

## RAP GARDENS IN FOCUS

Explore Sites That Participate in the AHS Reciprocal Admissions Program

### Tohono Chul: Desert Showcase

by Rachel de Rosset



the beauty and uniqueness of the region, thereby inspiring wise stewardship of the natural environment.”

#### GARDEN FAVORITES

Tohono Chul is comprised of 49 acres of small gardens, rest spots, educational facilities, and trails. “We especially enjoyed our collaboration with the O’odham people when designing the experience of the **Saguaro Discovery Trail**,” says Armstrong. Historically, the O’odham people relied on the saguaro for survival, and it still plays an important role in their traditions. To emphasize this connection, the trail’s signage includes watercolor il-



Left: Interpretive signs along the Saguaro Discovery Trail feature the work of Tohono O’odham artist Michael Chiago. Above: A variety of fan palm species and native canyon plants recreate a tropical forest in the Desert Palm Oasis.

**I**F YOU’RE traveling in the Sonoran Desert just north of Tucson in southern Arizona, don’t miss Tohono Chul Park: Botanical Gardens, Bistro, and Art Gallery. The name Tohono Chul means “desert corner” in the language of the Tohono O’odham, a native desert people who still live in Arizona, just west of the garden. From its beginnings in 1966 with benefactors Richard

and Jean Wilson, Tohono Chul was designed to protect the native landscape, plants, and wildlife from encroaching urban development, while also embracing the cultural heritage of the land. Today, says Director of Marketing & Communications Michelle Armstrong, “The vision of Tohono Chul is to show the interconnectedness of nature, art, and culture, and to educate guests on

illustrations by Tohono O’odham artist Michael Chiago showing O’odham people engaged in activities with the iconic plant, such as collecting its fruit with the help of long harvest poles, and preparing a syrup from it for use in a summer rain ceremony.

Also notable is the **Desert Palm Oasis**, which “shows the desert’s tropical connection in a unique biome interpre-

## HOW THE RECIPROCAL ADMISSIONS PROGRAM (RAP) WORKS

This American Horticultural Society program is designed to encourage people to visit gardens, arboreta, and conservatories while traveling. As a current member, you receive free admission and/or other special discounts at more than 330 sites throughout North America! Here's how to make the most of this member benefit:

- View the current list of participating locations and the RAP benefits they offer at [www.ahsgardening.org/rapgardens](http://www.ahsgardening.org/rapgardens). This list is also published in a booklet. To order, visit <https://www.ahsgardening.org/gardening-programs/rap>.
- Contact the garden to confirm the RAP benefits it offers. (Some sites may choose to enforce a 90-mile exclusion policy; if your zip code falls within that distance from the location, you would not receive the offered RAP benefits there.) Admission to special events may also be excluded.
- Present your current membership card at the admissions counter or gift shop to receive the RAP benefit(s) offered by that garden. Each card will only admit the individual(s) listed on the card. In the case of a family, couple, or household membership card that does not list individual names, the garden must extend the benefit(s) to at least two members; it is at the garden's discretion to extend benefits to more than two individuals. Some gardens may require a photo ID.

tation," says Armstrong. Species such as Mexican fan palm (*Washingtonia robusta*) and Sonoran palmetto (*Sabal uresana*) that are commonly found in isolated oases along the coast of the Sea of Cortez near Guaymas, Mexico, are also native to the canyons and can be seen in the Oasis,

alongside many other native plants and a stream that supports a population of endangered native fish.

The **Sin Agua Garden** is designed to demonstrate sustainable water use. Landscape features such as berms help harvest water and control and direct run-

## Additional Information

### Tohono Chul

7366 Paseo del Norte  
Tucson, AZ 85704  
(520) 742-6455  
<https://tohonochul.org>

- Hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.
- Admission: Member: free. Adult: \$15; Children (5–12): \$6; Children under 5: free; Student (with ID): \$13; Active Military: \$13; Groups of 10 or more: 10% discount. See website for special exceptions.
- RAP benefits: Free admission, 90-mile exclusion not enforced.

off; the plants in the garden require little supplemental water and tolerate cycles of desert flood and drought.

The newest addition to Tohono Chul is the 4,744-square-foot **Garden Pavilion**. "It offers an unparalleled space for the community to gather and connect with nature," says Armstrong. The facility is integrated into the existing plantings in a space that was not previously in use.

## PROMOTING DESERT STEWARDSHIP

Approximately 185,000 visitors pass through Tohono Chul each year. The garden regularly hosts garden-related learning opportunities with local experts, in addition to large-scale social events that appeal to the wider community. Among the recurring offerings are Desert Landscaping, Birds of Tohono Chul, and Stories in the Garden. These classes educate attendees about the desert climate, methods of water conservation, and native plants to include in the home garden, and introduce them to the wildlife, culture, art, and history of the Sonoran Desert. Visitors also have other opportunities to learn, such as by participating in the Adopt-A-Bee program, designed to help increase awareness of native bee conservation.

From its programs and use of native and arid-adapted plants in its gardens to the solar-panelled parking lot lighting structures, Tohono Chul is a living example of its commitment to preserving and caring for the Sonoran Desert region.

*Rachel de Rosset is an editorial intern with The American Gardener.*



To demonstrate sustainable water harvesting, the Sin Agua Garden channels rain runoff from a nearby parking lot to water its plants. The garden can store up to 8,000 cubic feet of water at a time.