



# Plant hunter

A Scottsdale Master Gardener brings his passion home

BY SCOTT CALHOUN PHOTOGRAPHS BY NORM PLATE

**"I'M A PLANTAHOLIC,"** admits Mike Platta, and his 1-acre Scottsdale property proves it. Filled with agaves, cactus, and perennials, the landscape resembles a botanical garden. Platta got hooked on plants while studying in the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Master Gardener program. Thanks to his plant-hunting skills, he and his wife, Vi, have achieved remarkable results.

Toward the back of the beds that surround the pool, he positioned cholla, prickly pear, and columnar specimens of twisted *Cereus* and lorch cactus (*Trichocereus*) hybrids. Then he placed litter-free plants in front; messier trees, such as sweet acacia, were set close to the back wall so leaf and flower litter don't become an issue.

Behind the seat wall (pictured at top right), Platta planted roses and sweet peas for seasonal color and scent. When the firepit is lit on chilly evenings, the area becomes an inviting destination for the couple and their dogs.

## Five great ideas from this garden

1. Use stone in fresh ways. The Plattas inserted chunks of rock—the same used on seat walls—in the exposed aggregate pool deck.
2. Edge a pool. Use textural, low-litter plants—such as golden barrel cactus, Parry's agave, and purple prickly pear—as a backdrop. In front, place low mounding plants such as yellow blackfoot daisy.
3. Combine hot pink and chartreuse flowers. Parry's penstemon and gopher plant (*Euphorbia lathyris*) make a colorful pairing along the edge of the pool decking (pictured above at left).
4. Mix annuals with succulents. Platta grouped one of his favorite annuals, tropical sage (*Salvia coccinea*), with *Agave angustifolia* 'Marginata' for a striking combo that's also distasteful to most rabbits.
5. Make a rebar fence. Durable and affordable rebar creates a secure fence, reminiscent of ocotillo branches, that's suitable for both rustic and contemporary settings. ■

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT** Colorful succulents and desert perennials mingle behind Mike and Vi Platta's pool; the Plattas enjoy a glass of wine by their firepit, built of local stone; *Agave angustifolia* rises beside red tropical sage (*Cereus peruvianus* is at rear); hot pink blooms of hollyhock.