



<June>

## Annual Corrales Garden Tour

Sustainable growing in the desert Southwest



### The gardens of Corrales

May is definitely the best month to tour properties in Corrales, something the organizers of the [15th Annual Corrales Garden Tour](#) obviously knew. To further entice, the theme was Sustainable Growing in the Southwest. Five sites were selected, each demonstrating smart, sustainable practices for all levels of growers to use, from easy ways to collect & utilize rainwater, to how to grow interesting mushrooms. And the gardens themselves were absolutely stunning...

The top image is a view toward the Sandia Mountains, from one of the host properties on the tour. Even though it's close to the river, the image feels elevated--because it

is: the lush acre with home & numerous gardens sits west of Loma Larga Rd, in a transition area between the lower riparian zone & the drier, sandy shrubland uphill, on the way up to Rio Rancho. The image below is another of the tour properties, which sits maybe 40 feet lower in elevation, on the former floodplain closer to the Rio Grande.

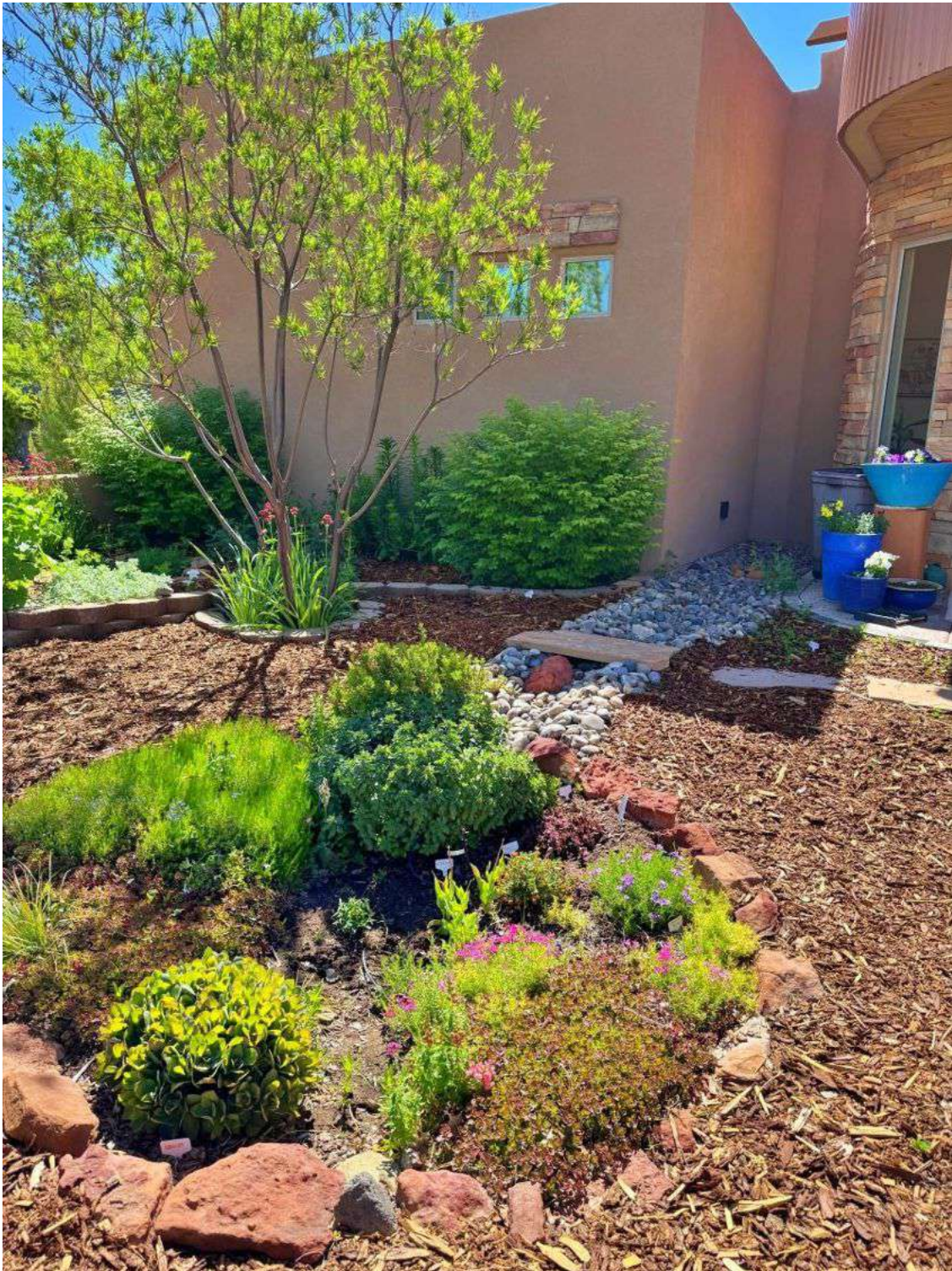


♪ "I want to know, **Have You Ever Seen The Rain**, comin' down on a sunny day?"

~John Fogerty, 1970. Nicely covered by [Paula Nelson & father Willie Nelson](#).

It's a pretty incredible scene in the Southwest: we've all seen the rain comin' down on a sunny day--[it can look like this](#). Then what happens? The water immediately evaporates, disappears into the ground, or runs away--the extraordinary benefit of a natural resource falling from above, in the desert, is quickly lost.

It's not *all* lost. Innovative minds have been perfecting rainwater collection for a long time. An excellent example is in the image below.



The rainwater harvesting system, above, is both subtle & complex. It begins at the cantilevered canale peaking out in the top right-hand corner of the scene. The canale waterfalls roof water down to the 'cushion' of river rocks below, which is the beginning of a swale. The river rocks then slope away from the house--helping minimize moisture around the foundation--& flows under a small flagstone bridge that crosses the swale.

The swale then empties into a shallow-ish basin--encircled by red rocks & already

populated with a healthy pollinator garden--in the foreground. Water that isn't absorbed during a downpour will slowly absorb over the next hours/days.

There are numerous similar rainwater catchment systems on the property, all shunting water effortlessly away from places it's not wanted, to places where it is. The poppies below are part of another, larger pollinator garden at the same property.

