

Historic Canoa Ranch Gardens

This is a unique cooperative project with Pima County Natural Resources Parks and Recreation (NRPR) that has been a leader in preservation of historic Arizona ranches and environment. While the Historic Canoa Ranch dates back to the 1800s, the Manning family operated it from the early 1900s until the 1960s as one of the largest ranches in Arizona. Major portions of the Ranch were sold to developers thus giving birth to Green Valley. For years this heritage site remained abandoned resulting in considerable damage to most of the buildings until Pima County purchased some 4000 acres surrounding the Ranch and began a major restoration project in conjunction with a separate foundation. During the next six years reconstruction of the damaged buildings was undertaken culminating in the dedication of the Historic Canoa Ranch as national historic site in the spring of 2013 which was followed by public tours that have drawn thousands of visitors.

A significant portion of the restoration goals was to regenerate the landscape and gardens in as similar a manner as possible at the time the Ranch was in operation, using old photos and testimony of the remaining family members and people who either grew up there or visited during this period as a functioning ranch. A committee oversaw the plans in conjunction with County officials and consultants. Green Valley Gardeners was asked to develop gardens at the Ranch. The initial gardens were to be a herb/vegetable garden adjacent to the W kitchen entrance of the Senior Manning House and a xeriscape garden the E side as well as indoor plantings in the Junior Manning House, which was to be open to the public during tours.

The gardens were started in the late fall of 2012 with Pima County NRPR supplying the financing for over 90% of the cost. Some 20 volunteers have participated in the project. GVG volunteer teams removed weeds and 6-8 inches of dead soil from the beds and replaced it with special soil- compost appropriate for each garden. Team members scouted nurseries for cold season vegetable plants that were probably present originally as well as heritage herbs. Due to the absence of full-time residents at the Ranch, the GVG team planned and obtained materials for a drip irrigation system. They then visited the Pima County Native Nursery that supplied all of the soil and recommended plants for the xeriscape garden. Planting was started in mid

December in order to be ready for an early February dedication date which proved to be fraught with many obstacles, including freezing up of the entire Ranch water system and the need for placing frost cloth at periodic intervals. The Ranch water system has been revised to protect from future freezing. However, obstacles were overcome and a nice spring harvest was present by dedication time and public tours. The beds of the cold season vegetables were then cleared and warm season vegetables planted. Indoor plantings were also completed and the planning phase of the Junior House garden was started.

A team of full-time GVG volunteers was developed by mid-May, met with onsite County staff, and undertook meetings with Pima County NRPR staff in Tucson. The team developed a visitation schedule for twice weekly examinations and problem solving at the Ranch gardens during the summer and early fall. The team did an amazing job caring for outdoor and indoor plantings, overcoming many obstacles and communicating with each other as well as project directors and consultants for problem solving. Among the many problems encountered was the need to provide shade cloth to protect plants from the searing sun, control of plant diseases and insect infestation as well as prevention of animal damage. They have harvested tomatoes, onions, peppers, watermelons, and other vegetables as well as various herbs, sharing with other volunteers and Ranch staff. This superb team includes: Leslie Campbell, Peggy Cederstrom, Elissa Dearing, Sara Hein, Pat Pearson, Byron Hinton, and Raydine Taber, now GVG Board representative to the project.

The plan for this fall is to do a final harvest of warm season vegetables and planting of cool season vegetables at the Sr House kitchen garden. While panning of the new Junior House garden will be resumed, there are many issues to be resolved such as gutter placement, water harvesting and irrigation control system installation. Project Director for Pima County NRPR, Robert Vaughn, anticipates that planting at the Grijalva House will be undertaken prior to the new Jr House garden. GVG members had assisted in identification of original plantings there via old photographs supplied by Mr. Vaughn.

In addition, public educational programs are on the drawing board by the Pima County staff for 2014, which will include GVG volunteers. To accomplish all of these efforts, we are initiating a call for volunteers. For further information about the project and/or to volunteer you may contact one of the Co-Directors.

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