's garden strives to create a full, mature look with a combination of flowers, shrubs and trees that attract birds, butterflies and local fauna that include bobcats, coyotes, javelina, and mule and whitetail deer. The overall design is a work in progress and as displaced Wisconsinites, they learn as they go. They grow plants by seed or cuttings and provide a touch of whimsy to the overall design with art objects, garage sale treasures, wind chimes and bird feeders.

Some of the technical details for creating and maintaining their oasis include:

Watering is achieved through an irrigation system with five zones for trees, citrus, low and high water plants and pot lines. Irrigation is adjusted seasonally. Small basins serve as water retention areas to provide rainwater to the courtyard gardens. Larger basins outside the walls collect run off. New plantings and others requiring special attention get hand-watered.

Fertilizer includes time-released granules for new plants, occasional all-purpose fertilizer (especially for pots), Miracle Gro is applied to vegetables as needed and the citrus and roses are fertilized on a regular schedule.

Pest Control is accomplished through hand picking insects, removing affected plants to avoid spread, water spray, insecticidal soap, BT and Neem oil. Round-Up is applied to quack grass and the pack rat population is dealt with through Havahart traps.

What's their personal gardening secret? Do your own thing! Visit lots of gardens and learn from others. Be open to making changes and trying something new. Know your invasive species and deal with them early before they take over. And most importantly, take time to step back, share and enjoy what you have created.

Garden D: Don & Julie



Most of the land surrounding Don and Julie's renovated home and garden is left as natural desert, with pocket gardens, hardscape, and metal work featured on about two of their seven acres. Don and Julie discovered the property while on a geocaching hike in the Tortolita Mountains five years ago. The grounds began as several rubble piles and homemade walls among the native plants and a few wonderful thriving non-native plants (including bottle tree, stapelia, some aloes, cereus, golden barrels and a pomegranate tree). In addition to adding plants, property renovations include 40 tons of gravel, removing buffelgrass, weeds and adding hardscape and metal work.



Don and Julie's property features a courtyard garden with irrigated plants for visiting birds and butterflies. Some non-native plants in pots thrive on the patio. Everything planted in the west side succulent garden has gone wild and serves as a propagation garden. The stapelia, aloes, firestick, octopus agave and others love the warm dappled light. The succulent garden is also where the Australian bottle tree lives. There is a collection of agave growing on the rocky west hill and they've started to create a small rocky nature path on the north hill. A

labyrinth is the newest addition to their opuntia garden. Other additions include several native bee habitat/nests to encourage pollinators and milkweed and other pollinator attracting plants. Giant Saguaros and native forest plants populate the natural desert areas of the property.

Some of the technical details for creating and maintaining their garden:

Watering is conservative due to a very slow well. They use drip irrigation primarily in the courtyard and for establishing younger plants. Gutters and two water harvesters provide a supplemental supply for hand-watering shade trees and maintaining a reserve for dry months.

Soil is generally a mix of approximately equal thirds of organic, sand and perlite for cacti and succulents.

Pest Control is accomplished through a homemade organic pesticide/fungicide when needed. Humane traps are used for catch and release of hungry squirrels. Tasty young plants are protected or replaced with plants that are not preferred by hungry animals (euphorbia, aloe, agave, etc.).

What's their personal gardening secret?

Be willing to learn by trial and error when choosing the right plants for each of the microclimates around the property. Agaves and opuntias have been great for the most challenging areas on the west side. Non-natives, aloes and/or specialty succulents live in dappled sunlight and more protected areas. They are actively growing and encouraging shade trees.