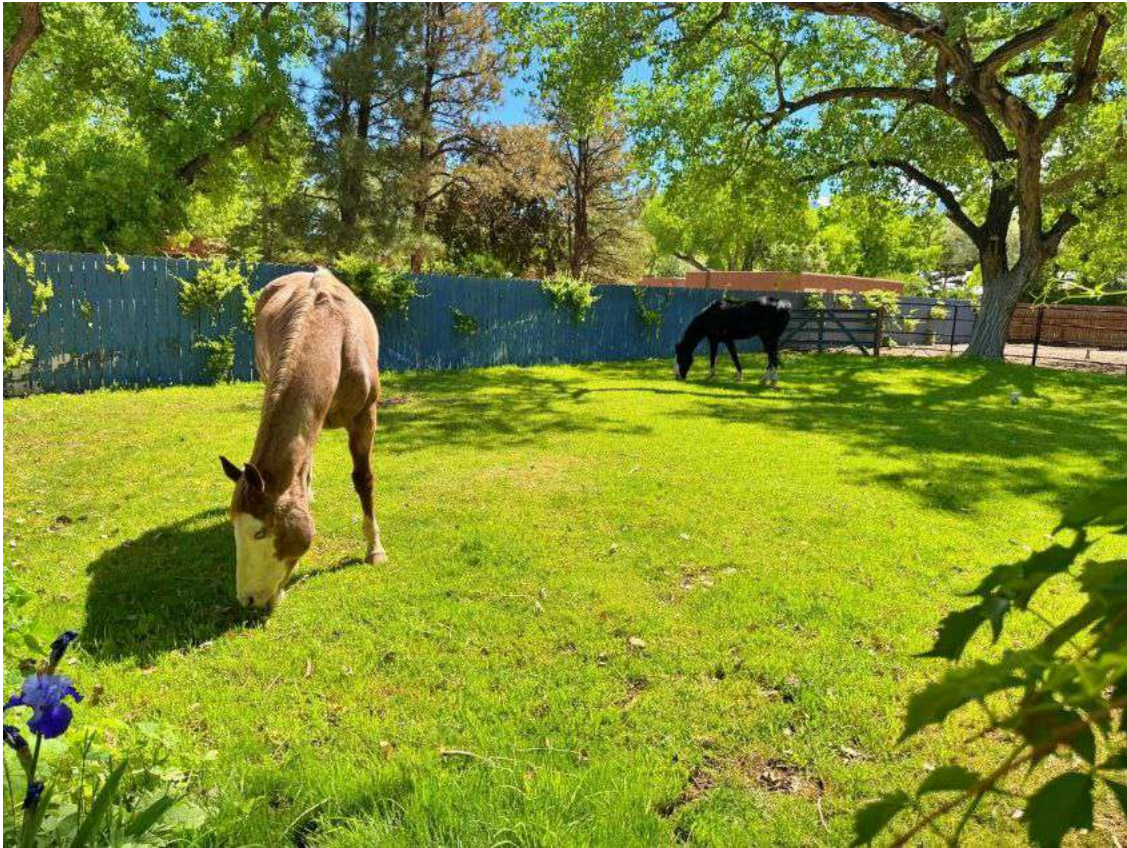


A group called the Arid Lid Coalition created the Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) concept, as four things that leverage the benefits of rainwater: collecting it, directing it, storing it & then utilizing it. The system, shown two images above, checks all the GSI boxes. It's a great example of a small, complete, mostly passive, rainwater harvesting system.

From the [Arid Lid Coalition](#):

- 1. **Rainwater Harvesting Basins, or Rain Gardens**, are shallow depressions in the soil where rainwater can collect & absorb into the soil. This reduces flooding & holds water in the soil to be used by plant roots later.*
- 2. **Bioswales** are gradually sloping channels that move rainwater from one place to another, such as from a gutter downspout to a basin, & include plants. Wide & gentle-sloped swales with rock & grasses also help slow down & soak up more water.*
- 3. **Pollinator Gardens** are landscaped areas that use the harvested rainwater from swales & basins as their primary source of irrigation, & include trees, shrubs, grasses & flowers. These Native plants support pollinators & other wildlife, & also cool the environment.*

4. *Rain Barrels/Cisterns, collect & store rainwater for future use. This water can be used to irrigate trees, plants, & even veggie gardens.*



### Hydroseeding: Sculpting a Meadow

Corrales isn't Corrales without the requisite scenes of horses. Hopefully the one above, & [this one, will satisfy](#). These happy horses are treated well, especially as their owners share the fruits from sustainable landscaping practices, like the natural--extremely healthy--pollinator meadow, below, framed by a pergola.

How did the meadow become so healthy? The owners had it 'sculpted' into a natural, organically-created meadow. The new owners (2017) knew they didn't want a water-intensive lawn, so they had a company called [Terraworx](#) hydroseed it: the company used "a tanker truck & blasted the front & backyard with a mixture of water, binder material (mulch-like substance) & seeds of grasses, flowers & clover. Some water was needed at first, then the meadow "was left to do its thing" with only a little weekly water. In the natural pollinator meadow below, the owners installed birdfeeders, nest boxes, a heated (bird) bath, built a [rock pile for reptiles](#), & enhanced the house windows to minimize bird strikes.

I learned about TerraWorx hydroseeding a few years ago during a tour of another property, a [new home in North ABQ Acres](#); the 1st image in that article shows

hydroseeding results in the top right section, & in the next two images the sculpting is seen in the bottom of each photo.



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**Three's a lucky number.** In the scene above, there are three obvious energy-saving/green-living concepts at play: the parapet-top solar panels passively generating electricity for the house; the water catchment system, with a small white pvc overflow connector between the two blue rain barrels (which come in diverse colors, [shapes](#) & [sizes](#)); & the cord-style 'bird-saver' enhanced windows, to minimize bird-strike accidents.



