

Portal-Rodeo gardens - Sept. 2022

This is a place for you to share anything you like about your garden. Successes, failures, questions, ideas, whatever!

Just type right here and paste in pictures if you like. Include your name (and approximate location if you like) so we know who is sharing what. And if you have questions for folks, you can add those in too. If this doesn't work for you, you can email Karen and she'll add it.

From Bekah Wilce over in Elfrida:

I'd like to invite you to a Wildflower Seed Collection & Planting Party outside the Elfrida Library (10552 N. Hwy. 191), Saturday 10/15 10am-12pm! I'll have this summer's plants out and ready to process some seed and the raised beds prepped to fall-seed some spring wildflowers. I'm hoping to have Francesca from Borderlands Restoration and Doug from the Cochise County chapter of the Arizona Native Plant Society back to help us learn more about native plants. Come on out, play with seeds, learn and/or teach! It should be a fun community event, free and open to all. <https://www.facebook.com/events/438689624939744/>

Our home gardens got overtaken by weeds and a little too swampy for too long, so results are mixed at best, but now that it's been drying out the squash and watermelons are starting to fruit nicely, and hopefully the tepary beans will do OK despite the sea of weeds (we tried to keep up, really we did!). The cucumbers have been coming on well and I've been fermenting/pickling them. I got some herbs re-planted this season after heavy losses the last two years, and it's nice to have most of those thriving again. The elder flowered twice and is fruiting for a second time, and the mulberries are growing up nicely. The chiltepinos got hit by some kind of insect for the first time, but Beau has still been able to harvest some to dry. He's also been collecting a lot of immature devil's claw to dry for winter stews (we do plant these in our gardens, but this year he's getting a lot more by foraging).



My little raised herb area at the dripline of a mesquite.



The volunteer squash is doing the best, of course!

Most of our yard looks like this: green tunnels

and

with beautiful blue flowers! Difficult to navigate

with sneaky hidden mesquite thorns, but very romantic!

Kim Goodwin, Rodeo:

Fall is here! It's wonderful to feel the shift. The butterflies and hummers seemed to catch on first...a couple weeks ago we watched a butterfly chase a hummingbird off a nectar-rich flower. At that moment, we realized autumn had arrived. :-D

What a blessed summer it's been. Plants grew and are flowering to abundance. The fragrance of flowers this summer seemed to shift each week and then we had a major surprise - the smell of grass! Trey weedwhacked a bit to make paths for us to walk, and I couldn't believe how pleasant it was to smell freshly cut grass for the first time since leaving Oregon.

This year we made two big additions to our gardens here, first adding a fenced main crop and nursery garden in the back of our garage, and then adding drip irrigation. Drip irrigation! Life changing for me. My

summers since 21 years old have been spent getting up in the morning and watering, then coming home in evening with hopefully enough light to make sure nothing else needs watering. This was one of the things that drew me to study permaculture back in Oregon. A way to make a garden that required less water? I'm in!

Moving to the desert, water harvesting became even more critical. We learned good techniques at our first home in Morongo Valley, CA, which was so hot and dry (4-6 inches of rain per year, many days over 110F), it was a great place to practice, see which plants had the most tolerance, and how little watering I could get away with. I killed a lot of plants there! Ha I like to learn what works through seeing what extremes things can take. How little water can this tolerate? How long can I get away with planting X unprotected? Will rabbits eat garlic? (Answer: yes. To the ground. Over and over.)

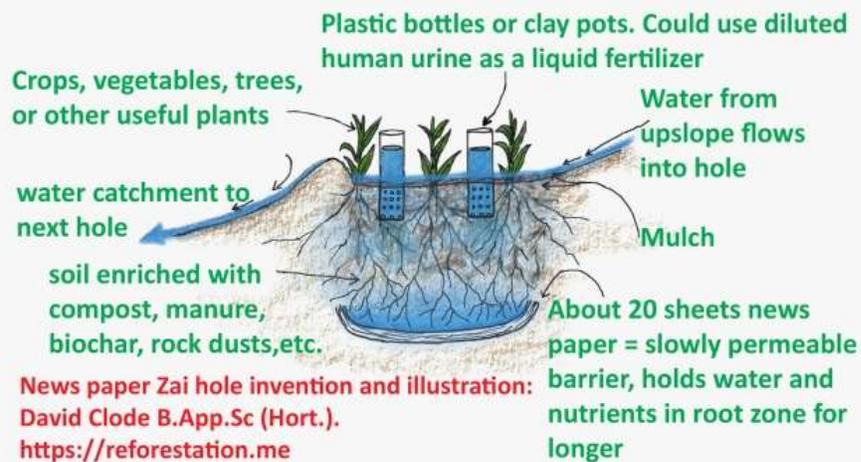
Here in Rodeo, we set up our first garden at the house dripline and with our laundry water feeding it. Sunken beds, a technique called a "Zai Pit" in Africa, or desert hugelculture as we tend to call it. This worked well for us in Morongo, and even better here. These beds harvest water, and hold it in the ground with a "sponge" of composting plant material.

