

## 2019 Tour Essay 1<sup>st</sup> Place: Claudia Bucher

### High Desert Victory Gardens

Climate change is upon us. I am reminded to “Think globally, act locally,” and that “The personal is political.” Anyone with property in the desert can be on the front lines of the battle against human-led climate change. Desert dwellers are at the forefront of forging innovative solutions for living within an extreme climate. We all need to be eco-warriors crafting 21st century Desert-Wise Victory Gardens.

In the fall of 2017, my partner and I purchased a two and a half acre compound on Yucca Mesa. We inherited an abundance of flora to care for, including a small fruit orchard, two very vulnerable Mulberry saplings, several stately old growth Mesquite, Desert Willow and Joshua trees, three fruiting olive trees, and lots of prickly pear cactus. Since then, I have enthusiastically embraced the self-imposed challenge of sculpting a self-sustaining micro ecosystem.

There are three primary challenges that I hope to solve with the appropriate use of natives. These are: erosion control along a river that flows through the middle of the property, privacy screening, and restoration of a flat plain that was scraped bare for use as a horse corral. My goal is to plant with societal collapse in mind: to plant for conservation, for diversity of native plant life, to support wildlife, for erosion control, fire resistance, drought resistance, pest control and food production, and last but not least, for beauty. Can our thoughtfully curated gardens sustain us in a crisis? Could we live off of the berries, fruits, flowers, leaves and stalks of our native plants?

The Desert-Wise landscape tour was satisfyingly instructive in revealing how my fellow desert inhabitants are thinking about and implementing real solutions to the the unique challenges that lie ahead.