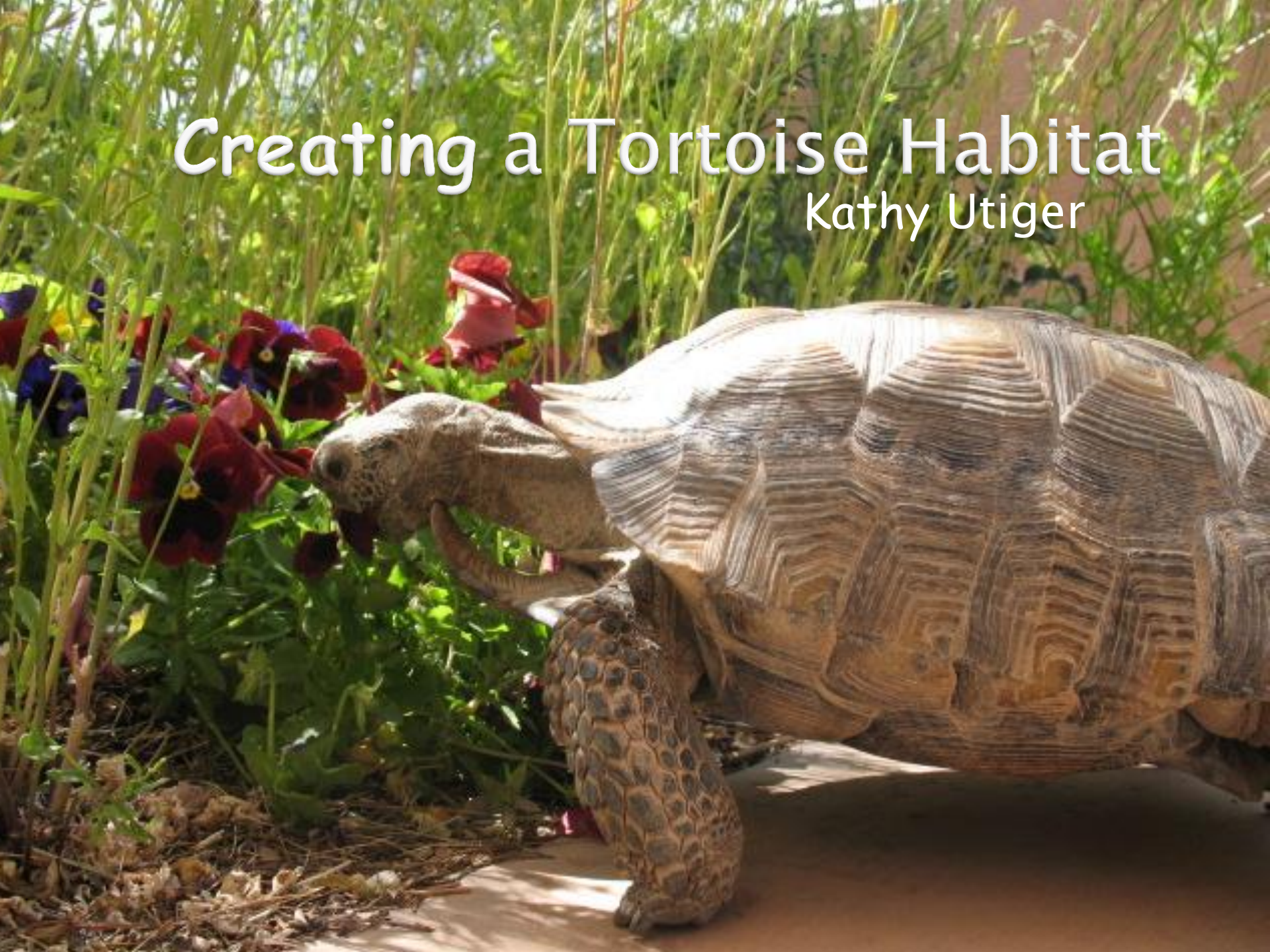
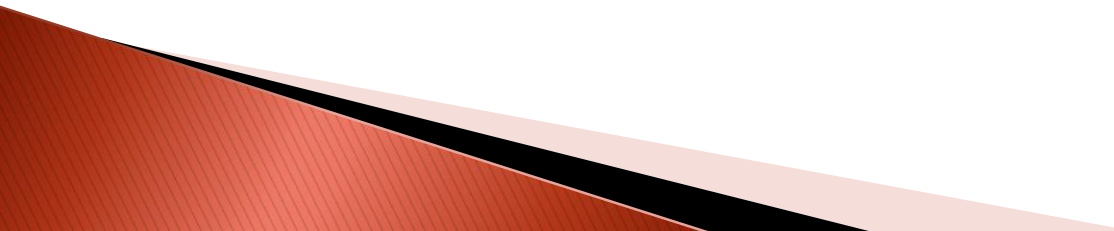