**Birds see things differently than you or I.**

Birds fly into windows because they see what looks like habitat; instead, it's a reflection in the glass of what's behind them. In lush Corrales, with houses set upon a mostly riparian landscape, there is no end to reflected bird habitat from residential windows. Fortunately, there are ways to eliminate these deadly birdstrikes.

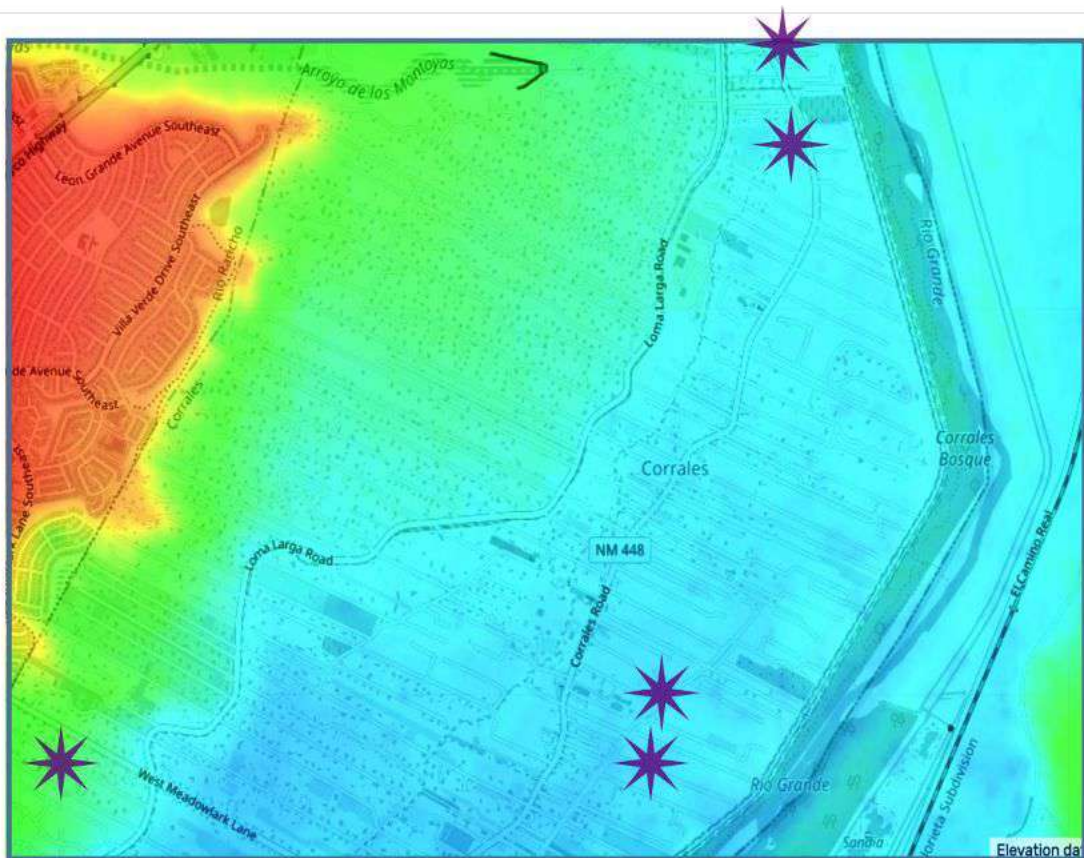
One of the tour properties utilized two kinds of bird strike deterrents on their

exterior glass. Simple cords the length of the window, secured on top & draped over the glass, was one of the methods, seen in the two images above. [Acopian BirdSavers](#) creates the window cords--& demonstrates how to easily make them yourself.

The dot-matrix system is another bird-protector: a thin film supporting tiny squares every few inches on the glass deter the birds. An interesting photo effect was created in the dot-matrix window, below, capturing a tour participant in the process. The Friend-or-Foe deterrent, seen on the [UNM Campus](#), is also pretty effective; with all that glass in the image, hopefully there are [enough bird stickers](#) to deter strikes.

