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IZONA DAILY STAR • SERVING TUCSON SINCE 1877

## LESS THAN SECRET GARDENS



This Mexican gold poppy is among the colorful native plants on display in Scott Calhoun's home garden.





Photos by Ron Medvescek / Arizona Daily Star

Parry's penstemon, brittlebrush and cacti mix in the front of Scott Calhoun's Civano home. The grounds are included on the garden tour April 2-3.

## Tucson Botanical Gardens presents a tour of six local gardens including the 'weedy' ode to native plants at Scott Calhoun's home

By Karen Schaffner

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

**S**cott Calhoun considers his garden a success when people tell him it looks weedy.

"I don't mind the yard being called weedy," Calhoun said. "I take that as a compliment."

Here's why: It means his philosophy of growing native plants in a natural environment is working.

Calhoun won't pull a weed unless what's coming up isn't native to the desert. Because of the proximity of his Civano home to Saguaro National Park East, he's very careful to keep non-native, invasive "volunteers" out of his garden.

"I want to work with the desert, not against it," said Calhoun, the manager at Civano Nursery.

You can get a look at how that philosophy looks in practice next weekend. Calhoun's desert garden is one of six Tucson-area gardens on the 19th annual Tucson Botanical Gardens Home Garden Tour, taking place April 2-3.

Like Calhoun's, each of the other five gardens represents the homeowner's garden philosophy.

"Our goal is to give people an opportunity to peek behind the fences to get ideas, see how other people have handled challenges," said Libby Czopek. She's the project director for the Desert Connection Conservation Grant at Tucson Botanical Gardens.

The tour presents a range of gardening philosophies, Czopek said. There's an owner-designed garden and a professionally designed garden.



Calhoun uses found objects to embellish the garden at his Southeast Side home.

There's a garden designed for low-water use and a garden that incorporates a railroad theme.

And then there's Calhoun's garden, where native plantings abound. In the front of his Sonoran bungalow, growing among the agave and prickly pear cacti, are Mexican gold poppies and brittlebrush, along with spears of Parry's penstemon. All are blooming profusely.

Calhoun has even found a way to embellish his garden with found objects.

Among the tuberosa and native grasses in the small backyard, he and wife Deirdre have placed objects such as his collection of old license plates and his 13-year-old daughter's collection of empty Mexican pop bottles.



The seating's casual and colorful in the native-plant garden at the Calhoun home.

## TOUR

### Native plants celebrated at one garden on tour

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A water fountain is really just a wood trough painted purple and backed by a recycled painted door. On the door is hung a full-length mirror. The fence that borders the garden in the front of the house is constructed from dried ocotillo limbs.

Found pieces can be practical, too. Calhoun has several cisterns made from recycled corrugated sheet metal to collect rain water, which keep his watering chores down to once a week.

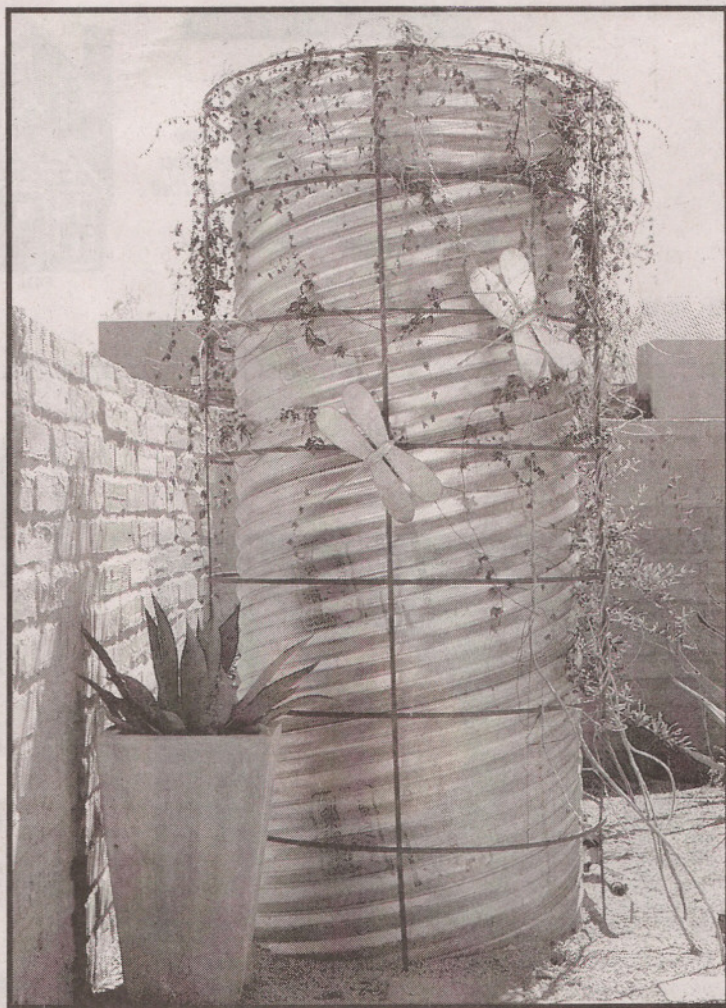
Since the Calhouns live in a relatively new home, they've been working on his garden for only about five years. For him, it's easier to work with a new space rather than an established garden. You don't have to spend time undoing yesterday's mistakes.

"In a new garden, you can place things where they're supposed to go," he said.

But he also likes empty spaces: what might look dead to the untrained eye is really just nature relaxing.

"I don't mind that the plants do their thing and then rest for a while," he said. It means his garden is ever changing. "As the plants mature, gardens evolve. They don't stay the same. All the plants have a life cycle. They're not plastic."

Calhoun, 38, became interested in gardening with native plants



Ron Medvescek / Arizona Daily Star

**A metal trellis and whimsical butterflies partly disguise one of the water-capture tanks at the Civano home of Scott Calhoun.**

when, as a young homeowner in Phoenix, he took a dislike to mowing grass. That led him to research plants that didn't require so much work. His life interests led to his nursery job.

"I love desert plants and I like seeing them in the wild. When I

have them in the garden, it lets me appreciate them up close," he said. "(My garden) celebrates native plants."

► Contact reporter Karen Schaffner at 573-4119 or [kschaffner@azstarnet.com](mailto:kschaffner@azstarnet.com).