



Here's the Dirt

A publication of the River Valley Garden Club

Deb Rooney, President

Nancy Compton, Editor

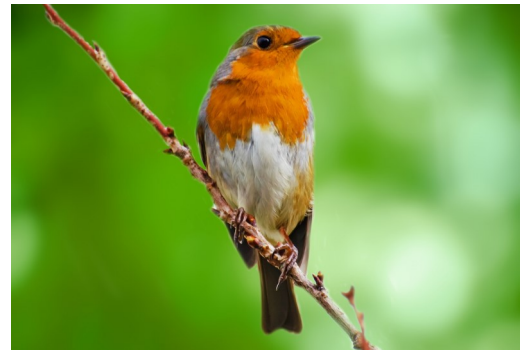
Rooting for You.....by Deb Rooney, President

“Spring has sprung, the grass has riz, I wonder where the birdies is.....”

Silly poem I've said to myself as long as I can remember.

This little ditty starts making the rounds in my head as soon as I feel spring in the air. It's funny — it only takes one sunny day and I feel like spring is on the way!

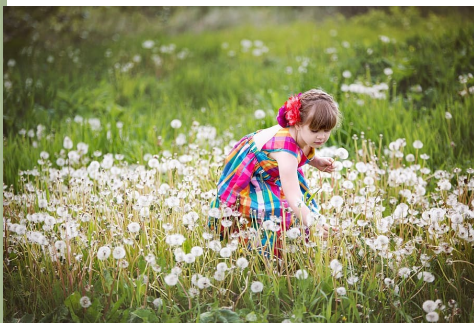
Every spring I'm so excited for all the possibilities — energy renewed, new plants, new flowers, trees budding, all those trimmed plants with new sprouts, a visit to Green Acres, and all the sights and smells and warmth of this new season.



This spring will be a busy one for the River Valley Garden Club as we continue our 20th year celebration. We're updating our website (rivervalleygardenclub.net), we're active on our Facebook page (River Valley Garden Club—Rancho Murieta), and have plenty of garden articles and notices in the River Valley Times and RM Neighbors magazine. We want to make sure you have lots of information about who we are and what we're doing.

We are busy planning the Garden Stroll, Plant Sale, and Raffle for May 13th. You'll be hearing lots about this in the coming months. Several gardens in the community will be open to stroll through and get ideas, talk to master gardeners, and enjoy a lovely day outdoors in the community.

We also have workshops planned with our first being on April 1st — Flower Arranging! There are a few spots still open, so let us know at our next meeting if you are interested.

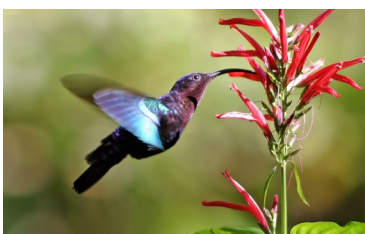


Field trips continue at the end of March with our visit to Hollandale Nursery for spring flowers — and more to come.

Come on out and join us — pick what you like to do best! And if you have ideas for us to add to our list of things to do — let us know!

See you soon — Happy Spring!

Deb



A Visit to Strutz Ranch



Chris Strutz, local rancher and RVGC member

If your question is fertilizer, then your answer is Chris Strutz. Chris knows seemingly everything there is to know about fertilizer, even things that you didn't think pertained to fertilizer. After a lengthy career in fertilizer sales, he has now settled in to his ranch, where he has an extensive orchard that includes several types of citrus, pomegranate, and jujube trees, many lively and colorful chickens, and a large variety of vegetables that includes heritage tomatoes.

In response to a question about the best fertilizer for use in our somewhat stubborn soil, Chris recommends a fertilizer that includes calcium — an element that is responsible for contributing to the building of cell walls in plants. When calcium is deficient, new tissue such as root tips, young leaves, and shoot tips often have improper cell wall formation. Calcium also activates certain enzymes necessary for vigorous growth. His go-to fertilizer is Nutri-Rich, a granular fertilizer available at Strutz Ranch — but go there soon, as supplies are limited.



Nutri-Rich fertilizer, available at Strutz Ranch

How did we learn all of this? On a sunny Monday morning in February, Chris hosted thirteen members of the River Valley Garden Club who wanted to learn more about local agriculture. Chris started from the beginning of his interest in planting things. It seems that when he was a mere lad, he decided to plant some seeds so he could watch them grow. But being both curious and impatient, he dug them up a couple of days later to see how they were doing. We can only guess how that turned out.

The jujube trees are a new addition to the orchard. This is a tropical fruit tree species that Google touts as having a potent natural therapeutic value that promotes sleep and relaxation, reduces stress and anxiety, boosts healthy digestion, and protects the heart and brain. We can all look forward to the day when the jujubes are ripe, as apparently in addition to all the benefits, the berries are quite tasty.

Chris is expanding his operations and now has one of the research greenhouses previously used by a seed company that moved elsewhere.



Karen Bengard asked a question about a bowling ball size grapefruit

Strutz Ranch is open every Thursday & Friday 12-5, and Saturday & Sunday 9-5.