There are birds aplenty in Corrales. Snaking on the east side of the Village along the Rio Grande, the [Corrales Bosque Preserve](#) is a birdwatcher's paradise, with people having spotted more than 250 bird species there. Hopefully there are plenty of anti-bird-strike methods used in the Village. The Preserve is also [cool in so many other ways](#).





**Corrales, top to bottom.** Above is an [elevation map](#) with stars that indicate the area of each tour property. A large portion of the Corrales population lives in the lower, blue-hued section, which shares many characteristics with the river. The west side of the Village begins to climb up the sandier hillside, shown in light then darker green. The tour took folks up the hill into the beginning of the green zone, which is a slightly different vegetative zone than the next properties, which were just a click away from the river, deep blue. Then up to the northern part of the Village for two more properties. Traveling sections of scenic Loma Larga Blvd ([Droning over Corrales](#), March '17) is a pretty excellent event all by itself...



### Front & Back

One of the tour stops was a two-acre working farm--[Corrales Classic Farms](#)--which sits on the northern edge of the Village. The owners have been living sustainably since at least 1983, when they built an [Earthship](#) on the property for their residence. 'It was constructed with used materials, an integrated grey water system, & passive solar energy.' The image above is the back, facing north-ish, designed with no windows. Below, the south-ish-facing windows bathe the interior with natural light, & heat during the winter months.



The two-acre lot is long & thin, so buildings & fields had to adjust to fit--see the long Earthship above. Still, the farm produces 6000+ pounds of produce each year, including the main crop of garlic (6 varieties), onions, cucumbers, tomatoes, squash & numerous others. Below are grape vines that also thrive along the field, as no place for growing is off limits there...





**Seen on the Tour:**

Above is a home for native solitary nesting bees, made from bamboo, often called a pollinator house. According to the [USGS](#), "bees of all sorts pollinate

approximately 75% of the fruits, nuts & vegetables grown in the United States, & one out of every four bites of food people take is courtesy of bee pollination. I didn't know: bees evolved from wasps, are vegetarians, & very few species of them sting.

A yard sign, hanging at one of the tour properties, was easy to (almost) miss, below. It was a poem written by former NM PBS environmental [reporter Laura Paskus](#), entitled, "In this yard, we know..." A section that stood out was,

"Green & growing things  
thrive best when liberated from fabric & gravel.  
Resisting fertilizer & insecticide  
protects our most valuable & vulnerable neighbors."

Not five minutes later, at the same property, I recognized Joren Viers-- formerly the Metro's Chief Forester, now Senior Arborist with the [Legacy Tree Company](#)--who was talking with a group of tour participants; apparently he was one of the volunteers at the tour. I overheard him discussing the horrors of the landscaping-fabric-over-soil-to-eliminate-weeds trick, & how detrimental it is for any garden, anywhere, ever.

[Viers](#) wondered aloud (paraphrasing), why people place that landscaping fabric between the ground soil & the mulch above--two processes that absolutely benefit by interacting with each other.

As he mentioned, landscaping fabric severs the connection between the organic matter in the soil & the nutrients being released from the mulch above. The fabric also minimizes soil aeration & water penetration, decreases organic matter & prevents the reseeding of desirable plants. After listening to him for a few moments, I went back to Paskus' hanging yard sign poem & re-read it.

## In this yard, we know...

Dried seeds on stalks & fallen leaves left to lie  
yield bounty for birds and bugs through spring.

Green & growing beings  
thrive best when liberated from fabric & gravel.

Resisting fertilizer & insecticide  
protects our most valuable & vulnerable neighbors.

