



Here's the Dirt

A publication of the River Valley Garden Club

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After living in Rancho Murieta for over 30 years, I believe Spring is the best season of the year in the River Valley. Gardens are adorned with so many intoxicating colors.

Just take a walk down any street in your community and you will be amazed at the vibrancy of the red ruffle azaleas, along with their cousins, the pink variegated and white flowering beauties. They are harmoniously joined by California native orange poppies, masses of purple, lavender and white osteospermums (aka African daisies), creeping pink phlox, and rabbits ear lavender.



Glorious Local Azaleas



California poppies

As the oak trees leaf out their canopies, their understory inhabitants, the red buds and dogwoods, join the spring symphony.

Unfortunately, the season is fleeting as the temperatures increase. So take the time to wander about and appreciate this incredible season before it passes.



Lavendar phlox

On a side note, from my "growing from seed" journey that started in February, my seeds from the planting workshop are germinated and displaying their second set of leaves, so it's time to transplant and harden off. I'm also thinking about plants to grow from stem cuttings for the annual plant sale on the Saturday of the Mothers Day weekend. The Master Gardeners of El Dorado County will be having their first plant sale of vegetables and fruits on Saturday, April 11, at the Sherwood Demonstration garden in Placerville. It starts at 8 a.m.



Osteospermum (African Daisies)



Light pink dogwood tree



Camellias — Sacramento's signature flower

In Love With Worms



Susan Muckey with worm bins

If you missed our February meeting, then you missed the only opportunity you may ever have to hear someone say, with enthusiasm, “I love worms!”

Sacramento County Master Gardener Susan Muckey has become a worm champion, and she encourages others to join in this effort.

Originally from Nutley, New Jersey, Susan and her husband moved 3,000 miles west and purchased five acres in South Sacramento that originally had been an olive grove.

After thirty years of teaching piano, Susan pursued her dream of becoming a Master Gardener. When she achieved that goal successfully, she joined the compost team and immediately became Team Leader. Following her lighthearted, cheerful talk, Susan held a raffle, the prize of which was a worm bin won by Lenore Taylor. In addition to speaking on the topics of worms, Susan teaches how to paint mandalas on rocks and pots at the Secret Garden in Elk Grove. This might be a fun workshop!

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New Research on Bees.....

Because bees are one of our most crucial pollinators, bee research is happening all over the country. Bees pollinate about one third of the food we eat, and thus, their survival is critical to our food supply and for our general health.

Three main problems for bees are parasites, pesticides, and poor nutrition. Bee keepers can fight the parasites, but back yard gardeners can take on helpful roles as well. Scientists encourage people to avoid using chemical pesticides on their lawns and gardens. Experts advise planting flowers, especially native species, to create pollinator gardens.

Bees are actually amazing creatures. In fact, a new documentary called, “Secret of the Bees” captures never-before seen footage of how bees move, work, and communicate. Incredibly, by enlarging their film, it allows viewers to observe movements that are usually too fast for the human eye. The most amazing discovery was that bees are quite social — they play with balls and solve puzzles! See this documentary on Disney or HULU. One of the most memorable scenes shows bees dealing with a hornet invading their hive. After swarming the hornet, the bees vibrate to generate heat, killing the intruder. Now that’s a miracle!



Bees gathering pollen from a flower



More bees landing on yarrow



Bees busily working in their hive

Garden Club Updates

Plant Sale Extravaganza: –

- ◆ **Saturday, May 9** – (The day after Mothers Day) – 9 a.m.–2 p.m. R.M. Parking Lot
- ◆ **New this year:**
 - ◆ Floral design demonstrations – 9:30, 10:30, and 11:30 a.m.
 - ◆ Large, professionally created bows to include in items intended as gifts
 - ◆ Small cards for shoppers to use to write, “Happy Birthday,” or “Get Well,” etc.
 - ◆ Lots and lots and LOTS of garden art and patio embellishments



How you can help....

- ◆ **Donate** flowers, herbs, vegetable starts, house plants, garden art...anything connected with gardening
- ◆ **Bring** an item or items to help fill the garden cart which will be a raffle prize – the cart will be at next meeting on April 28



Fun Stuff – and dates.....

