

## **Gardeners: Scott McMahon**

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Scott McMahon has been growing cactus and succulent plants for over 20 years. If you attended the open house he hosted, you saw the magnificent shade house that he has in his back yard. Scott and his brother-in-law Ed built the structure each weekend over seven months. "Although Ed enjoyed building the house, he is not willing to do it for anyone else," Scott told me. "He does carpentry and electrical, and was the one who convinced me that we could do it."

They started by laying a concrete foundation for the walls. All the boards were treated with a water proof sealer, those on the interior were painted white, "So that the light would reflect and bounce around the plants," Scott said. The floor is soil covered with rock so that there would be good drainage. The house is very solid, airy and made to last. He has fans for air circulation, wraps the house with 6mm plastic in the winter, and provides heaters.

Scott moved into his house about two years. It had a grass lawn with standard landscape plantings. "I was inspired by Kathy Babcock's house, particularly the way she created a natural desert environment," Scott said. "That's what I am striving to achieve." He began by removing what was there, and basically starting over. "I wanted to bring the desert into my neighborhood. I guess I've succeeded, as some of my neighbors have begun asking me for advice on plants."

*Scott's favorite place to find information on cactus and succulent plants: The Cactus and Succulent Journal of America.*

*Scott's favorite books: The Euphorbia Journal, for information on euphorbias; Illustrated Dictionary of Cactus, for cactus; Conophytum by Steve Hammer; Lithops, by Ed Storms; and Cacti of Chile (although in Spanish, a good reference).*

*Scott's favorite nursery catalogs: (these are good references as they contain many photos) Grisby, Abbey Gardens, Miles to Go, and Mesa Garden*

*Scott's favorite nurseries to purchase plants: Any of the above, plus Anne Shein, California; Cactus Data, Little Rock, California; Tucson growers (addresses for all of these are available in the back of the CSSA Journal).*

*Scott's solution for getting spines out of fingers: "I have the most success with the dig method. Just sterilize a needle and go for it. It's often the only way to get them out."*

*Scott's tips for newcomers: Use a general use cactus potting soil, be conservative on your watering, provide some sun protection in the summer especially (50% shade cloth with all day sun exposure), and start by growing more common and less expensive plants at the beginning. Also, read a lot about the plants you are interested in growing and*

where they are originally from as that can affect the care they should be receiving. Join a club, as members will gladly help you out.

*What does Scott like the most about growing cactus and succulent plants:* “I like the diversity of the plants. I don’t need a plant to flower to enjoy it, but like the plant form itself. Observing the growing process, and learning by researching is very rewarding.”

*Scott’s tips for building a shade house:* “Make sure that you get any needed permits and that you build to meet code. Also, don’t start drinking beer too early in the day or you might forget that wheel barrow filled with mixed cement that somehow fell over like I did.”