

FROM OPEN RANGE TO DESERT OASIS Cyndi and Dwight



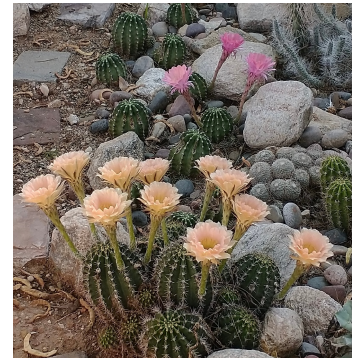
I bought this one acre property in 1999. The only thing on the land was the house, piles of bulldozed creosote and upside down barrel cactus. There was one ancient Mesquite tree on the far back property line. The first four years it was open range and I couldn't plant anything or the cows would eat it.

Eventually the cows were fenced in and I've been planting things everyday since then. I wanted the yard to look like the Catalina foothills. I brought in two large dumptruck loads of Catalina boulders and rocks and got busy! I planted the many mature trees, a lot of creosote filled back in. I love cactus and learned where each variety would be happiest. I learned that when the book says full sun, it doesn't mean AZ full sun.

Obviously, the plants didn't read the book. The yard has changed several times over the years. Plants grow, die and are replaced. Currently I am learning about native plants and have been adding many to the acre. Several of my favorite plants are the 9 ft *Trichocereus terscheckii* with arms and the crested *Trichocereus* in the front yard. Also the 5 ft *Aloe dichotoma*, still waiting for it to fork. It was fun when I didn't have to scrounge for plants to put in the ground anymore and could go choose plants from my two shade houses

SOIL MIX: I use Kellogs Raised Garden potting mix for the potted plants. When I plant in the ground, its usually a mixture of potting soil and native soil. I feed with Osmocote. I found a 20-20-20 plant food that I get online for the Adeniums.

WATERING: When planting trees or native plants, I water every day for a month then gradually taper off over several months. Then I water weekly. Trees get deep water weekly until they're pretty big, then only an overnight soaking several times a year. The cactus in the 30% shade house get watered weekly in the summer and not at all in the winter. The plants in the 70% shade house are succulents mostly and get watered every three days or as needed.



GARDEN PESTS: My several resident gopher snakes take care of packrats for me. I coexist with the spiders etc. that take care of insect pests. If something isn't eating your plants, your not part of the ecosystem. I planted a Milk Vine a month ago and it came with two free Queen caterpillars who've eaten almost every leaf, but it been amazing to watch the green chrysalis and watch the Queen butterfly emerge. The plant will survive. I never use anything toxic outdoors. I will spray ants indoors. And will use neem oil on mealy bugs or spider mites in the shade houses. I love my many lizards, snakes, scorpions, hawks and don't want to endanger them.

TIPS: Experiment. I've learned to plant native cactus that require little care on the outer edge of the property and gradually move toward the house with plants that require more attention. Its okay to plant in the shade. Just visit Bachs Nursery and check out the mature cactus plants under the large trees. I'm inspired by the desert when deciding where to put a plant. It's a jungle out there! Nobody planted in straight lines! And every plant is an experiment.



(Enjoy Cyndi's extensive collection of succulents growing in the shaded beds along the front paths, her special group of potted specimens in the shade houses and don't miss Pancho & Lefty in their desert tortoise habitat.)