# Creating a Tortoise Habitat

Kathy Utiger



# Habitat Needs

- ▶ To provide conditions similar to those in the wild, a tortoise habitat needs:
    - Well-insulated burrow
    - Water dish
    - Plants for browsing
    - Removable gate barrier
    - Escape-proof yard
    - Tortoise-safe environment
    - Areas of shade and sunlight
- 



# Tortoise burrow

- ▶ Tortoise is in burrow 95% of the time
- ▶ Tortoise is cold-blooded: it regulates body temperature by moving in and out of sunlight and the burrow

Tortoise basks to warm up enough to forage



# Burrow Styles

## ► Underground



Insulated by surrounding  
and top soil

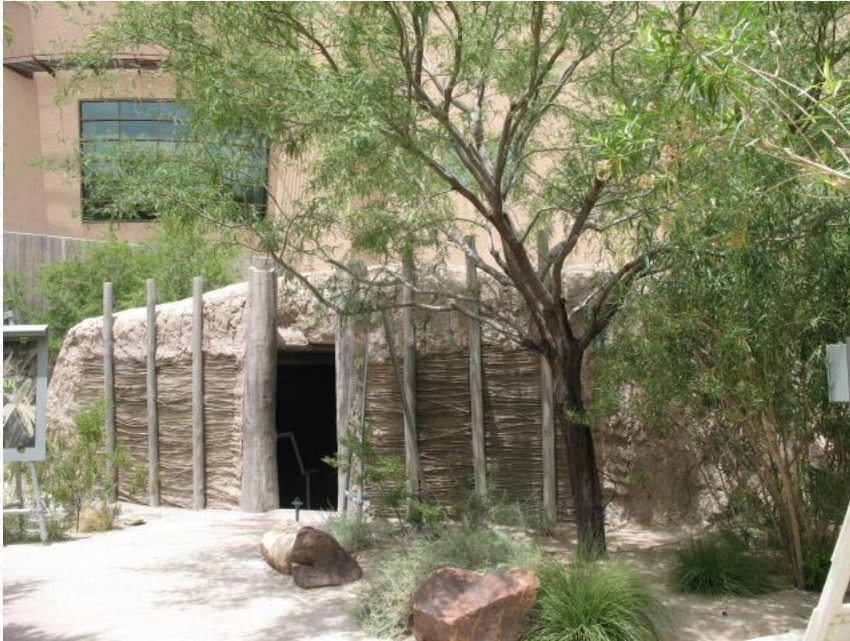
## ► Aboveground



Large amount of soil  
needed for insulation



# Indian Dwelling—look familiar?



Like a big aboveground burrow,  
with several feet of soil insulation  
on top and on the sides



Very heavy soil insulation  
on the sides



# Water Dish Styles

## ► Shaded Dish



Water is sure to keep cool

## ► Unshaded Dish



Very shallow water is cooled by the slightest breeze



# Plants for Browsing

- ▶ It's important for tortoises to browse independently and not have to be fed



Some MegaDiet---lots of browsing

Tad nibbles on tufted evening primrose

# Removable Gate Barrier

- ▶ Barrier stays in place when the gate is left open inadvertently.
- ▶ Most lost tortoises escape through the open gate.



