

Bringing History Alive

Tumacácori National Historical Park

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Sometimes the smallest contributions have the biggest impact. That's the case for the two peach pits found during restoration work on the Tumacácori Mission in 1987. These little pits actually led to the acclaimed Kino Heritage Fruit Tree Project. Though they were covered in adobe dust, they were in pristine condition and dated from 1800 to 1848. This ignited imaginations to wonder if

the original orchards, which covered much of the historic grounds, could be replanted with fruit trees related to the originals cultivated by the Spanish missionaries.



Tumacacori Mission

In 2003, with Tumacácori funding and the help of Jesus Garcia, Desert Survivor's Nursery and many Tucson organizations, fruit trees that possibly descended from those original 1680's orchards were identified. Cuttings of quince, pomegranate, fig, plum and Mission grape were vegetatively propagated to ensure the new plantings were identical genetic copies of the originals.



The Orchard

In 2007, the Tumacácori orchard was replanted for the first time in over 200 years. Master Gardeners from Pima County arrived a few years later; drawn by the chance to learn and help maintain a heritage orchard on the beautiful Mission grounds. To keep with the historic theme of this orchard, all

fertilizers and amendments used are organic and even hauled to each tree in

large buckets. The orchard has a cover of non-native Bermuda grass, transported by birds and cows from nearby ranches. Not only is this grass not historically correct, it has added to maintenance time for the park and takes nutrients from the trees. To keep this grass at bay, steel rings were

installed around the trees and lined with heavy landscape cloth and a thick layer of pecan mulch. Master Gardeners removed the grass inside the rings by hand; no chemical herbicides allowed. It was a massive project completed by some very dedicated volunteers who understood the true heritage mission.

Results of all this care can be seen in the current heavily fruit laden quince trees and lush pomegranates, figs, plum and apricot trees. The Master Gardener crew is growing out heritage peach, two variety of heritage plum, numerous varieties of heritage pomegranate and fig and seeds of the heritage apricot tree from the Mission courtyard. This apricot tree, planted in March 1938 by the Civilian Conservation Corp, was recently recognized as an Arizona Magnificent Tree. This means it is the largest and best example of its species in Arizona and now has protected status.



Quince

Our crew has slowly expanded to other areas of the 360 acre park. The visitor center courtyard garden was the first stop. We have researched and planted historically accurate plants either brought over by the Spanish missionaries or available as a native Santa Cruz county variety. Their original mission courtyards were a respite from the hostile life they were confronted with daily in the 1700-1800s. Its walls gave more than just protection from wild animals and Apache raids. This micro-climate provided an ideal environment to grow their only pharmacy, with herbs and medicinal plants. It can't be forgotten that these courtyard oases also brought lush beauty into their lives with ornamentals and fountains.



Courtyard

When the 35,000 annual visitors were asked what they enjoyed most while at the park, the courtyard won hands down. It has proudly served as the location for Naturalization Ceremonies, high school Baccalaureates and weddings. Master Gardeners have provided the park with a map and identification list for all 150+ plantings. The park is ordering

engraved plant identification signs for the plants. An additional ethnobotanical informational listing of where the plant came from originally, how it would have been used historically and why it is relevant here, has recently been added. Visitors can check out a packet with all this information from the visitor's center and study as they stroll through the garden.

Our next stop, in projects for the Mission, involves the entry to the visitor's center. A basket weaving garden is planned with examples of 19 plants used for different methods of weaving by the Tohono O'odham, Apache and Yaqui people. Another 11 very large trees and shrubs, that were also used, can be found elsewhere on the park's property and will be explained in the future signage. Celebrating the riparian area of the park with plantings of evergreen native perennials and shrubs will certainly green up the now mostly barren entry. A large bench is planned for tour gatherings or basket weaving demonstrations.



Visitor Center

In 2001, the former ranch house, barn and casita of the originators of the Crayola crayons, was donated to the park. Master Gardeners have recently installed irrigation to the heritage fruit trees there and transplanted some of the frost sensitive figs from the cold river bottom orchard to the ranch courtyard.



Santa Cruz River

Tumacácori National Historical Park is the proud recipient of a large pollinator grant. They have asked Master Gardeners to help out as they work with Borderland Restoration Project on this. Being an archeologically sensitive area, there are many areas of the park that are labelled "no dig". Keeping with these rules, a path to the De Anza Trail and the Santa Cruz River will be seed spread with native pollinator plants. Close to the river, the land is labelled a "migrating channel" and the rules allow for some digging. We plan to help collect seeds, spread seeds, water if necessary and put in plantings, grown out by the Borderlands group.

There's always a lot to do at the "prettiest little national park in the country". Stop in for a tour or come give us a hand on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month. We'd love to have you also find the fun of bringing history alive.



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