SITE-TO-SOURCE / SAMPLE CONSULTATION

Color and habitat in a hot west-facing border

Tucson, Arizona

$89 Single-Area Plant Palette • West-facing hot border

Illustrative report for a fictional client and site; no real property inspection or purchase. Sample edition: 7 Nov 2026 | PHY-SAMPLE-004_Tucson_Hot_Border

Your recommended direction

Build structure with desert fairy duster and brittlebush, then use lower flowering species toward the walk. Allow mature widths and expect seasonal dormancy. Water new plants as they establish.

The client behind the question

Fictional client: Phil "Tandy" Miller

"I've got one embarrassing strip in the front yard that gets the worst afternoon sun. The walkway is right beside it, and I'm not interested in cactus spines sticking out where people pass. I'd like color and a few birds and bees, but I can't water every day. I can spend a couple hundred dollars in stages if someone can tell me which desert plants really belong together and how big they get."

Illustrative mock submission, not an actual customer testimonial. Adapted from the fictional intake originally prepared for this example.

Selected answers from the client intake

Intake question	Client's answer
What I want	One colorful, low-water Sonoran-style bed rather than a full-property redesign.
Site description	About 12 x 26 feet, west-facing, existing rock/gravel, reflected heat and unknown fill/drainage.
Big worries	Summer dieback, walkway clearance, plants too wide for the space and water use.
Plant preferences	Locally appropriate desert plants, nectar/flowers and an intentional arrangement.
Must avoid	Cactus spines at the walking edge; obvious contact/ingestion hazards in highly accessible areas.
Resources	Hose water available to establish plants; about $200-$350 for starter stock; fall or spring installation.

How we answered the client's questions

Client asked	How this report responds
What keeps the bed looking intentional?	Use desert fairy duster and brittlebush for structure, with shorter seasonal flowers along the outer edge.

Client asked	How this report responds
How can we avoid sharp plants along the walkway?	Do not recommend walkway cacti; keep bush muhly awns and potential skin-irritating globemallow away from contact areas.
Will plants look green every month?	Not necessarily. Brittlebush and seasonal flowers can go dormant; mature structure and a phased bloom sequence are part of the plan.
Can I just stop watering after planting?	No. The palette assumes a realistic establishment-watering period even for drought-adapted choices.

What we clarified in the simulated written intake

Follow-up question	Client reply and resulting decision
Can you water deeply through the first hot season?	Client: Yes, I can use a hose for young plants. Report decision: Keep drought-adapted options with an establishment-water plan.
Are mature shrub clearances measured at the walkway?	Client: Not yet; I do not want any branch overhanging it. Report decision: Treat large shrubs as conditional on measured mature width.

The plant recommendations and next steps that follow show the result of these client-specific choices. Site observations remain fictional, and conditions must be confirmed before real installation.

How we interpreted this project

One 12 × 26 ft front-yard planting strip with reflected afternoon heat and a walkway. The homeowner wants Sonoran Desert character without sharp cactus near pedestrians or daily irrigation after establishment.

The $89 Single-Area Plant Palette coordinates plants for one defined bed, with fit notes and substitutions. A consultation call, formal revision and whole-property design are not included.

Three decisions that matter most

01 Check bed drainage and construction fill or caliche; do not infer soil from a general map alone.

02 Keep the walkway clear and reserve space for mature woody plants.

03 Plan establishment during a cooler planting period, with supplemental watering available.

Plant recommendations

12 screened plant choices are presented below. They are alternatives organized by planting environment and use—not a shopping list you must buy in full. Mature dimensions and growing conditions remain approximate; confirm the supplied plant form, actual site light and water before purchase.

Structure

Plant / selection status	How it may work and what to check
Desert fairy duster *Calliandra eriophylla* Core	Pink flowers; compact woody backbone in sun; bees and hummingbirds. **Approximate dimensions: about 3 x 3 ft** **Check:** Allow full mature spread; extra water through establishment.
Brittlebush *Encelia farinosa* Core	Silvery foliage and yellow winter/spring flowers; strong exposed-sun fit. **Approximate dimensions: about 4 x 4 ft** **Check:** May lose leaves or require cutback after drought/cold; allow room.
Chuparosa *Justicia californica* Conditional	Red flowers and hummingbirds; handles reflected heat; seasonal leaf drop. **Approximate dimensions: about 5 x 5 ft or more** **Check:** Only if a clear 5-ft-or-larger footprint exists and supplemental water can reach it.
Bush muhly *Muhlenbergia porteri* Conditional	Airy native-grass texture; monsoon-season response; low irrigation after rooting. **Approximate dimensions: roughly 2-3 ft wide and 1-4 ft tall** **Check:** Seedheads have stiff awns; not at walking/pet-contact edge; dry-season foliage can look dormant.

