

# Creating A Desert Garden

*A showcase garden of native species can inspire environmental education and action.*

by JEFFERY COMER



*The “after” effort (right) of a showcase desert garden of native species inspires environmental education and serves as a point of interest on the golf course.*

**W**ATER USE, loss of desert habitat, expanding development . . . these environmental issues keep golf courses in desert settings under close scrutiny for their environmental management practices. TPC of Scottsdale, a municipal, daily-fee resort in the greater Phoenix, Arizona, area, is no exception. To take a proactive stance, our golf course joined the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) in 1992 and implemented a variety of projects to achieve certification in 1996.

As part of those efforts, we sought to raise awareness about our involvement in the ACSP, improve wildlife habitat, and help our guests learn about and appreciate some of the native plant species found on the course. To accomplish these goals, we planned and installed an Audubon Garden featuring native Sonoran desert plants. We chose a high-profile area filled with overgrown saltbush and weeds, and planted it with native species of trees, cacti, shrubs, and grasses. Identification placards near each plant educate guests and perhaps even inspire people to use these native species in their own home landscaping.

### Bringing the Garden to Life

To create an attractive garden on this overgrown site, we first had to strip the area of all non-native plant species. We then selected several native species that

represented those found throughout the golf course and designed the garden to feature attractive groupings of various plants.

To our good fortune, the City of Scottsdale donated all the native plants. Our landscape foreman rescued more than 300 plants from city-owned sites that were earmarked for development. Initial grow-in required us to allot several extra hours in hand watering, irrigation installation, weeding, and sign construction. We regularly weeded the area while plants became established and, subsequently, we installed a layer of crushed stone to reduce weeding. Because the plants selected are all drought tolerant, no supplemental water is required now that the garden is established.

Several additional garden features nicely complement the plants. Signs, with both the common and scientific names of each plant, help golfers become familiar with the native plants in the landscape. We installed a birdhouse to show guests our nesting program, and we saved a dead tree in the area as a snag for birds of prey to use as a perch.

### Enjoying the Results

Even while we were still installing the garden, several cactus wrens began nesting in the chollas, and two hawks were observed hunting from the tree snag. The garden beautified the area

and created a point of interest on the course.

Equally important, building this area raised curiosity from our guests, who asked many questions about our Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary efforts. This was a first. Golfers took note of the garden and complimented our efforts. Many customers have asked us how to grow native plants at their homes. Showcasing native species of plants gave us a way to communicate with and educate our guests and raised their perception about our environmental concerns for our community.

The desert garden achieved all of our goals along with some unexpected positive results. We were pleased with the response from golfers, but our staff, too, took a keen interest in the project. The garden spurred them on to become positively involved in our overall Audubon program. We hope this increased awareness by our staff and guests will be carried off the golf course to the surrounding communities, where greater attention to native plant gardening can help protect the desert landscape that makes this area so unique.

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