



Community News

Gardening in Sta. Martha

I am a Canadian with an ingrained understanding of the seasons. Summer means long days filled with warmth and winter means short, cold days while spring and autumn are transitional periods. All Canadians know that our gardens are planted in the spring, flourish during the summer and die off in the fall. Of course, we also know that when deciding what to plant in our gardens, we have to consult the Plant Hardiness Zone Map to see what could possibly survive in our yards. In Canada, the plants that will NOT survive far outnumber those that will because we reside in zones 1 through 5 with most of the country being listed at Zone 3 or lower.

Having a garden in Santa Martha Etla in southern Mexico is a considerable adjustment for those of us who try their hand at gardening. The climate, of course is different. The growing season is year-round with only two seasons based solely on rainfall. There is the rainy season (May through August) when it rains every few days and the dry season (September through April) when rain falls only about once every month or so. January tends to be hotter than August because it lacks the cooling summer rains. (Using the Hardiness Zone Map, Sta. Martha is in the Zone 10 & 11 area).

The climate in southern Mexico affects gardening there in two ways:

Speed of Growth: My wife and I have discovered that plants grow quickly in Sta. Martha. Two years ago, we planted some flowering trees (Jacaranda) in our yard. When we put them in the ground, they were less than 3 feet (1 meter) tall. Two years later, they were 7 feet (2.1m) tall. Doubled in size in 2 years! One of our rose bushes went from 18" (45 cm) to 8' (2.4 m) in just one year. The tree just outside our gate was photographed on June 3, 2003 (the before picture) and again on August 26, 2006 (the after picture). It went from a scrawny bush about a meter tall to a tree that is about 3 meters tall and has been pruned at least 4 times in the space of 3 years and 2 months.

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The Work Begins

This summer saw the start of construction at Los Sabinos. The first steps involve putting in the basic facilities – streets, sidewalks, sewer systems, water lines and underground electrical system.

Our Engineer commented to me that the water delivery system that we have designed is superior to that used by the town of Santa Martha in terms of the volume of water delivered, the reliability of the water source, and the quality of the water.



Condo Fees

The monthly Condominium Fees for Los Sabinos have been set at 1000 pesos per month (as of September 6, 2006, that is \$103.10 CDN or \$94.33 US) for the first two years and will be reviewed in September 2008. Ideally, these fees should be paid annually or semi-annually.

The Condo Fees cover the following items: a) the maintenance of the green spaces and other common areas, the streets and sidewalks, the street lighting, and the water and sewer systems (see the note below titled Corvee Labor), b) fees for water and sewer usage, c) electricity usage (see note on Utilities below), d) land taxes, and e) staff salary (see note on Staff below).

Condo Fees become payable on the first of the month following the month in which you acquire the title to your condo.

Corvee Labor: In many communities like Santa Martha, property owners pay city taxes not in money but in labor. Every household is expected to devote a specific number of days to work on community projects such as street maintenance or repairs to town buildings (or pay to hire a workman for the required length of time). The owners of Los Sabinos houses, by assuming responsibility for the maintenance of the street, street lights and the like, are completing their required corvee service and do not have to do any other service for the town council.

Utilities: The basic condo fees include the cost of all utilities with the exception of propane gas (used to heat water and for cooking) and telephones. Estimated cost of propane assuming that someone is in residence all the time is about 120 pesos per month (\$12.37 CDN or \$11.32 US). At this point in time, there are no telephone lines installed in Los Sabinos. If condo owners want land lines, the Condo Committee must vote to install them and then assess each condo owner an appropriate share of the cost. At the moment, cellular phones are used at Los Sabinos.

Staff: Los Sabinos Condo Community has a full-time staff member with a variety of responsibilities that include overseeing the maintenance and upkeep of the common areas and facilities and assisting the residents regarding paying bills, organizing household repairs and the like as well as providing basic security for the community.

FACT: Oaxaca City has its own English Language Library located not far from the historic Parque El Llano on the edge of the city center.

FACT: The zocalo (or town square) in Oaxaca City was built in 1616 and will soon celebrate its 400th anniversary.

Buying Your Condo

In Oaxaca, as in all of Mexico, there is a procedure that must be followed when purchasing property with one additional step added for foreigners. Note that a foreigner may not own land within 30 km of a border or coast but inland, foreigners can own land with the same rights and obligations of a Mexican landowner. Purchasing your condo in Los Sabinos involves the use of a Notary Public and, of course, one of us will be there to help in every step.

Step 1: On your first visit to the Notary Public, we begin the process and initiate the process. The land is paid for by the prospective purchaser by this time.

Step 2: The initial paperwork is taken to the Ministry of Exterior Relations (in Oaxaca City) where you must apply for permission to own land in Mexico. You will need the papers provided by the Notary Public and copies of your passport and visa. Permission is obtained once you have paid a processing fee (4070 pesos as of August 2006) and signed an agreement stating that should any dispute arise, you will use the Mexican system rather than appeal to your consulate.

Step 3: Once permission has been obtained, it is back to the Notary Public who will prepare the necessary transfer documents.

Step 4: At this time, it is necessary to visit the Land Office in the town of ETLA to pay a land transfer tax (estimated at about 2000 pesos).

Step 5: Upon presentation of the tax receipt to the Notary Public and upon payment of his fee (estimated

at 3000 pesos), he will enter the transfer of title into his records and the process is complete. Note that the Notary Public will provide you with an official copy of your land title within 3 months of the completion of this step but that you become the official owner of record as soon as step 5 is complete.

Shopping

Most Oaxacans visit their local markets every day to get the foods they need. Should you decide to adopt that lifestyle, there are a wide variety of markets to visit. There are local stores in Sta. Martha but the nearest open market is in the town of ETLA about 5 km (3 miles) to the southeast. For a true shopping adventure, you could decide to go into the city of Oaxaca (24 km or 15 miles) away and visit the main market – Central Abastos – that covers 17 city blocks and offers everything under the sun. If traditional North American shopping is your choice, there are a number of supermarkets in the area including a Sam's (similar to Costco). There you can get almost all of the foods and brands that you used to buy back home. The choice is yours.





Before



After. (Note that the scale is roughly the same in both photos)
The growth seen here took 3 years and 2 months.

other trees such as Norfolk Pine, cypress, oak, eucalyptus and poplar. We would also see a wide variety of flowers and shrubs such as Bird of Paradise, bougainvillea, cockscomb, roses, and fushia.

The problem for us is deciding what NOT to plant in our garden. Of course, we want at least one of everything but that is not possible so what do we do? It is great fun and you can share in the fun if you wish to.

Variety of Plants: In our yard, we have planted a wide variety of things including cactus, flowers, bushes and trees but we have only begun. We are taking our time because there are so many to choose from. If you and I were to take a walk through the village of Santa Martha, we would see trees such as sapote, pine, tamarind, pomegranate, soursop (guayaba), and acacia as well as plants such as morning glory, salvia, feverfew, and cup of gold growing wild in the ditches and fields. In the locals' gardens, the array is even greater. Trees include flowering trees such as frangipani, flamboyant, jacaranda, and poinsettia, fruit trees such as papaya, mango, avocado, banana, orange, and lemon and



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