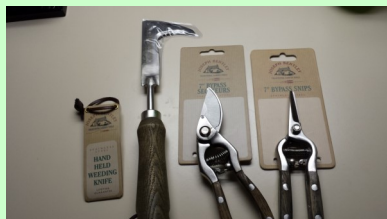


Left to right: Deb Rooney, Paula Swanson, Karen Bengard, Margaret Watson-Hopkins, Irene Slavens, Linda Beagle, Ellison Cowles, Sharon Barton, Rosann Stevenson, Cathleen Reibe, Laura McAllister. In the back: Chris Strutz standing on a tractor

Are Your Tools and Equipment Ready for Spring?



Are these your tools?



Or do yours look like this?



Okay gardeners — spring has sprung and the time for garden clean-up is upon us. That means trimming and pruning back bushes, small trees, and other plants so they can grow and thrive for another year.

But what do your tools look like? Did you put them away cleaned-up spic & span — or are they lying in a heap on the floor of your shed? Would you even admit to what they look like?

Dull, dirty or rusty hand tools that don't open and close easily can ruin your day. And your hands. Keeping your pruners dirt-free and sharp will help you cut smoothly, preventing stress on your hands while creating a clean cut that minimizes the risk of infection or disease on your plants.

Vinegar works well in cleaning up rusty tools, as the rust reacts to the vinegar which breaks it down. Soak pruners overnight and the rust will fall to the bottom of the container. After soaking, use a wire brush to clean up any residual rust — then buff the blades to a shine with fine grade steel wool.

Hand pruners are best used for cutting small stems. Bypass models are recommended, as they work like scissors to make a clean cut. Look for ergonomic models for a comfortable grip.

It is recommended that hand pruners be used on branches up to 1/2" thick. Don't take a chance on larger branches by wrestling blades through them, as you could damage the tool, the branch — or worse yet — your hand.

Springtime is typically when I discover that some of my tools are missing — likely left outside all winter and now hopelessly buried under leaves, mulch, and debris, never again to see the light of day. In the twenty-two years I've lived in Rancho Murieta, I have probably inadvertently buried 35 garden tools which may be unearthed at some point in the future when another owner decides to relandscape this yard. By then they will likely be considered antiques.

Loppers are much stronger than hand pruners, and the longer handles provide more leverage. The more leverage, the larger branch you can cut. Some loppers have ratcheting gears to assist in cutting, and this means less pressure on your hands. Loppers will cut branches from a half inch to one and a half inches thick. Loppers with telescoping handles can help grasp out-of-the-way branches that otherwise would be difficult to reach.

A **pruning saw** is a good tool for pruning larger branches. This tool cuts on the pull stroke, which allows you to use body strength. Folding pruning saws are a good option, as they don't take up a lot of storage space. Use a pruning saw on branches that are between one and ten inches in diameter.

When you can't reach branches that you want to prune, this is a good time to call a tall neighbor or contact your friendly tree service. And never, ever, stand on a ladder unless you're on the bottom two steps. Your safety is more important than a perfectly pruned tree!



Good News for Gardeners: Most Garden Problems Can be Solved with More Plants!



A recent report shown on the web site www.monarchgard.com reveals that many issues in a landscape bed can be addressed by increasing the number of plants in that bed. This is good news for plant lovers!

Often we see gardens filled with wood mulch with the plants spaced far apart. We are now told that there are many benefits of greater plant density. Here are some reasons:

1. Minimizing herbivore damage. When we use bodyguard plants (grasses, sedges, etc.) around plants, they act as a protective layer against herbivores. If it becomes too cumbersome for herbivores to munch on your plants, they will go elsewhere.
2. Increased habitat for birds, butterflies, and insects. This means shelter, food, and nesting sources for our pollinators.
3. Reduced erosion. More plants intercept more rainfall which they hold on their leaves and stems. More plants means more roots, which are also good at holding soil in place.
4. Increased soil moisture. As plants shade the soil surface they help slow evaporation. As plant roots amend soil naturally, they help the soil hold more water.
5. Dense plantings compete much better against weeds. Nature abhors a vacuum and wants to fill in the space. Would you prefer that it fill in with crabgrass, or would you rather have some pretty flowers with foliage that butterfly larvae eat? How much weeding do you really want to do?

Especially if you are planting a native garden with the purpose of attracting little pollinators and other wildlife, these critters don't want big gaps of wood mulch — they want more plants. And you want more plants! Your plant addiction wants more plants! So chose plants that self-sow, or run around a little to fill in the little gaps with more plants. The denser the better!



