The Wonderland Garden
Sonoran Sky Elementary School

Features:
Garden designed to teach our connection to nature
Raised beds with pathways designed to ADA principles
Parental involvement – all labor and time donated
Monarch butterfly waystation and pond/riparian area

At Sonoran Sky Elementary, a very supportive PTO group, a principal who believes in the importance of teaching ecology, and 760 enthusiastic kids have created a wonderland in what was once a “big open, unused, ugly vacant lot.”

Master Gardener Karen Klein came to Sonoran Sky as a master gardener volunteer to design and help build an organic garden for Kindergarteners through 6th graders. She creates many of her own lessons. Children come every afternoon to learn about organic amendments, worms, photosynthesis, botany, entomology, pollination and plant life cycles. Today she says, “Can you believe this is my job? I am so lucky!”

With generous parental help from the PTO and a special Parent Garden Support Team headed by Kristen Neugebauer, and the support of principal Robert Dawson, the garden today offers a fantastic educational opportunity as well as benefiting the environment around it. It is beautiful, makes the air smell good, is a safe haven for bees, butterflies and hummingbirds, provides food and composting materials and has brought the school community together in a project.

Designed in the early spring of 2014, the “S” shaped beds (for Sonoran Sky) were ready for planting by August 2014. The paths are decomposed granite, wheelchair accessible. To the east of the raised vegetable beds is another raised area where all the plants are mostly native or xeriscape specimens needing little additional irrigation. Here amid desert milkweed, common milkweed, penstemon, blue mist, ocotillo and blanket flower bees and hummingbirds find nectar and pollinate plants. In the butterfly garden monarch butterflies lay eggs and nestle in acacias at night. In another bed, pink and purple petunias and pink frizzle poppies populate a pollinator flower garden. A herb bed, the sensory garden, offers luscious and aromatic nibbles for the children to explore and enjoy.

Outside the perimeter of the garden alongside the driveway, wildflower seeds have been sown and will form a wildflower meadow with added lavender and milkweed. Parents lent their professional skills to design and build a 150-seat amphitheater, resembling The Colosseum, at the back of the garden. In another on-going lesson in ancient technology, a simple clock that uses the position of the sun to indicate the time of day is used as a Human Sundial. A child can stand in the center and see where his or her shadow falls to tell the time. In the pond/riparian area, Karen is also growing papyrus, as the sixth grade is studying ancient Egypt. This pond,
nestled in the shady side of the garden, hosts dragon flies and tadpoles, cattails and lily-pad, water hyacinth, elephant ear and Gambusia, a native fish for mosquito and vector control.