

TURTLE LOVE



yard and covering them with dirt. We had to fence that area off for 90 days so we didn't disturb them. They hatched on their own and were on their way. We got to see and hold a few of them. They were so cute."

Sadly, the odds are not good: due to predation, a female can be expected to raise only *one* successful clutch every *ten* years. Still, the gopher tortoise gives so much back: over **350** other species thrive in the burrows the tortoises leave behind.

"Our cat Ferry liked to stare over a smaller tortoise's den and tap its shell with her paw as if to say, 'can you come out and play?'"

At the corner of Medinah Lane and Maidstone Court is a settlement unique within Magnolia Point, a refuge created, nurtured and protected by the West family. And the State of Florida: a thriving community of 6, sometimes 8 Gopher turtles at any given time.

"We've had the tortoises in our yard for almost 20 years," Shelli West says, who lives with her husband Jon and two sons at 3610 Maidstone. "They moved in right after we had our front yard landscaped with Fakahatchee ('Fountain') grass in our front yard. They like the sandy soil in this part of the neighborhood." The Gopher tortoise burrow is from 6 to 8 feet deep.

The tortoises are self-sufficient: "They eat the grasses around their burrows, the bay berries that fall on the driveway, and the dates from our royal palms."

"We once saw a female tortoise dropping eggs in our

After so many years, the tortoises are part of the West family, and a familiar stop for folks walking by and golfers coming or going. "We get many visitors on golf carts that stop by and say, 'can we visit your turtles?' One time we saw they had left Skittles near their dens." Obviously not part of their diet.

However, like most families, there can be disagreements. "They get territorial and my husband Jon has to separate them when they fight. They ram each other, one trying to knock the other one over on its back," Shelli says.

If you're thinking you might like to host a colony, keep in mind that a permit is required to move a turtle, and this can cost from \$1,000 to \$2,000 and as high as \$6,000.

Be kind: to report a sighting, or a sick, distressed, dead or injured turtle, contact FWC:

<https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/wildlife/gopher-tortoise/>