Springtime Calendar of Events

Date	Event Details
March 11 & 12	Spring Sale at Shepard Art & Garden Center. Over 30 clubs and vendors will be selling plants, jewelry, crafts, flowers, art, pottery, and food. 10-4 on Saturday; 10-3 on Sunday.
Sat. March 18	<p>18th Annual Gardener's Market. hosted by the Sacramento Perennial Plant Club. 9 a.m.—3 p.m. Shepard Art & Garden Center.</p> <p>Morning speakers: Jesa David: Recycling Programs for Homeowners JoEllen Arnold: Caring for Our Local Bats</p> <p>Noon Speaker: Marlene Simon, "Plant Lady" speaking on water-wise Mediterranean Gardening</p> <p>Vendors: All Things Wild, Arti.fizer Yard Art, BirdFeedersRUs, Cool Planet Revival of California, Friends of San Juan de Oriente, Geraniaceae Glen Rowley, Golden Pond Water Plants, Judy's Plate Flowers, LinWil Design, Mad Man Bamboo, Morningsun Herb Farm, Mother Natives, Pam's Porch, Sacramento Vegetable Garden Specialty, Second Chance Creations, She Sews=He Sews, Succulent Sirens, The Emerald City, The OG (cacti and succulents), Sherman's Garden. Also, food and refreshments, tool sharpening, and container drilling.</p>
April 1	Capital City African Violet Society Plant Sale & Display. Shepard Art & Garden Center. Hundreds of plants & supplies for sale. Open 10-4 or until they sell out of plants!
April 8 & 9	American Bonsai Association — 63rd Annual Spring Show. Demos at 1:30 p.m. both days. Sunday 10 a.m. workshop. Contact them at abasbonsaiclub@gmail.com to save a space in the Beginner's Workshop on Sunday, April 9th 10 a.m.
April 29	75th Annual Sacramento Rose Show — "Diamond Jubilee" 1-4:30 p.m. Shepard Art & Garden Center.



Marlene Simon—March 18



African Violets—April 1



Rose "Diamond Jubilee Show—April 29

January's Program Featured Naturalist Kristen and an Animal Ambassador named Echo from the Effie Yeaw Nature Center



Our January meeting focused on our natural environment in the Sacramento region, a cheerful naturalist from the Effie Yeaw Nature Center, and an Animal Ambassador named Echo.

The photo to the left features Naturalist Kristen Angelini with Echo, a Great Horned Owl, who was very interested in looking around the room with his giant friendly eyes.

Echo was found during the fall of 2011 in the South Lake Tahoe area making what is known as “begging calls” in the night. A volunteer rehabilitator heard the bird and called to it. Echo flew right down to the rehabilitator, and readily ate the food that was offered.



Kristen shows the huge amount of space that owl eyes take up in their skull

Unfortunately, this behavior meant that Echo was imprinted or raised by humans as a young owl, and thus did not know how to hunt for food. The Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care group contacted the Effie Yeaw Nature Center about Echo, and they were happy to take her. Echo is calm around people and has been trained for careful handling.

January's program was all about this beautiful nature center that is such a treasure to our community. As background information, Effie Yeaw was a teacher, conservationist, and environmental educator who began leading natural and cultural history walks in an area located along the American River Parkway.

The Nature Center is currently operated by the American River Natural History Association, and is part of a 100-acre preserve along the river that includes riparian oak woodlands, shrub lands, meadows, and aquatic habitats. It is also home to nearly 30 non-releasable animals native to the area. These animals cannot be returned to their native habitat, as they have been injured, orphaned, or become too accustomed to people.



A scene along the American River

In addition to Echo, attendees were fortunate to meet other Animal Ambassadors including a very chubby toad who spent most of the time trying to climb out of his plastic cage, and a much calmer pond turtle name Clem who came to the Nature Center as an egg and was content to sit there doing nothing at all except looking at us.

A field trip to the center may be scheduled for warmer weather in the spring.



Gardens Gone Native Tour.....

The Sacramento Valley Chapter of the California Native Plant Society is once again sponsoring a free, in-person self-guided native garden tour on **Saturday, April 29** from 9:30 a.m.—4 p.m.

This 10th annual plant tour will feature 25 California gardens in the Sacramento and Yolo county area. Gardens will be focused on California native plants, and will feature professionally landscaped, as well as homeowner garden designs.

Even a school demonstration garden will be featured on this tour.

Attendees can speak with garden hosts about their landscape design choices and challenges.

FREE registration is available through Eventbrite. Once registered, a map and brochure with garden descriptions will be emailed to all registrants.

For further information and registration via Eventbrite, please visit the California Native Plant Society website at www.cnsp.org.



MY WIFE the GARDENER

*She dug the plot on Monday; the soil was rich and fine.
She forgot to thaw out dinner, so out we went to dine.
She planted roses Tuesday—she said they are a must
They really were quite lovely, but she forgot to dust.
On Wednesday it was daisies...they opened with the sun.
All white and pink and yellow...but laundry wasn't done.
The poppies came on Thursday...a bright and cheery red.
But she was so engrossed that she never made the bed.
On Friday it was dahlias in colors she adores
It never bothered her at all the crumbs upon the floors.
I hired a maid on Saturday, my week is now complete.
My wife can garden all she wants...
The house will still be neat.
It's nearly lunch time Sunday, and I can't find the maid
Oh, no!! I can't believe it!! She's outside with a spade!*