Mid-layer

Plant / selection status	How it may work and what to check
Desert senna *Senna covesii* Core	Warm-season yellow flowers; butterfly host; thrives in exposed xeric spots. **Approximate dimensions: about 1.5 x 2 ft** **Check:** Reseeds; thin seedlings if needed; not a tasting/forage plant.
Parry's penstemon *Penstemon parryi* Core	Rose-pink spring flowers; hummingbird appeal and reseeding. **Approximate dimensions: about 1.5 x 1 ft foliage; flower spikes taller** **Check:** Good drainage; water young plants through first summer; may be short-lived.
Desert globemallow *Sphaeralcea ambigua* Conditional	Orange spring flowers, native-bee value and seasonal dormancy. **Approximate dimensions: about 3 x 3-4 ft** **Check:** Leaf/stem hairs can irritate eyes/skin; put deep in bed, avoid reach of frequent play and pruning without protection.

Front / color

Plant / selection status	How it may work and what to check
Desert marigold *Baileya multiradiata* Core with caution	Bright yellow flowers; short-lived reseeder for bare, fast-draining openings. **Approximate dimensions: about 1 x 1-2 ft** **Check:** Documented sheep/goat toxicity, not suitable for animal browsing; do not permit ingestion. No stock safety guarantee. Potential toxicity to sheep/goats is relevant where grazing animals could access landscaping; this residential example does not establish livestock safety.

Plant / selection status	How it may work and what to check
Blackfoot daisy *Melampodium leucanthum* Core	Low white daisies for a sunny front edge; drought tolerance once rooted. **Approximate dimensions: about 1 x 2 ft** **Check:** Needs good drainage; occasional shaping may help.
Desert zinnia *Zinnia acerosa* Core with caveat	White flowers; low, gravel-suited accent in sunny, well-drained ground. **Approximate dimensions: about 0.5-1 x up to 2 ft** **Check:** A restoration dataset flags possible animal toxicity without species-specific detail; avoid ingestion and confirm animal access.
Golden dogweed *Thymophylla pentachaeta* Core	Small, golden, nectar-rich daisies; aromatic low cover. **Best fit:** generally under 1 x about 2 ft **Check:** Often reseeds; confirm species label, not the more widely sold T. tenuiloba.
Goodding's verbena *Glandularia gooddingii* Conditional	Lavender-pink spring mat; butterflies; seasonal color contrast. **Approximate dimensions: about 1 x 3 ft** **Check:** More seasonal moisture for longer blooms; may decline/die in summer, reseeds; label as Glandularia (formerly Verbena).

How to put the recommendations to work

01 Confirm drainage, sun and safe walking clearances.

02 Plant a few backbone shrubs, allowing room to expand naturally.

03 Add seasonal flowers and assess water demand after the first hot season.

Important site and safety considerations

- Drought-tolerant does not mean no establishment irrigation.
- Only published nursery pages—not real-time inventory or local seed provenance—were reviewed.

A few things we would hold back

sacred datura: Potentially toxic if ingested; dramatic native flowers do not offset exposure for a frequented bed.

cholla cacti: Spines and detached segments make pedestrian-edge contact unsuitable; native status is not an automatic safety endorsement.

agaves / desert spoon: Rigid pointed leaves or marginal armature near routine walking or maintenance.

Plant sourcing and expectations

Ask growers for the exact scientific name (including any trade synonym), the plant or seed format, the propagation source and whether stock is suitable for the local climate. A nursery listing is a lead for shopping, not proof of current inventory, correct provenance, or guaranteed establishment.

Examples of places to inquire

Spadefoot Nursery. catalog/species page only

Desert Survivors. historical/database listing, not stock

Tohono Chul Desert Corner. retail nursery described; species stock not confirmed

Sources consulted

The references below support the regional botanical, gardening, or regulatory decisions in this illustration. Published range, nursery listings and generalized soils information do not prove parcel-scale conditions, county indigeneity or seed-lot origin. Check dated rules and availability before making real purchases.

Native Plants of the Tucson Area (Pima County Master Gardeners 2026)

Landscape Plants for the Arizona Desert (2024 edition)

Native plant search directory

Tucson garden design by Scott Calhoun

Desert zinnia Arizona native county habitat dataset

Desert zinnia (Zinnia acerosa)

Plant Safely: Baileya spp.

Desert marigold plant guide