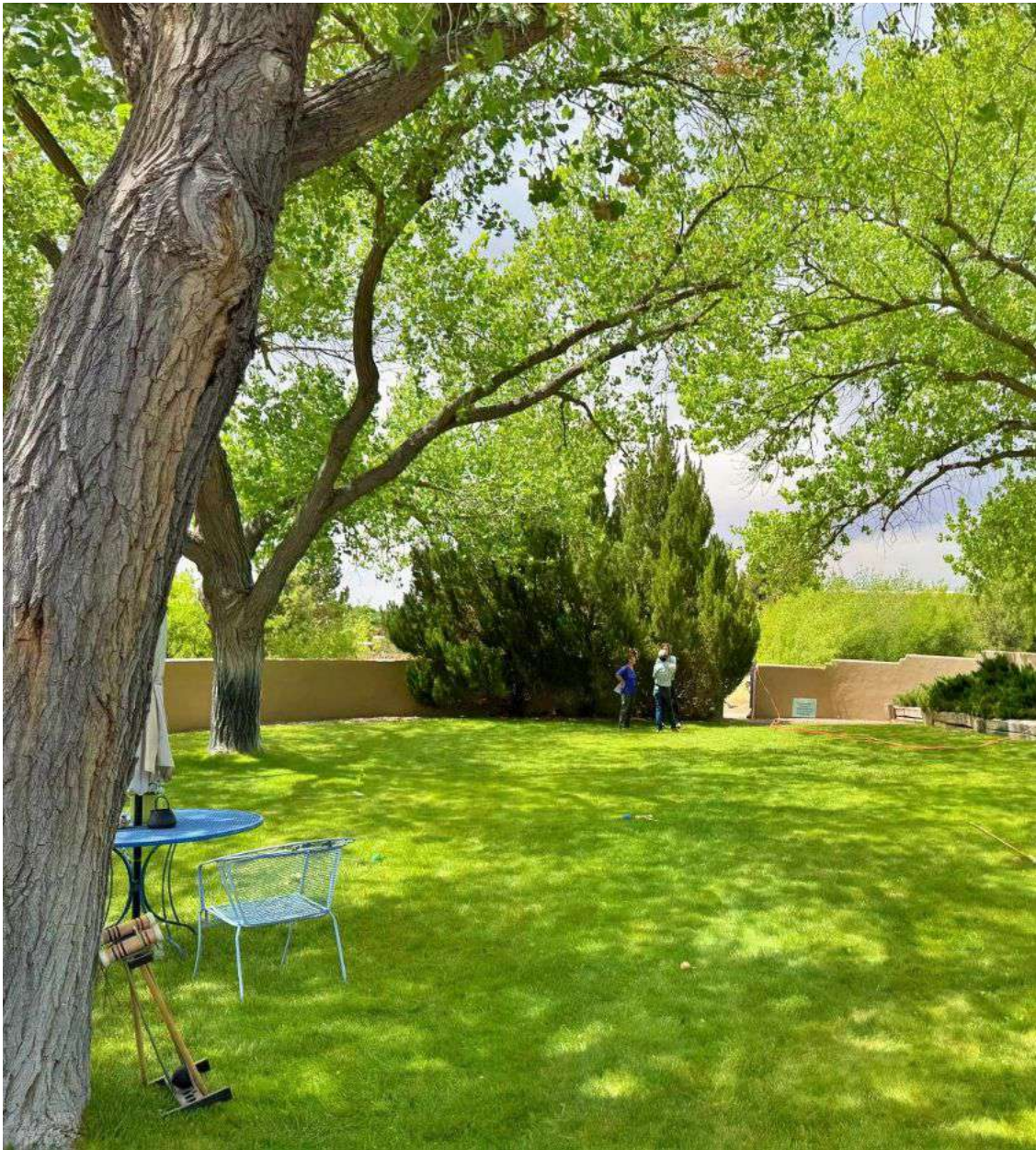
And in this yard, we know  
humans can nurture safe places  
in service to beauty.

poem by Laura Paskus  
art by LWren Walraven



3bqBackyardRefuge.org





### Back to the beginning

The final Corrales garden property we visited felt so much larger than the actual one-acre it sat upon. It was a dense, lush oasis, with dozens of large healthy trees, bushes & grasses, a meadow, & a fish pond with solar waterfall, all supporting a diverse wildlife habitat. Varieties of microclimates were thriving across the hilly property. The owners created numerous outdoor 'rooms' that included pergola-covered gathering places.

