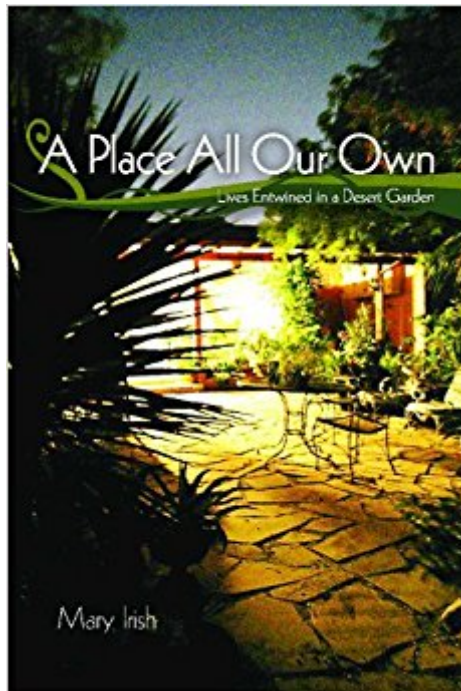




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# **A Place All Our Own: Lives Entwined In A Desert Garden**



## Synopsis

For twenty years Mary Irish, along with her husband Gary, tended a garden in Scottsdale, Arizona. Over the years they transformed it into a lively and lovely spot that reflected both its place in the worldâhot, dry, and often hostile to gardeners who donât understand its waysâand the particular passions of its two creators. Of course, not everything went as planned, and the garden talked back as much as it obeyed. But for these two gardeners, the unexpected outcome is one of gardeningâs great pleasures.Â Mary Irish is a delightful writer. With grace, wit, and obvious affection, she tells the story of how she and Gary transformed a barren half-acre plot around their house in the center of Greater Phoenix into a haven: for its creators and their friends, for the birds and insects and other critters that have discovered it, and for the plants that have made it their home. Although it describes the experience of gardening in one of the most extreme climates in the inhabited world,Â A Place All Our OwnÂ will interest anyone who gardensâ and everyone who enjoys a well-told, true-life nature tale.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

âThe writing is exquisite, and I found the descriptions of the weather and plants spot-on, insightful, and occasionally surprising and graceful.â Scott Calhoun, author of *The Gardenerâs Guide to Cactus: The 100 Best Paddles, Barrels, Columns, and Globes*â Mary Irish is a desert gardener par excellence. Anyone who prefers native plants to manicured lawns should read her account of how she and her husband turned their home ground into a showcase for

a diversity of arid-lands plants, which are vastly more interesting than the typical suburban Bermuda grass.â John Alcock, author of *When the Rains Come: A Naturalist's Year in the Sonoran Desert*

An intriguing chronicle of challenges and setbacks in creating a garden oasis in a harsh climate.

This is a great book by a most knowledgeable gardener familiar with the difficulties of gardening in the low desert of Arizona. The fact that it focuses on her own experiences over the years gives insight and thoughtfulness on the philosophy of gardening. Not a "how to" book but a charming read by a gardener of extensive experience and deep interest in the joys of gardening.

This book is the best I've read with wonderful personal information on making a garden in the Phoenix area. Gardening here is like nowhere else in the country and Mary Irish's personal experiences on all aspects of gardening are terrific. Although she is an professional in this area, she writes for the average home gardener and the book is a joy to read.

"A truly comfortable garden is one where all the lives with whom we share it become intertwined, a place where most lives are tolerated, indeed welcome, and where a moderate live-and-let-live approach is enough to settle our differences." When I read those words in the Introduction to *A Place All Our Own*, Mary Irish's story of the desert yard she and her husband Gary tended for two decades in Arizona's Sonoran Desert, my first thought was, I want to live in that garden! A place where most lives are "tolerated, indeed welcome," sounds like my kind of community, whether it be garden, town or whole nation. This tale of the evolution of a xeric but bountiful Scottsdale yard shows how Irish and her husband come to terms with the harsh reality of gardening in the desert, not by overcoming climate, soil, landscape and wildlife but by coming to understand and thrive in an environment where the relentlessly hot and bone-dry months of late spring and early summer drive many people inside to turn up their air-conditioning, and rain--when it comes--pours down with such intensity that dry washes become muddy torrents capable of washing away trees and cars. The chapters chronicle the growth and change of the garden itself ("The Back," "The Front," "The Outback," and "The Patios") as well as the lives which inhabit it ("Birds," "Animals," "Bugs," and lastly, "People"). Irish's keen eye, passion for plants, and generous sense of humor enliven this tale of growing a garden in which gardeners, plants, residents wild and not, and landscape are intertwined in a lively and fascinating community. *A Place All Our Own* is a story of plants and plant

obsession, of weather and insects, of bird song and flower displays. It's peppered with plant names, both in English and the odd language of science, a mix of Green and Latin that may seem undigestible at first. Don't be deterred; keep reading. Like the best of garden memoir--Joan Dye Gussow's books come to mind, for example--it's full of garden-grown wisdom about life and how to live it: I think if all our gardens inspired us to live more carefully with each other, instead of insisting on our dominance over all the rest, it would be a more peaceful and richer world. In the end all our interests are the same: find a good mate, get a good meal, live in a safe, secure place, raise smart, good looking kids. It's hard enough in the best of times; the least we can do is create gardens that help that along as best we can. Hear, hear! And, I would add, communities and nations too. by Susan J. Tweit for Story Circle Book Reviews reviewing books by, for, and about women

I have developed an avid interest in low desert gardening in Arizona ever since moving here a few years ago. Much of my inspiration and passion has come from reading personal gardening accounts such as "A Full Life in a Small Place and Other Essays from a Desert Garden" by Janice Emily Bowers and "Yard Full of Sun: The Story of a Gardener's Obsession That Got a Little Out of Hand" by Scott Calhoun. I had expected this book to be somewhat along similar lines. I already own several gardening books by Mary Irish and was eager to dive into this one. Although I don't at all regret having read this, navigating the barrage of scientific plant names and genera that Irish throws at you can be difficult if you are not a botanical fanatic or if you don't have access to another reference where you can easily look them up. I found the few illustrations in the book not to be particularly informative and the author's descriptions of plants to be often incomplete. Although I consider myself somewhat knowledgeable about plants and xeriscaping in Arizona, I still found myself skipping pages and sections because I wasn't in the mood to look up another plant name. I guess I'm just not the target audience for this book. On the positive side, her habit of moving plants from one part of the garden to another whenever they seem to be faltering has inspired me to take another closer look at some parts of my own garden.

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