The American Gardener

RAP GARDENS IN FOCUS
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Tohono Chul: Desert Showcase
by Rachel de Rosset

If 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 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 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-

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.

Photographs on this page and opposite courtesy of Tohono Chul.
“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.

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.

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.

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

Additional Information