

Growing food in Tucson

Are you new to gardening or have had a successful garden in another area but are struggling in our desert climate? These **essential basic steps** will get you started on your desert garden and give you further resources to help your garden thrive. Gardening is fun and rewarding lifelong learning. *Enjoy and experiment!*



LOCATION

You can garden in containers, plots or on acres of land.

Whatever size, observe the following:

Sun: Look for a space with full winter sun (southern exposure) and ideally some shade on the west side for the hot summer afternoons.

Accessibility: Garden close to home, start small and manageable. Make sure you can comfortably maintain garden beds (they can be elevated). Beds should be narrow, 2-3 ft. To reach without stepping on prepared soil.

Utilities, contamination, and problem plants: Avoid areas where oil, solvents, paint, chemicals may have been spilled. Avoid gardening near oleander, salt cedar, and eucalyptus. Check location of utility lines before digging.

Other challenges: Plan fencing and barriers for animals (pets, gophers, etc.) And high winds.

Harvest rain: Observe the flow of rain water to utilize it in your landscape and garden.



WATER

Water is very precious in the desert!

Practice careful, conservation-minded watering.

Do not water during the heat of the day.

Early morning or evening is best.

Water to the soil and roots, not air and leaves.

Deep, slow, consistent watering is best (for example, 20 minutes every other day instead of shallow 10 minutes every day).

Drip irrigation is simple and economical to install and a more efficient use of water.

Touch your soil! If moist 1-2 inches below the surface NO need to water again. Push a stick or soil probe or dig a small hole into soil--it should be moist soil at least 1 ft. deep.

Mulch: To lessen evaporation, cover the surface of the soil with anything non-toxic (alfalfa, straw, newspaper, agrobion, weeds, leaves).

Consider not gardening during June (extreme dry and hot) but rather waiting for monsoon rains (July and August).



SOIL

Tucson has many soil types, most are compacted, alkaline, low in organic matter and unfit for growing vegetables.

Planting areas must be lovingly prepared:

DIG: Break up the soil removing rocks, roots, and break through any caliche layers, to a minimum depth of 2ft. Soaking the area 48 hours beforehand will soften the soil. Separate the top and bottom halves of soil. Use the bottom half of your removed soil to create raised pathways and create basins for rainwater.

Compost: Mix 50% compost with the remaining top half of soil. Never walk on the prepared planting area. With every planting season incorporate more organic materials to the top layer. Building soil life and fertility is a long-term process. Continue learning about soil and make your own compost (see separate resource list)

Containers: Try a container with a water reservoir at the bottom (wicking planter or self-watering container). Fill with potting mix that feels spongy, not woody.



SEEDS

Plant desert adapted varieties: Exchange with other gardeners, the library or purchase from local companies. Look for heat tolerant and low water use varieties. Visit Farmers' Markets to see what varieties of vegetables do best in our climate.

Plant with the season: Use a Tucson planting guide. Typically, leaf, root and brassica (cabbage family) crops are cool season (Sept-Feb) and fruit crops (tomatoes, melons, chilies, etc.) are warm season (March-Oct).

Save your own seeds: Avoid hybrid seeds so you can save your own! Check seed saving information for techniques on saving from different kinds of plants.



HARVEST

Eat your veggies! Garden veggies often look different than in a store. Visit other gardens or research to learn to harvest at peak ripeness. Often gardens produce abundantly--consider sharing, preserving or selling. Enjoy trying different recipes.

Visit <http://www.communityfoodbank.org/Our-Work/Programs/Garden-Installation> for additional information and resources.



COMMUNITY FOOD BANK
OF SOUTHERN ARIZONA

communityfoodbank.org

Help! Resources, websites & reading

LOCAL RESOURCES

COMMUNITY FOOD BANK GARDEN & FARM PROGRAM

www.communityfoodbank.org; (520) 622-0525

Free and low-cost classes, garden materials, technical assistance and seed library.

- *Nuestra Tierra Demo Garden:* 3003 S. Country Club Rd., behind playground
- *Las Milpitas Community Farm:* 2405 S. Cottonwood Lane

MASTER GARDENERS OF AZ COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

www.tucsonvillagefarm.org

Plant question hotline: (520) 626-5161

Demonstration gardens and home of Tucson Village Farm

TUCSON ORGANIC GARDENERS

www.tucsonorganicgardeners.org

Free monthly lectures, materials, and advice

NATIVE SEED/SEARCH

www.native-seeds.org; 520-622-0830

Online garden forum, classes and information, seed library, and desert adapted seeds and products for purchase

SONORAN PERMACULTURE GUILD

www.sonoranpermaculture.org

Classes and information on sustainability and permaculture

DESERT HARVESTERS

www.desertharvesters.org

Information and events about edible desert plants

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT GROUP

<http://watershedmg.org>; 520-396-3266

Information, events, and technical assistance for water harvesting and water conservation

COMMUNITY GARDENS OF TUCSON

<http://communitygardensoftucson.org>

Information about community gardens and home of George Brookbank's desert gardening blog

FRIENDS OF TUCSON'S BIRTHPLACE, MISSION GARDEN

<https://www.tucsonsbirthplace.org/>

CFB FARMERS' MARKETS - *See what vegetables are seasonally available, talk to local farmers, and purchase seedlings*

- **SANTA CRUZ RIVER:** Thursdays 3-6pm October-April & 4-7pm May-September; 100 Avenida del Convento
- **COMMUNITY FOOD BANK:** Tuesdays 8am-12pm; 3003 S. Country Club Road

LOCAL NURSERIES - *Information and materials*

- **DESERT SURVIVORS:** (520) 884-8806
- **MESQUITE VALLEY GROWERS:** (520) 721-8600

BOOKS AND WEBSITES

GENERAL GARDENING

- *Extreme Gardening* by Dave Owens
- *Desert Gardening* by George Brookbank
- *Desert Gardening for Beginners* by Cathy Cromell
- *The New Organic Grower: A Master's Manual of Tools and Techniques for the Home and Market Gardener* by Eliot Coleman
- *The Sustainable Vegetable Garden* by John Jeavons & Carol Cox
- *Rodale's Vegetable Garden Problem Solver* by Fern Marshall Bradley
- **National sustainable agriculture information service:** www.attra.org

SOIL AND COMPOST

Compost is often available for free from people that have livestock or purchase from nurseries and landscape companies—or make your own!

Call Community Food Bank Garden Program staff for more information at (520) 622-0525.

- *The Rodale Book of Composting* edited by Deborah Martin & Grace Gershuny
- *Teaming with Microbes* by Jeff Lowenfels & Wayne Lewis
- *Worms Eat My Garbage* by Mary Appelhof

CONTAINERS

- *Fresh Food from Small Spaces* by R.J. Ruppenthal

SEEDS

- **Pima County Seed Library:**
<http://www.library.pima.gov/seed-library/>

WATER

- *Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond* by Brad Lancaster www.harvestingrainwater.com
- *Create an Oasis with Greywater* by Art Ludwig
- **Oasis Design Greywater Resources:**
<http://oasisdesign.net/>
- **Sprinkler World:** (520) 888-9414 (*irrigation supplies*)
- **UA's Project Harvest training:**
<https://projectharvest.arizona.edu/>

HARVEST

Learn about selling produce on consignment with Abundant Harvest Cooperative. Call (520) 882-3271.

