

The Garden at El Zaguán

A Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners Project



The 1880s Horse Chestnut in spring bloom provides welcome shade in summer.

The Garden at El Zaguán
545 Canyon Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

The Garden is open to the public Monday through Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm.

The Garden at El Zaguán Project

In 2012, the Historic Santa Fe Foundation invited Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners to restore the garden. Work began in 2013 with soil analysis and amendment, garden design, hardscaping, irrigation, and low water plantings.

Garden History

The garden contains many old varieties of shrubs and flowers introduced by the James L. and Jesusita Johnson family which bought the property in 1854. As was common in the 19th century, relocated easterners valued the familiar plants of their former home, and brought many from the eastern US to the west despite different climates.

It is thought that the Johnson's planted horse chestnut trees in the 1880s, and introduced peonies; both remain among the garden's signature plants. An acequia ran through the garden from the 1880s until the 1940s providing a water supply. The acequia was partially reconstructed in 2022. Gardens in this part of Santa Fe have microclimates with rich soil, water and shade, allowing them to support plants that normally do not thrive in our climate.

Pictured here is a selection of signature plants, some grown in the garden since the 19th century.



The historic Salt Cedar / Tamarisk, shown in summer bloom, may be one of the oldest in the State.

Gardens for Today and Tomorrow

As climate changes impact this garden, SFEMG is studying the water needs, respiration rates, and heat tolerance of new plantings. Santa Fe gardeners seeking a lush historical garden can recreate a sense of abundance using plantings that are low water. Here is a selection of plantings in the garden that address these changing conditions. Many are native plants that also support beneficial insects like bees and butterflies.

Achillea 'Yarrow' - Growing in clumps, the feathery pale green leaves of this native plant are aromatic, while 3' tall stems carry flat-topped flower heads that attract native bees.

Aquilegia chrysantha 'Golden Columbine' - This showy native plant has delicate foliage with softly divided leaves and slender 2-4' tall stems. Pastel yellow bell-shaped flowers are 2-3" wide with markedly hooked spurs, giving them the impression of ballet dancers. Blooms that attract birds and pollinators can be seen from spring to mid-summer.

Echinacea purpurea 'Purple Coneflower' - A striking native plant, it has textured, oblong 3-4" leaves that are spaced on flowering stems standing 2-4' tall. Large flowers bloom in summer and feature drooping purplish-pink petals with soft orange centers. Its flowers draw birds and butterflies.

Engelmannia peristenia 'Engelmann Daisy' - A carefree and hardy native, 2-3' tall stems above dark green toothed leaves carry a mass of long-blooming bright yellow daisy-like flowers from spring through fall. The flowers draw native pollinators.

Helianthus annuus 'Sunflower' - A native plant with hairy, coarse leaves and stems that arch 4-5' high above the garden. Flowers are multiple petaled bright yellow disks with brown centers. The plant supports birds and native bees.

Iris germanica 'Iris' - Growing from rhizomes, these plants have blade-like leaves on sturdy stems of 1-2' high. The flowers in colors ranging from purple to orange to brown bloom in the spring. Shown below is a white variety, reblooming in spring and again in the fall.

Lavandula spp. 'Lavender' - Known for its pleasing and long-lasting fragrance, this hardy compact shrub forms mounds of soft, gray-green foliage. Spikes of small purple flowers bloom in the spring and summer and are visited by honey bees.

Potentilla sp. 'Cinquefoil' - A native shrub, this carefree plant forms a pleasingly compact 3' mound. The native variety has bright green leaves and is covered in vibrant yellow 5-petaled flowers from spring through early fall, drawing native bees.



Our Mission

Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners is a nonprofit volunteer organization whose mission is to learn, teach and promote locally sustainable gardening through reliable, current research-based practices.

It is one of more than a dozen Master Gardener chapters affiliated with New Mexico State University's College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences and is overseen locally by a volunteer board of directors under the direction of the Santa Fe County Extension Agent.

Contact Us

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Peonies of various colors have been in the garden since the 19th century.



Twice blooming white iris nestles among old roses in the historic garden.



Planted in the 1950s, the Kolkwitzia / Beauty Bush features showy pink blossoms in the spring and naturally peeling bark.



Kniphofia uvaria - 'Red Hot Poker' and native plant Aquilegia chrysantha - 'Golden Columbine' thrive in our changing climate.



Several varieties of old roses offer fragrance and color in summer and fall. Roses have grown in the historic garden since the 19th century.



The historic acequia, reconstructed in 2023, was created to irrigate the flower garden in the 19th century. Water saving drip irrigation is used today.