Above, a juniper bush in a right-hand corner of the grass-to-roll-around-on backyard, was recently appropriated by a mother duck incubating her eggs; so the section was closed off for viewing.

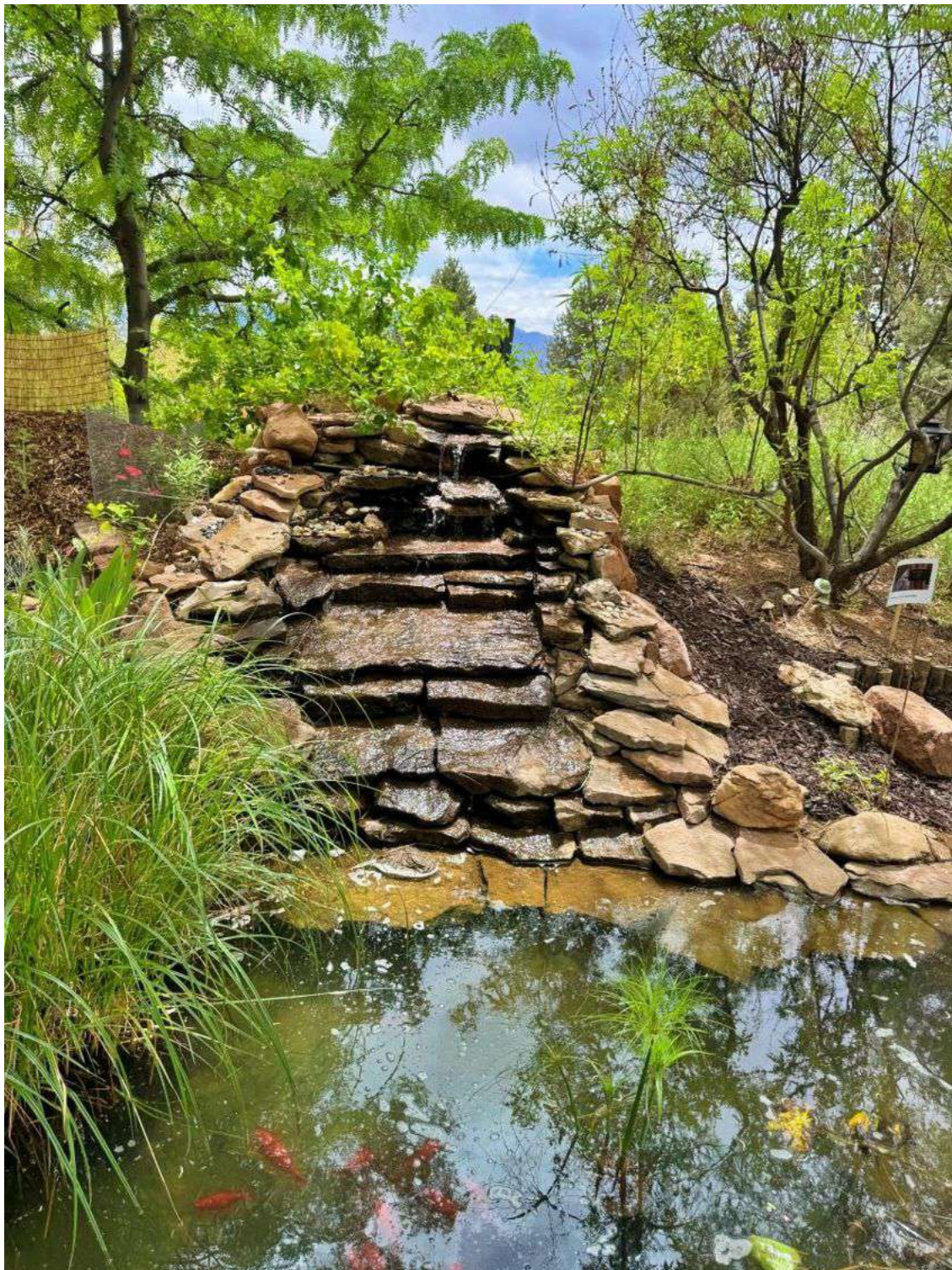
Amazingly, the 3400+sqft home on the property seemed somewhat discreet in that

wild setting. Below, left, an owner poses with a friend in front of the residence.  
Another view of [the home is here](#).



