

**DWL Tour 2018 Essay 1<sup>st</sup> Prize**  
**Cynthia Heaton**

Desert: Wasteland or Oasis

Many people think of the desert as wasteland; large expanses of sand given over to the reptiles and a few scraggly shrubs and cactus. They need only spend one weekend on the Desert Wise Landscape Tour to have their current paradigm of what is possible in the desert shattered.

The properties are each quite unique. Even if you see similar native or drought tolerant plants and cactus at each location, the creativity and vision of each owner is what has magic happen. One property especially demonstrates how taking a really long view (100 years) into a plan, can quite literally, help the desert landscape heal itself and thrive again.

You see I was always a flower lover and thought the desert didn't have many to offer. But, the tour shows that just isn't so. The blooming cacti and penstemon at one home were glorious. Not only beautiful and low maintenance, these natives offer much needed blooms for bees and hummingbirds as well. And other features made from rock, rusty iron and many other items abandoned as trash, add to the artistic nature of many of these landscapes.

I've been inspired to get off the fence and remove several of the plants in my yard which have required too much attention and precious water. I have great ideas for water catchment systems and have seen hard evidence that mulching is a huge water saver. And all those weird rusty things I pickup on my walks in the desert just might get an upgrade to decorative landscape feature instead of trash.

Most of all, this tour helped me to remember, that when we come to a new environment we should leave our old ideas behind, look around, and let ourselves be inspired by the possibility of Going Native.