Gate opens outward while board stays in place

When plywood rests on concrete or rock slab, tortoise can't see or dig out.



# Las Vegas Habitats

- ▶ Custodians will tell us:
  - What challenges they faced in developing the habitat
  - Any special accommodations they made
  - Safety issues they had to overcome
  - Special features they put in their habitats
  - What plants are available for browsing—and which ones the tortoise eats

# Cecil's Setting under Construction





# Cecil's Setting under Construction

- ▶ Burrow—unfinished



Solid caliche made digging next to impossible

- ▶ Shaded water pavilion



Large dish fed by automatic sprinklers

# Cecil's Setting under Construction

## ► Back yard (left)



Note gate barrier next to house

## ► Tortoise area (right)



Plant area (left), burrow (center), water (right)



# Cecil's Setting under Construction

- ▶ Gate barrier



Removable barrier blocks hazards

- ▶ Barrier on sliding gate



Barrier will prevent tortoise from seeing out and getting stuck

# Cecil's Setting under Construction

## ▶ Plant area



Rose bushes in place. Plants for browsing to come. Will remove several rocks for tortoise access.

## ▶ Potted plants



Potted plants can be tipped on side as occasional treats



# Konna's Kingdom



# Konna's Kingdom

▶ Nice burrow



▶ Shaded water dish





# Konna's Kingdom

- ▶ Note rock holding stem down for easy eating



- ▶ Grapes, dandelions, and other plants for browsing

# Konna's Kingdom



More browsing, plus a  
bench for custodian



Special barrier to avoid squeezing  
Konna at the corner of the gate



# Konna's Kingdom



Back-to-front view of  
habitat



Blocked-off hazard

# Konna's Kingdom



Comfy sitting area



Ingenious cover to protect young plants (right)



# Maxine's Manor

- ▶ Removed some grass to make dry area



# Maxine's Manor



Burrow (center) and  
browsing plants (left)



Beautiful tortoise!



# Maxine's Manor



Yummy plants and  
doggy friend

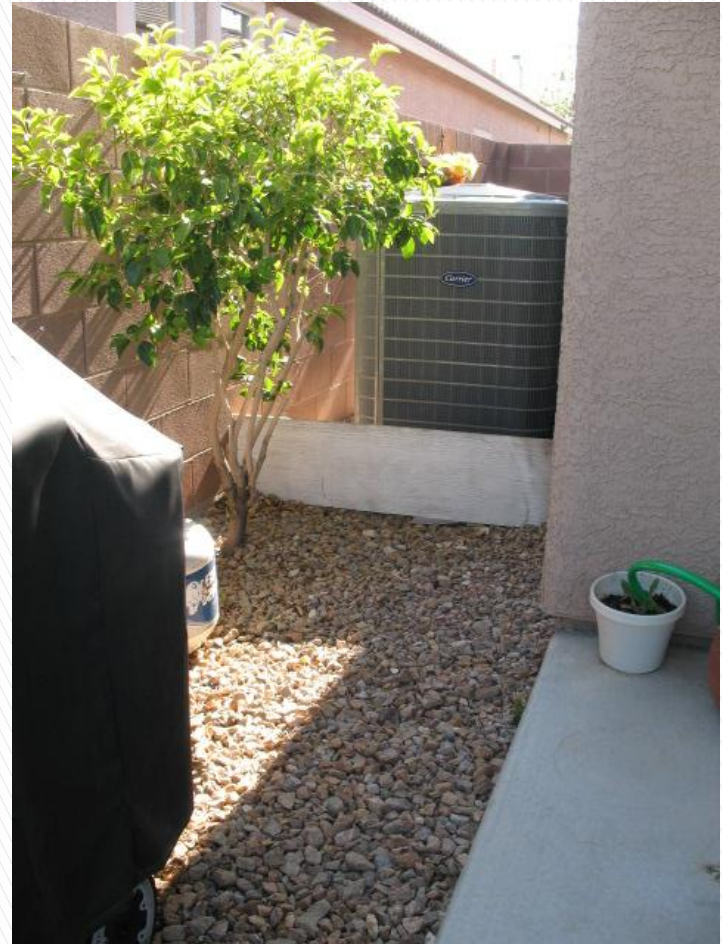


Prune heavy foliage to  
make walkway by wall

# Maxine's Manor



Gate barrier stays in place when door is open. Needs solid base so tortoise can't see or dig out.