- ◆ **April 13: Pot Idea Day** – we plan to decorate flower pots – so bring your decorative items—supplies, etc. and let’s get decorating! Or just bring your ideas – 9 a.m. – and stay awhile...Nancy’s garage
- ◆ **April 28—Member meeting day** – bring your donations to fill the garden cart!
- ◆ **May 6– Planting day** – Nancy’s garage & potting table – help fill our beautiful pots with healthy, gorgeous plants, many being donated by our generous community, our sponsors, and our amazing members!



If you signed up on the clip board that was circulated at the last meeting, we have your name, and you will be contacted soon.

Who to contact with questions: **Deb Rooney**

(debjrooney0120@yahoo.com, Nancy Compton at ncompton43@att.net or Margaret Watson–Hopkins at m.watson911@gmail.com



This is not your grandmother’s plant sale (mine either). As always, this will be a spectacular community event! The children’s table will return – a unique feature that we have not seen anywhere else.

A Master Gardener will stay all day to answer your gardening questions. Friendly, helpful garden club members will assist shoppers, and there will be a will-call area for those who want to continue shopping or need to leave and return – what a day it will be!

*Mo Young and Jan
Mathews staffing
the children’s table*

Sowing Seeds...

Timely Tips from Green Acres

Spring is the time of reawakening...for the birds, for our spirits., and certainly for our gardens. It's also the time of year when we head to our favorite garden center to see what's blooming, to check out the latest garden implements, and maybe even to peruse the seed selection. That's what I did the last time I was at Green Acres. Not only did I find some wonderful seed packets, but I pulled one of their informational flyers from the rack and found detailed info on what to do when growing veggies and flowers from seed. The following is from this flyer:

- ◆ Annual and perennial flowers and vegetables should be sown indoors four to eight weeks before transplanting outdoors.
- ◆ Use a seed starting mix or peat plug.
- ◆ Spread seeds thinly over the surface of the seed starting mix using three to five seeds per cell/pot. Cover seeds with the mix at the depth recommended on the seed package. Keep in mind that too much seed starting mix can prevent seeds from germinating.
- ◆ Moisten the mix and cover with a seed dome to prevent seeds from drying out. Move newly planted seeds to a warm area or heating mat for faster germination.
- ◆ Monitor regularly, ensuring that seed starter mix is kept moist.
- ◆ Once seeds germinate, showing their first pair of leaves, move to a sunny window or under fluorescent lights. Young plants need 12-14 hours of light per day (sunlight and/or fluorescent light). Rotate every couple of days to prevent seedlings from bending to reach the light.
- ◆ Snip off the weaker of the seedlings with scissors. Eventually you will have one strong plant per pot.
- ◆ When the roots grow through the bottom of the pot, it's time to transplant. Consult your seed package for further instructions specific to your seed.



Vernal Pool Expert provided our March program

Dr. Jamie Kneitel, an expert on vernal pools, has studied vernal pools at several locations throughout the world.

As chair of the Environmental Studies department, at CSUS, he shares his knowledge and love of these fleeting bodies of water, most of which are disappearing rapidly as urbanization continues to crawl over so many of nature's gifts.

These seasonal pools of water provide habitat for specific plants and tiny animals. Despite being dry for much of the year, vernal pools serve as critical breeding grounds for frogs, toads, and salamanders.

Vernal pools harbor distinct colonies of flora and fauna that aren't found any other place on the planet. Despite this fact, about 90% of vernal pool ecosystems in California have been destroyed, mainly due to urbanization, habitat loss, and fertilization.

Locally, many of our vernal pools are located on or near the Mather field property — many just off the Jackson Highway that we drive by nearly every day. These pools are spectacular in the early spring when the area is populated with native flowers that include white-topped clover, frying pan poppies, vernal pool monkey flower, scarlet pimpernel, buttercups, and yellow star thistle.

Visiting vernal pools helps us to further understand this important piece of nature's puzzles.

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An Invitation to Visit Irene's Farm & Ranch

Irene Slavens has issued an invitation to visit her little bit of heaven in Wilton.....

“Welcome to the Farm & Ranch! Join your garden friends on **Saturday, May 30 at 10:30 a.m.** for a tour of the ranch. We will visit my beautiful rose garden, peruse the raised-bed vegetables, meet the chickens, and see the horses — and with a little luck, we may even be introduced to a brand new foal!

Following the tour, bring your lunch bag and relax on the front porch while enjoying mimosas and good company.”

Editor's note: The last time we visited Irene's little slice of heaven, more members attended than any other field trip ever! This is not to be missed. Address: 12841 Leo Lane, Wilton.