In one of the outdoor pergola-shaded rooms, a mycologist discussed [How to grow mushrooms in your garden](#), & gave out starter bags containing Pioppini & Chestnut mycelium mush. There was also a little library of books about growing & identifying mushrooms, with titles like *Mushrooming with Confidence* & *Mushrooms of North America*, seen below.





One of the many stand-out features on the property was the solar waterfall, aerating water as it flowed into the pond, above, but only when the sun was shining. The pond makes a nice burbling noise while it's running, then stops when a cloud passes overhead. The two photovoltaic panels sit just off a path, close to the pond but out of sight of it, below. The solar waterfall was a nice little touch.



### Corrales Hugelkultur

Another eclectic-yet-nicely-thought-out decision was to allow a builder, working on a project at the top of Meadowbrook Road in Rio Rancho, to bring dozens of loads of dirt & organic debris to the Corrales property. The owner had them dump the fill into connected piles, creating a natural elevated pathway.

The process is called Hugelkultur & [The Gardener's Toolkit](#) described it like this:

*"The basic technique entails building a pile of wood logs & thick branches, then burying them beneath layers of greenery, humus & soil. Just like a forest floor where felled trees are buried over time by living & dead biomass, eventually becoming a new growing surface for countless new species to take hold & begin the entire process over again of life & death—the natural cycle of all things."*

Hugelkultur is low maintenance, self-watering, promotes biodiversity, creates improved soil health, & looks good. The owners of the Corrales tour property utilized Hugelkultur to create a path that encircled most of the perimeter of the property. You can see it in the image below, on the bottom right side--it's the raised brown squiggle to the left of the tall pine tree.





### Chill out!

The scene above demonstrates another sustainable concept in the desert Southwest:  
relaxing in Corrales after an excellent tour...

<Organization/Brochure Links>

[ABQ Backyard Refuge Program](http://friendsofvalledeoro.org)  
friendsofvalledeoro.org

[Arid Lid Coalition](#)

[aridlidcoalition.org/index.php/what-is-gsi](http://aridlidcoalition.org/index.php/what-is-gsi)

[TerraWoRx -- Hydroseeding](#)

<http://www.terraworxservices.com>

[Corrales Bosque Preserve Brochure](#)

[Corrales Elevation Map](#)

[Glass Collisions -- American Bird Conservancy](#)

<https://abcbirds.org/glass-collisions>

[All About Birds](#)

[birds.cornell.edu/home](http://birds.cornell.edu/home)

[All About Bees](#)

[usgs.gov/news/featured-story/buzz-native-bees](http://usgs.gov/news/featured-story/buzz-native-bees)

[Laura Paskus -- Environmental Reporter & Podcaster](#)

[laurapaskus.com/about](http://laurapaskus.com/about)

[Joran Viers -- Environmental Arborist](#)

[legacytreecompany.com](http://legacytreecompany.com)

[Passive Rainwater Harvesting Brochure BernCo](#)

[bernco.gov/public-works/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2023/05/Passive-Rainwater-Harvesting-Guide\\_webLR.pdf](http://bernco.gov/public-works/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2023/05/Passive-Rainwater-Harvesting-Guide_webLR.pdf)

[Hugelkultur -- German Permaculture Technique](#)

[grow.edenbrothers.com/german-gardening-trick-hugelkulture/](http://grow.edenbrothers.com/german-gardening-trick-hugelkulture/)

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