This garden is three years old now and does not have drip irrigation. This year it managed on roof and laundry water. We use it as a butterfly garden and also for propagating garlic and chufa, rabbit/peccary tolerant culinary and medicinal herbs, and slipping in extra tomatoes and seeing how little water they will still produce with! Those are particularly yummy and flavorful.



Here's an example of a Zai Pit with a cardboard lined bottom from this website:
<https://reforestation.me/zai-holes-roof-gardens>

NEWS PAPER ZAI HOLE



At the site above, the author details results of experimenting with Zai pits lined with cardboard, versus unlined ones. It's a very interesting read! We have had great success with no-till bed methods like this, where you dig the bed once, and just lightly reduce compaction in succeeding years..

Our three year old garden is going to be primarily a butterfly garden in the future. This is the first year our butterfly efforts really took off. We finally have enough host plants to attract a very wide variety!



The rue, flannel, parsley and hardy citrus (below) attracted many swallowtails. We saw black, giant and two-tailed. Our milkweed attracted some queen butterflies, and in the photo on the left above, the Gregg's mistflower attracted loads of the adult Queens, and some types of orange butterflies as well. I wondered why the Queens like the Gregg's mistflower so much, looked it up and found this fascinating article: <https://npsot.org/wp/pollinators/gregg-mistflower-queen-butterfly-nuptial-gift/9972/>

It's mostly males! And they are getting a lovely dose of alkaloid to gift to the female to help make their offspring toxic to eat... Now that is creative!

Thank you Ray & Joy Mendez for the rue seeds last year. They really paid off in pillars.



We have affectionately named the Giant Swallowtail and also younger Two-Tailed Swallowtail caterpillars “poo-pillars”. They totally stripped our Poncirus (hardy orange) tree! It’s been so fun to watch them transform through their lifecycles.



Sulphurs (I think this is one on the left?) were all over the Partridge Pea which grew abundantly on the valley floor this year. And we have no idea where the Aristolochia plant for this Pipevine Swallowtail caterpillar was, but the stunning velvety pillar was on the march, maybe trying to find a place to pupate.



No idea what the one on the left is but it was eye catching! The ones on the right are probably Buckeyes. The host plants in our garden (other than wild plants) that we noticed attracted the most butterflies:

Summer Nectar plants: Tithonia (still a winner in the adult butterfly variety contest), Zinnia (we are growing *Z. haageana* and *Z. peruviana*), Marigolds of all varieties, Alliums of all sort, Spearmint, Runner and Hyacinth Beans, *Ageratum houstonianum*, Sages, Agastaches, and the aforementioned Gregg's Mistflower. Roselle Hibiscus also attracts a lot of Sulphurs which almost blend in with the petals. Then they move and it looks like a part of the flower just flew away!

Host plants: Rue, Poncirus (hardy orange), Fennel, Tithonia & Sunchoke (loved by the Buckeyes, we discovered), and of course, Passionflower.

And that leads to my favorite pillar-picture this year, what I believe is a Gulf Fritillary caterpillar on the passion flower vine with a stunning blue morning glory next to it. Thanks to Ray & Joy for the morning glory seed and thank you Barbara Miller for the passionflower start!



This picture above is in our two-year old garden. That garden also has the “desert hugel” or Zai Pit beds, plus a cattle panel trellis that we thankfully put in before the price of cattle-panels shot up. The trellis is so overgrown this year it looks a bit like Cousin It from the Addam's Family, if Cousin It was made of flowers.



In this pic you can see the trellis and an assortment of our top butterfly attracting flowers I mentioned above.

Vertical gardening and trellising is probably one of my favorite techniques. It allows one to pack in a huge amount of variety, create microclimates underneath, and grow a lot more food in a small space. At our home in Oregon, vertical gardening was less useful because we didn't have enough sun for everything to share. In Oregon, creating shade meant killing other plants. :-O Our gardens there were all about utilizing the most scarce resource - sun. Moving to the desert has been a thrilling shift for us in garden diversity. It's really hard to "make sun" but making shade is pretty easy!

Below left is a view of the 2 year old garden now. That trellis is like a waterfall of flowers and beans!
Next is the trellis in August. You can see some of the assortment of things under there. Some are plants that require a bit of sun protection, others are plants we were propagating to move elsewhere, later.



The garden above looks like it's all flowers right now, but looks can be deceiving. I've found that in this Land of Sun, I can grow a greater variety of plants together than in our shady grove in Oregon. Also a principle in permaculture is to shade the ground in order to minimize evaporation and in the hot regions and seasons, keep the soil cooler.

This summer, the garden above is growing sweet and hot peppers, butternut, sunchokes, tomatoes, tomatillos, roselle, green beans and long beans, zucchini, green onions and garlic chives, Thai and Italian basil, plus at least 7 other culinary, tea and medicinal herbs we use. Then it still has room to hold our propagation stock of multiple alliums and daylilies that are ready other times of the year. We are loving the incredible variety of plants we can grow here in such a small space. Thank you Sun. And Monsoons, and drip irrigation! Can't forget those factors. As a neat comparison here is the garden July 28 this year.



