

A backyard with legs

On Tom and Barbara Stokes' 1.5-acre parcel in Los Osos, you'll find a place for their horses, chickens and tortoises, rows of colorful roses and hollyhocks, and a savory vegetable garden

Written by Dawn White Photographed by Lance Kinney, Tribune August 24, 2007

On a recent day, a pair of neighborhood kids spent their afternoon picking plums, feeding chickens and watching guinea pigs play at the Stokes residence in Los Osos.



Is it any wonder that a visit makes you want to be outdoors? Rows of fruit trees, vegetable gardens, a horse stable, a chicken coop, multiple fountains, seemingly endless flower gardens, a few koi ponds and scattered oak trees make up just some of its allure.

Tom and Barbara Stokes moved to the almost 1.5-acre property 10 years ago, although they've lived in Los Osos for three decades.

A plan takes shape

The couple revamped the interior of the home and began working on the yard. At the time, there was little landscaping — just a hill dotted with oaks. The two began sectioning out areas, building terraces and finding a spot for their various horses.





The ample acreage allows space for the horses as well as an area below for grazing. Although not visible from the yard, a creek runs below the grove of oaks.

Closer to the residence is the manicured portion of the yard. Thirty varieties of roses create a rainbow of color among hollyhocks, daisies and perennials.

Initially, Barbara planned for a formal rose garden, but the temperamental— or foggy— weather of Los Osos caused her to alter those plans a bit. Next to elegant rosebushes grow tall hollyhocks in shades of red, pink and yellow, some reaching heights of 8 feet.

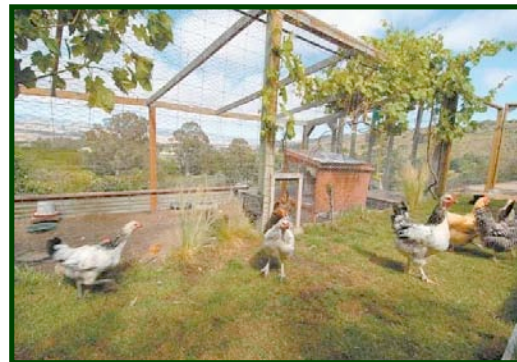


Exotic trees add ambience, including the curly willows, grown hydroponically in half wine barrels.



On one side of the home are two desert tortoises, bunnies, guinea pigs and 20 chickens living in a luxury chicken coop. The area's caging is covered in grapevines and has a "chicken door" to a grass area where fruit trees flourish.

The animals live harmoniously together, and lucky children can help feed them if they show up at the right time in the afternoon.





Vegetable delight

On the other side of the home grows a lavish fruit and vegetable garden. Asparagus, green onions, artichokes, olallieberries, key limes, strawberries, cucumbers and peppers are just a few of the produce varieties grown there.

One of Tom's favorite things about the garden is coming home and picking fruits and vegetables to eat for dinner.

"You haven't had real asparagus until you get it homegrown," said Barbara. "There is no comparison to what you get at the store."

The Stokes have the "green thumbs" for which many gardeners strive, but they say they can't take all the credit. Their three-part composter — filled with old plants, kitchen scraps, grass clippings and manure from the animals — provides a rich amendment to the soil in which they grow their plants.



The compost and lots of time spent working in their yard have created their ultimate outdoor haven, says Barbara.

"I couldn't keep it up if it wasn't my passion," she said. "But I love it."



Backyard hardscaping by Earthscapes