

UNIQUE YARD OF PLANTS AND TREASURES Crystal's Garden

I always had flowers, but gave that up when I returned from vacation to find the Honeysuckle Bush dead because my son forgot to water it; that was 14 years ago. As I always had plants of one kind or another, I decided to try my luck with cactus. Since my backyard was full of kid's things – swing set, trampoline, turtles, etc., I chose to go with pots.

The first problem I had was over watering. Once I realized cactus don't require the water that flowers do, I quit killing them and the cactus were much happier. Today, I water twice a week during the summer months and it takes between 1.5 and 2 hours to complete. During the winter months I water once a month.



The second problem was I kept burning everything as I don't have any shade in my backyard. My husband solved this problem by installing a 25 ft x 2.5 ft structure with shade cloth on top – the cactus love it. This is perfect year-round as we put blankets on the front and add lights in the winter to keep the plants nice and toasty when it's cold outside. Once this area was full, I tried putting some cactus in the ground.

The third problem was my sulcate turtles kept eating the cactus – pretty expensive food for them and depressing for me to come home from work and find the cactus that I had just planted with a big chunk out of it or completely gone. I had to make a decision – either keep the turtles or the cactus, but I could not have both; obviously the cactus won! I was amazed and still am at how much larger the plants grew once in the ground. Over the years, my plants have expanded to the side and front yard, basically any open space I can find for another plant.

The next thing I have to tackle is a new greenhouse. In the winter in addition to the heated area I have outside, I used to take lots of plants inside. My husband was not happy since the sunroom was full of plants for approx. 5 months. For my birthday this year, he purchased and put up a greenhouse complete with lights and electricity. He was not sure the lights were such a good idea when I was outside working in the greenhouse at 9:00 at night. This winter if all goes right, the plants will be in the greenhouse and not the sunroom.

Today I have over 300 potted plants in addition to the cactus in the ground. Although I prefer clay pots, I'll use anything. All my pots either are hand me downs or purchased at garage sales, the swap meet, or second-hand stores. I have purchased some plants, but the majority have been given to me, are starts from another plant, rescued, freebies I get at our meetings or for volunteering at Pima Prickly Park. As I have limited space, the cactus must be able to grow upwards. Several species are supposed to grow along the ground but with a little help from a stake (or whatever is available) they have learned to grow vertical.

It is not just the plants that make my backyard unique, it is the birds, soft sounds, and creatures that enjoy this environment along with so many treasures. I've created something that is different, full of life with memories from years past and present.



I've learned so much, but one thing I have to practice is patience, the plant may not look as good as I think it should, but with some time and lots of TLC it comes around.

