



Here's the Dirt

A publication of the River Valley Garden Club

Jayne La Grande, President

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Rooting for You.....by Jayne La Grande, President

Dear Members:

I've recently returned from a 17-day tour of France. The trip started in the northwest corner of the country in Angers in the Loire Valley, with stops in Sarlat, Albi, Carcassonne, Lyon, and Paris. Here are a few of the highlights.

I toured the elaborate Renaissance era gardens of Chateau de Villandry. They are an example of formal French gardening, symmetrically laid out with knot gardens, square gardens filled with vegetables and bordered by box hedges, and a water garden with ponds and fountains. After the tour we enjoyed lunch at their restaurant with food sourced from their gardens. The photo captures a look at their beautifully designed garden plots.

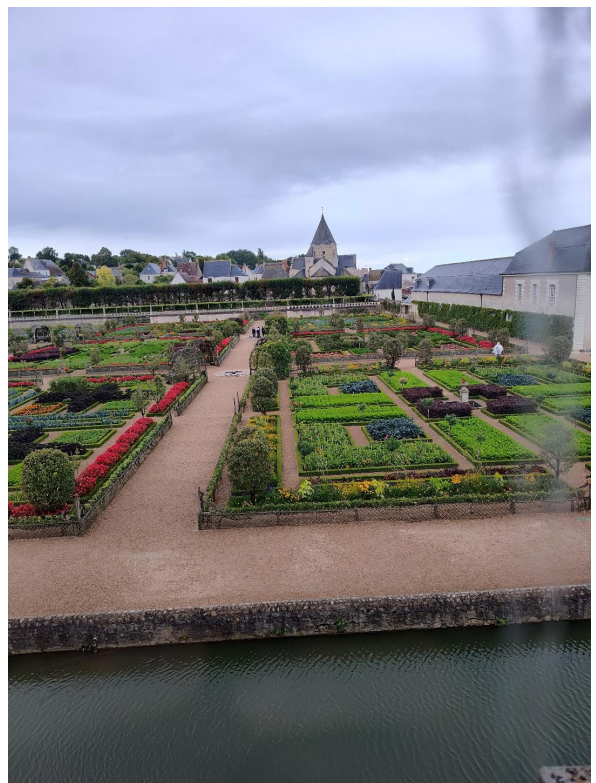
The next garden tour was in Albi, a small town stretching along the Tarn River in Southern France. The photos show the plantings bordering the stairway between the Saint-Salvi Collegiate Church and the Toulouse Lautrec Museum and the church's formal gardens overlooking the river.

In addition to these beautiful gardens and landscapes, the other highlight of the tour was food. In the French culture, restaurants source their ingredients locally and the daily menu is based of ingredients available regionally in the marketplace. Dinner starts at 7 p.m. and lasts 2-3 hours. While much longer than U.S. standards, this allows diners to enjoy conversation, savor flavorful food and wine offerings.

Another highlight of the trip was a visit to Les Halls de Lyon Paul Bocuse. It was a gastronomic theatre of meats, seafood, cheeses, wine, fruits, vegetables, chocolate, prepared food, and desserts offered by 55 merchants emblematic of French excellence in food.

Refocusing on the present, our last member meeting featured Lorina's Edible Garden, a program in which she shared information about herbs, vegetables, spices, and flowers. It was a great turnout, and many of you brought friends. Thank you for doing this, as it provides an opportunity to spread gardening knowledge throughout the community.

Jayne LaGrande



Chateau de Villandry

RIVER VALLEY GARDEN CLUB

Please join us for the
**Holiday of Lights
Party**

Sunday, December 7, 2025

3:00–6:00 p.m.

RMA Building

On the menu

The Sparkling Poinsettia cocktail, appetizers
and dessert bites

Plus

Special raffle drawing : Cookie exchange
Music and mingling

Please bring

An appetizer or dessert bites to share
Two dozen cookies for the cookie exchange (optional)
Guests are welcome!

RSVP

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Notes from the Sandhill Crane Festival.....



