

Thinking about Landscaping your Yard at Academy Village

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Academy Village is located in one of the lushest portions of the Sonoran Desert. Many plants are native to this area, from the giant saguaro to the diminutive desert lupine. At 3,000 feet in elevation, we are at the edge of the desert grassland and many grasses find a home here.

Sonoran Desert plants attract and support a wide variety of wildlife. This abundance of wildlife is one of the great assets of our community. Butterflies, hummingbirds, goldfinches and many other birds are plant feeders. Growing the native plants they enjoy is one of the best ways to attract these animals to your yard. Please consider the wild native plants that appear in yard a blessing to be nurtured, not weeds to be destroyed. Please see the Resources list at the end of this document if you need assistance identifying these plants.

Some things to consider when planning your landscape:

1. Academy Village Landscape Policy and Prohibited Plant List are in the Red Book (page 20+). The Approved Plant List contains over 400 plants and is available, in both electronic and paper form, upon request from the HOA Business Office.

Landscape changes, including the addition of walls, fences, patios, trees, and shrubs, must be approved in advance by the Architectural Control Committee (ACC). Please submit a Proposal for Design Review (PDR) (in your Red Book and available from the Business Office) if you wish to make these additions to your property. The ACC has policies to ensure a rapid response to PDRs and often approves requests without a formal meeting. The ACC must respond to all requests within 30 days. Plants not on the Approved List may be allowed by the ACC if submitted for approval.

2. Many references and websites give information on the potential size of plants. You will have healthier plants that require less work from you if you take their mature size into account. Don't let that small plant in the nursery fool you – it will grow. Give it the space it needs.
3. When considering a plant for your landscape, pay attention to its ability to withstand both summer's heat and winter's cold. Yes, temperatures can go well above 100°F but can also fall below freezing. To be safe, plants should be cold tolerant to at least 20°F. If you want to grow tropical plants that can't survive a freeze, put them in pots and bring them indoors during cold spells.
4. Academy Village is lucky to have well-drained soils that can support a wide variety of native plants. These native plants can grow in our soil without any amendments, such as compost or peat moss. However, our soils are naturally low in organic matter. Roses, vegetables, and other plants from non-desert regions may benefit from the addition of organic soil amendments.

Many homeowners use stone mulch (known as DG-decomposed granite) to improve the appearance of their yard, reduce weed growth and soil temperature, and hold soil moisture. DG comes in different stone sizes and is available in colors that match our native desert landscape.

Some desert soils have problems with caliche, a layer of calcium carbonate that can slow drainage and constrict roots ([more information](#)). This may be a problem in some locations in Academy Village. Perhaps more common is soil compaction caused by heavy equipment used to clear and level building lots. If water stands on your lot after a rain when it has soaked in on most other lots, you may have a compaction problem. Deep digging to loosen the soil can help. If your soil is compacted, you can help roots of new plants grow by making the planting hole extra wide (but do not make it deeper than needed. Loosening the soil immediately below the plant may cause it to sink as the soil settles. Roots grow out, away from the base of the plant, not down toward China.)

5. Wildlife can nibble on your plants. Often the damage they do is minor. Sometimes the damage is more severe. There are steps you can take to reduce damage but remember, if the animal is starving, there is plentiful incentive to get to and feed on your plants. Animals you may encounter include:

Javelinas: these large animals can do a lot of damage by digging plants out of the ground. Our local population has a taste for red yucca (*Hesperaloe parviflora*). To prevent damage, grow this plant only inside a fenced/walled area. Javelina will occasionally go after other plants such as agave. Village residents have reported at least some success

protecting plants from javelina by surrounding the plant with poultry wire flat on the ground, at or just below the soil surface, or by surrounding the plant with larger rocks. Javelinas travel in herds and can be dangerous. Approach with care.

Rabbits: these small animals eat a wide variety of the native plants that are plentiful in our open spaces. You may, however, find rabbits eating the occasional landscape plant. If you do, place a chicken wire cylinder around the plant. Rabbits can also chew on the bark of small trees and shrubs. In severe cases, they may girdle the plant and kill it. The trunks of newly installed trees and some shrubs should be protected by a cylinder of chicken wire or hardware cloth that is several inches larger than the trunk and at least 12” high.

Caterpillars: Love that monarch butterfly? Its offspring are going to eat your milkweed. You may find caterpillars on many of your plants occasionally and may often find them on citrus, desert willow, datura, and milkweed. Small, new plants may not tolerate the feeding and leaf loss, but the health of established plants is seldom damaged by caterpillar feeding, though there is certainly cosmetic damage. Leave the caterpillars alone and ask for help with identifying them (see below).

6. Irrigation is a confusing issue for newcomers. Most lots in the Village have drip irrigation installed. In the desert, drip irrigation is preferable to irrigation systems that spray water into the air. Drip irrigation puts water directly into the soil and reduces water loss through evaporation.

New plantings will always need some initial irrigation. Native plants will often adapt and, once established, need supplemental water only if the summer is exceptionally hot and dry. You’ll be surprised at the number of plants that will appear in spring after the winter rains and in summer after the monsoon. These plants are desert adapted and will do just fine without any help from you.

When you do irrigate, water deeply and infrequently rather than shallowly and often. Irrigation regimen does change with the season. Adjust how often you irrigate, not how long you irrigate. For example, you may irrigate every few days in summer and every few weeks in winter. But, each time you irrigate, allow the irrigation to run for the same amount of time. Find more information [here](#).

7. If you grow plants in pots, you may need to water them every day, at least in the heat of the summer. If you have lots of pots or will be away for extended periods, you may want to invest in an extra irrigation line just for the pots. The timer can then be set to a daily schedule for the pots and a more infrequent schedule for your landscape plants.

Resources

Books in the ASA library

Native Plants for Southwestern Landscapes by Judy Mielke

Trees and Shrubs for the Southwest by Mary Irish

Perennials for the Southwest by Mary Irish

Agaves, Yuccas, and Related Plants, a Gardener’s Guide by Mary Irish

Websites

[University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Publications and Information](#)

[Virtual Library of Phoenix Landscape Plants](#)

[Landscape Plants for the Arizona Desert Online Plant Search](#)

[Arizona Native Plant Society Native Gardening website](#)

Academy Village Resources

For basic plant and horticultural information, insect and pest ID

Mary Welch-Keesey, mw-k@cox.net

For plant identification

Mary Welch-Keesey, Betty Feinberg: bgfeinberg@cox.net

For advice moving plants, especially cactus and other succulents

Bill McCourt: bmccourt@outlook.com

For help with invasive plants

members of Open Space and Trails Committee: Mary Welch-Keesey, Betty Feinberg,

Erika Brand: berbrand1@aol.com