Block off hazards



# Maxine's Manor



Cover with plywood, fencing  
that tortoise can see through



View of plywood from  
street



Maxine taking it easy >>

Heavy foliage is pruned to make for easy walking  
around the perimeter



# Pokey's Place



# Pokey's Place



Water dish with  
stepping stone for  
wee ones

Tortoises can walk  
to all areas on dry  
ground, which is  
easier than walking  
on grass



# Pokey's Place

- ▶ Long-standing burrow



- ▶ Dandelions everywhere





# Pokey's Place

- ▶ Shelter for wee ones





# Pokey's Place



Well-worn pathway along  
perimeter of property



Large fig tree gives  
grand shelter

# Pokey's Place



Hatchling Pen—unused  
right now



Ramp admits small tortoises  
and blocks large ones



# Tad's Turf



# Tad's Turf



Grape branches trail on ground for easy eating



Grape trimmed from Tad's walkway; nice resting place



# Tad's Turf



Globe mallow bent down or held in place with a rock



Tortoises bite and pull—need attached leaf

# Tad's Turf



Dandelion patch



Salad bar. Note that the Tad can't reach the poisonous tomato leaves planted in a flower pot



# Tad's Turf



This year I am eating  
dark-colored pansies



And yellow evening  
primrose

# Tad's Turf



Mexican evening primrose (right rear) can be contained and tipped on side for nibbling



Tad won't eat the white petunias, only dark-colored ones



# Tad's Turf



Desert willow (left) blossoms all season long—pick a handful daily

Shallow walk-in water feature (right)

# Tad's Turf



My favorite red roses grow without pesticides in the front yard



Gardening equipment is blocked off



# Chuck's Chambers





# Chuck's Chambers – Before





# Chuck's Chambers

- ▶ Large yard with many areas of shade and sun
- ▶ Building projects blocked off by short temporary walls





# Chuck's Chambers

- ▶ Beautiful burrow



- ▶ Shaded water dish  
(They'll cut my grass soon so I won't choke on the long blades of grass)





# Chuck's Chambers

- ▶ Verbena and gazenias



- ▶ Hollyhocks





# Chuck's Chambers

- ▶ Spineless cactus in pot and yellow bells
- ▶ I love my new burrow!





# Big & Runtley's Realm



# Big & Runtley's Realm



Aboveground burrow



Water dish



# Big & Runtley's Realm

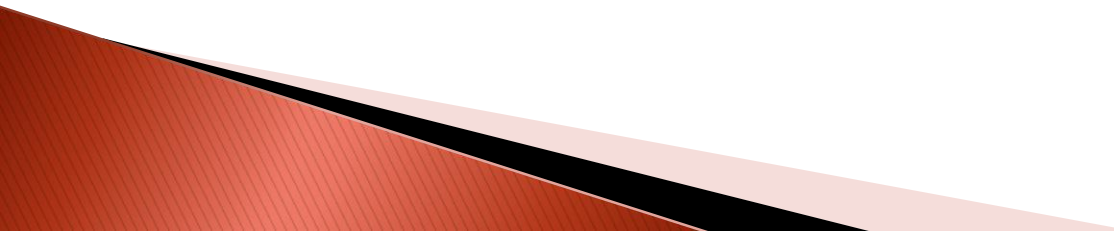


Mexican evening  
primrose



Future expansion, when Windsor  
block planter is restructured to  
avoid climbing

# What Does a Habitat Need?

- ▶ The basic elements are very important
  - ▶ No need to be fancy
  - ▶ Include as much space as possible
  - ▶ Must be outdoors
    - Well-insulated burrow
    - Water
    - Plants
    - Removable gate barrier
    - Tortoise-safe area
- 



# Happy Tortoises