Lise Smith, Mary Silvis, Sharon Barton, Mariamma Hashorva, Marlene Airoso-Heier

A group of Garden Club members visited Lodi to celebrate the seasonal return of the magnificent Sandhill Cranes. There were speakers, an art show, and lovely exhibits, and then we boarded a bus to Staten Island, which is a 9,200 acre island in the Delta and a wintering destination for Sandhill Cranes and other migratory waterfowl.

Greater and Lesser Cranes fly in from as far north as Alaska. It's a beautiful sight to see hundreds of these beautiful birds land gracefully in the wetlands at dusk to be safe overnight. Our tour guide explained that the island is self sustaining with many crops, primarily corn and rice. — Sharon Barton



What Can We learn from Sandhill Cranes?

(from registration information for the Sandhill Crane Festival)...

1. Sandhill Cranes Show Grit.

Sandhill Cranes are long distance migrators and can fly for thousands of miles each year coming back to the same area year after year. The birds choose Delta areas near Lodi to forage from fall to spring, after which they fly north to their spring and summer homes to nest and raise their young.

2. Sandhill Cranes value family and belonging.

Sandhill Cranes migrate in large groups and may congregate in groups of thousands. They are very graceful dancers, very gregarious, and teach their young to survive and thrive as a community.

3. They weave our cultures across time.

Earliest fossils are more than 2.5 million years old. Cranes have inspired songs, poems, and science throughout history, as evidenced in cave drawings, modern art, dance, and story-telling.



Sandhill Cranes in flight



A large Sandhill Crane flirting with Marianna Hashorva

Brighten Y our Home With Christmas Cactus



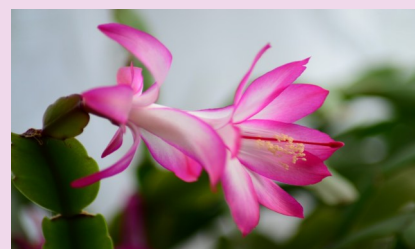
As the days become shorter and we're spending more time indoors, a bright pop of color in our homes can be a mood-lifter, and a dazzling Christmas Cactus may just brighten the spirits.

The name of this lovely and interesting plant would lead one to believe its native habitat might be a desert. This is not the case. The Christmas Cactus is actually an epiphyte, which doesn't grow naturally in soil, but rather in shallow organic debris found on rocks or in crevices of tree trunks in the rain

forests and coastal mountains of Brazil where they are pollinated by hummingbirds.

Apparently they have adapted very well in Europe and the U.S. where some plants have been known to live 50, 60, 70 years, and have been passed down from generation to generation. In fact, it has been reported that a spectacular specimen in North Dakota has already lived 111 years and shows no sign of slowing down.

All of this is surprising, as research into the Christmas Cactus reveals a litany of instructions as to the best way to raise a happy, thriving specimen. The first of these growing instructions relates to light and temperature. The Christmas Cactus needs indirect light, as direct light will cause it to burn. It prefers a temperature of 70 degrees during the day, and 60 degrees at night, which begs the question as to just where to put the cactus.



I will share with you an experiment that I conducted using two Christmas Cactuses (*which is just an acceptable plural as cacti*) that were propagated from the same mother plant. One was placed outside on my patio which has no direct sun, but other than that has survived 90+ degree weather during the day, and 40 degrees at night. The other was placed on an indoor windowsill, again receiving indirect light, but much more cozy temperatures (72-80 during the summer). Would you like to guess which specimen is thriving?



The winner is — the outside Christmas cactus, which is now showing off its gorgeous deep pink flowers on nearly every arm. The indoor cactus is also gorgeous, but nary a flower. This coming year I plan to switch the specimens to see if the indoor/outdoor placement is the only determining factor that caused one to flower and the other to be barren of flowers.



Christmas cactuses are readily available this time of year at area nurseries, garden centers, and even grocery stores. Do yourself a favor and pick one up (or two or three) and enjoy the stunning colors in your home this holiday season.