This year we started another garden in January. It takes a lot of time and effort to dig the beds in this adobe-brick-like soil, slowly, with water, a pick and shovel. But it is worth it to have productive, no till beds for years to come. I love being able to garden year round here, and no-till beds make that work well. In our gardens in Oregon, only a few things could survive year round. They had to be able to sit in water, literally. We grew leeks, green onions, garlic, parsnips, and Portugeuse kale year round, plus herbs and a few types of unusual edible tubers that can survive sitting in water (regrowing in spring, but not staying edible through the winter). That was basically it for overwintering vegetables at our site! Most everything else rotted by the November rains. I couldn't even grow a radish. What a change here.

So to help Trey with the bed digging for our newest garden which will hold a lot of our fall/winter crops, I got myself a lady-size pick. A 2.5 pounder. I can finally help even in the tough and rocky parts.

Trey took this nifty panorama pic of the garden in August. I showed the beds on the left and on the one on the right earlier this year. They produced a good amount of basil, broccoli, eggplant, cukes, and peppers. Now the butternut, leeks, amaranth, tomatoes, sunflowers, sweet potatoes and melons are coming in.



It's exciting living in a place that can ripen long-season, and/or heat requiring foods like butternut, sunflowers, eggplant, okra, sweet potatoes, dry corn, and melons. These are new things for us. Here are our first melons (ever), a Lemon Drop watermelon and Sakata Sweet Asian melon. Both had edible skin like an apple! Check out the distinctive little button on the Sakata Sweet melon blossom end. Even the seeds and seed pulp were very delicious and perfectly edible on that Sakata melon.



The monsoons brought some things I didn't expect to see since leaving Oregon. Brassicas rotting! Whiteflies all over cucumbers! I didn't get powdery mildew, but I heard someone did. That's a given in Oregon.

I don't use any pest control techniques other than gardening via permaculture methods (which imitates nature and helps plants survive on their own), but it didn't seem to matter much, or impact the productivity of anything *except* our Portuguese Kale (became the aphid attractant plant, and then the ladybug orgy), one dill plant that succumbed to the aphids and also contributed to the lacewing and ladybug-mating-spree, and three De Cicco broccoli which melted away in rot, Oregon style. A scent of home. Haha! A couple of the De Cicco seem to be coming back, and hopefully have enough oomph to produce this fall. We shall see!

The winner this year was the Gypsy broccoli (heat tolerant hybrid) which I reported on in the last Garden Update. That broccoli didn't mind nuthin'. :-D It still got some aphids and cabbage-pillars early in the summer, but then the ladybugs, lacewings and wasps made quick work of those juicy tidbits.

This monsoon season we finished a bed, and planted it in fall crops of daikon & watermelon radish, three types of turnips, snap peas, parsley, cilantro and some onions, plus perennial arugula, moringa, and alfalfa. Then those monsoons continued, totally filling our sunken beds! I hadn't even dared hope the rains would continue that long, I certainly didn't expect it. Left is the day we planted and right is two days later!



It drained and then refilled, repeating several times. Would they survive? Did the seeds all wash away? Do we have to replant?

Happily, incredibly, almost everything took. The lower portion of this bed (which wasn't intended to be that much lower, but ended up that way due to uneven compaction during the severe soaking) has plants that are smaller than the upper, so we are leaving the protection on for them. But they are growing! On the right below, our next bed at present is finally filled with trimmings and weedings from around the landscaped yard, sticks and branches, every tumbleweed we could find, and kitchen scraps, and is being topped of with dirt to make the next sunken bed. Soon to be ready for planting more fall/winter crops.



I could go on. And on. And on! But I won't here. If you'd like to see more of our garden updates, look up my posts on Permies.com where I post a good deal of updates, progress, lessons learned, and details on techniques we use.

I'll leave you all with this video below. If you are curious about the efficiency of home gardening versus commercial agriculture, if you are concerned about the fragility of our ag and food and distribution systems, or just need a little more gardening inspiration watch this wonderful video on Youtube. Even if you can only watch the first 10 minutes, you will get the gist of it. (And probably want to finish it all!) The concise presentation by author/researcher David Fischer is only about half the video length with the rest being Q&A.

[Your garden - 100 TIMES more productive than commercial agriculture!](#)

Happy Gardening, Everyone!
Kim & Trey

From Karen and Brad:

With over 12 inches of rain this summer, our plants are happy and our rainwater tanks are full.

Our experiment with a smaller intensive garden went well and allowed us to do very little work but still to enjoy a good amount to eat. Here are some of the fruits of that.



We are moving on to our winter garden now. About 350 garlics went in September and are growing nicely. We've also planted greens (lettuce, spinach, kale, chard) and some fava beans.