

Creating potential habitat for lizards in your backyard is easy

- all you need are a few **KEY ELEMENTS** that will provide them with their basic needs.

PLANTS Using a variety of trees, shrubs, cacti and flowering plants helps to provide lizards with a variety of places to forage, bask, hibernate and breed. Two lizards commonly found in the urban area are Tree Lizards and Desert Spiny Lizards. Both will use trees for basking and foraging. Since the bulk of a lizard's diet is insects, gardeners can use flowering plants to attract pollinators and butterflies, providing food for insects at their various life stages.

Spiny plants are a great way to provide a safe haven for lizards. A lizard's tough skin protects them from thorns, but potential predators like cats and dogs won't venture into the middle of a prickly pear clump. A few examples of attractive spiny plants that do well in our desert climate include Prickly Pear Cactus, Desert Spoon, and Cholla Cactus.

COVER Besides food, lizards need protection from potential predators like cats, dogs and birds. A simple way to create a safe haven from predators is by creating rock or log piles. These piles will give lizards places to bask and forage. Homeowners can enhance rock piles by placing PVC pipe in between the rocks for lizards to hide and hibernate.



Design Guidelines

Provide a variety of plants - include native trees, shrubs, cacti and flowering plants to give lizards a variety of food sources, basking sites and cover.

Mass plants - placing plants close to one another provides escape cover - lizards will be less exposed to predators when moving between plants.

Include complex structures - rock or wood piles offer lizards a variety of basking sites, as well as protection from potential predators like cats, dogs and birds.

Leave the leaf litter - leaf litter provides a place for lizards to lay their eggs and habitat for insects that lizards like to eat. It also serves as a natural weed barrier and enriches the soil.

Use insecticides sparingly - lizards (and birds) can aid in pest control by eating insects some consider pests: ants, termites, cockroaches, crickets, flies and mosquitoes. Lizards (as well as birds) can die from eating poisoned insects.



Below are ideas for plants to use in your garden for attracting wildlife:

Trees

Desert Willow	<i>Chilopsis linearis</i>
Netleaf Hackberry	<i>Celtis reticulata</i>
Whitethorn Acacia	<i>Acacia constricta</i>
Velvet Mesquite	<i>Prosopis velutina</i>
Ironwood	<i>Olneya tesota</i>



Whitethorn Acacia

Cacti & Accents

Saguaro	<i>Carnegieia gigantea</i>
Prickly Pear Cactus	<i>Opuntia spp.</i>
Desert Spoon	<i>Dasyliroia spp.</i>
Cholla	<i>Cylindro-opuntia spp.</i>
Yucca	<i>Yucca spp.</i>
Agave	<i>Agave spp.</i>



Prickly Pear Cactus

Shrubs

Creosote	<i>Larrea tridentata</i>
Fairy Duster	<i>Calliandra eriophylla</i>
Brittlebush	<i>Encelia farinosa</i>
Desert Hackberry	<i>Celtis pallida</i>
Trailing Indigo Bush	<i>Dalea greggii</i>
Wolfberry	<i>Lycium spp.</i>



Wolfberry

Flowering

Plumbago	<i>Plumbago scandens</i>
Butterfly Mist	<i>Eupatorium</i>
Penstemon	<i>Penstemon spp.</i>
Desert Verbena	<i>Verbena goodingii</i>
Globe Mallow	<i>Sphaeralcea ambigua</i>
Chuparosa	<i>Justicia californica</i>



Desert Verbena



Ornate Tree Lizard (*Urosaurus ornatus*)
 This is the most common lizard found in Tucson yards; it is often found in trees, but also commonly found on walls and fences. Homeowner's can potentially increase tree lizard abundance by placing rock and wood piles in the garden and planting shaggy barked trees like the Velvet Mesquite, which they will utilize as a basking and foraging site.



Regal Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma solare*) These lizards feed almost exclusively on harvester ants. Because of the ant's painful sting, many homeowner's consider ants to be pests and choose to use ant poison to kill them. Unfortunately, by killing the ants, homeowners also eliminate the Horned lizard's main food source.



Tiger Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis tigris*)
 This is a very active lizard that is always on the move. It is often seen digging through leaf litter looking for a meal during the heat of the day. Unlike Tree lizards, Whiptail lizards don't climb well, and do best in large open yards with chainlink or no fences.



Mediterranean House Gecko (*Hemidactylus turcicus*) Although this lizard is not native to the U.S., it is commonly seen at night on the walls of our houses, usually near lights, where it hunts insects. It looks much like our native Banded gecko, but due to the presence of cats and other predators, Banded geckos are rarely found in the urban area.



Desert Spiny Lizard (*Sceloporus magister*)
 Considered a semi-arboreal, or tree-dwelling, lizard, the Desert Spiny lizard can be found in areas with lots of cover like rock piles, log piles and dense vegetation. Because of its large size, it eats larger insects like cockroaches and beetles.



Resources

For more information about lizards and gardening for wildlife visit:

The Tucson Herpetological Society
www.tucsonherpsociety.org

The Wildlife Friendly Garden - Arizona Game and Fish
www.azgfd.gov/w_c/landscaping_wildlife_garden.shtml

A Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians by Robert C. Stebbins
Amphibians and Reptiles in Arizona by Thomas C. Brennan and Andrew C. Holycross

Lizards of the Southwest by Craig Ivanyi & Stéphane Poulin

Native Plants for Southwestern Landscapes by Judy Mielke

Brochure by Heidi Flugstad & Dennis Caldwell. Photos by Dennis Caldwell.



A guide to creating backyard habitat for Tucson's urban-adapted lizards.