



Here's the Dirt

A publication of the River Valley Garden Club

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Rooting for You.....by Pam McCabe, President

With my larger Rancho Murieta property, I had the luxury of planting five or six tomato varieties. This year in my condo, I will need to settle for one tomato in a container. So that one tomato has to be a winner! I consulted my garden journal where I have kept track of tomatoes I planted each year with comments about how well they produced, and their flavor.

An example is Cherokee Purple, which I planted in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2019. When I first started planting it, I found that it was my best performer and I really liked the flavor. In 2017, my journal comment about the Cherokee Purple was simply, "sad," so I did not plant it in 2018. Remembering how good it was, I decided to give it another try in 2019, and my comment for that year was, "low production." So Cherokee Purple was not planted in 2020.

Cherry tomatoes have been consistently good performers. Last year I planted a cherry tomato called Bumblebee. The seed packet included three colors — yellow, red, and purple, each with green stripes. I didn't notice until after I planted them that they were color-coded. I gave away all but one of the tomato plants. Mine ended up being purple with green stripes. It produced tomatoes all the way until Thanksgiving.

Recently, I participated in an Eldorado Master Gardener Zoom class, titled, "Develop a Vegetable Garden in a Small Backyard Space." If you are interested, you can find it on You Tube by typing in the title of the class. The presenter, Mike Pavlick, recommended a determinate tomato for containers, since they grow much shorter. Tomatoes are either determinate (grow to a fixed mature size and the fruit ripens in a short period) or indeterminate (a vining plant that continues to set and ripen fruit throughout the growing season until frost kills the plant).

Cherry tomatoes can be kept shorter as well. Mike recommended a 24" diameter container for growing tomatoes. He mentioned that Burpee sold a "two in one" tomato combo for container growing that included both a cherry tomato and determinate tomato. After class, I looked on the Burpee website to see if I could find the two in one, but it wasn't currently available, but I did find a blog post on their site that discussed growing tomatoes in containers. The author recommended planting marigolds and basil around the tomato, and nasturtium seeds around the edge of the pot to spill over the side. Since I don't care for orange in my garden, I went looking for other colors of marigolds and nasturtiums, and happened upon the Baker's Creek Rareseed website. I ordered seeds for Purple Bumblebee tomatoes, white marigolds, and purple nasturtiums. Mike also described a way of starting plants from seeds that I tried this year. The seeds are kept indoors at night, and put out in the sun during the day. Before the seeds sprouted, I kept them on a heat mat while indoors until they sprouted, then I put a grow light on them at night.

I'm gratified to find that I can still enjoy gardening, even with a very limited space. My tomato container with its companion plants is a fun experiment. If it turns out nice, I'll share photos with you. If it doesn't turn out so nice, oh well, I still had fun gardening.



Sprouting Young Minds.....

A recent article in the April 2021 issue of *Eating Well* magazine highlighted a story of a longtime science teacher who was assigned to a sparsely-equipped classroom in the Bronx. Giving up on his efforts to obtain adequate supplies through traditional channels, he created an online appeal, after which he received what he thought was a box of onions. The box was stashed near a radiator, then promptly forgotten.



Several months later, the teacher, Stephen Ritz, known by his students as The Big Cheese, intervened in a student fight during which the box fell over, and out came a lovely blooming bunch of daffodils. Reportedly, everyone laughed, the fight dissolved, and Mr. Ritz decided he would turn this into a teachable moment.

Labeling this event the “Miracle of Daffodils,” he created an opportunity for both students and teacher to think more broadly of how things grow. This led to an after-school program called the **Green Bronx Machine**, which has evolved into a K-12 educational model that’s being used in 500 schools across 20 states and five nations.

According to Ritz, “The curriculum wraps the entire school around the garden. Schools can implement the program throughout the day in a variety of ways, depending upon the specific class or topic. For example, while learning about food production and health, students can explore subjects like science, math, language arts, and history. Each day they might conduct experiments on how light and soil quality affect their plants, work together on group projects to plan springtime plots, or prepare meals with visiting chefs.”

Ritz’s students in the South Bronx grow more than 5,000 pounds of produce every year in their own community garden, most of which is donated to local soup kitchens and food-insecure seniors. Three of his classes even traveled to Washington, D.C. to hear Michelle Obama talk about food and health.

Teacher Ritz hopes he is having an impact in the creation of a healthier, and thus a more equitable and resilient community in one of the country’s most desperately poor neighborhoods. “We grow vegetables,” he said. “Our vegetables grow students, schools, communities, and opportunities.”

Story from “Eating Well” magazine, April 2021



Recycle Toilet Paper Rolls — Make Bird Feeders!

Here’s a crafty suggestion: rather than tossing your toilet paper rolls — turn them into clever bird feeders! Just take the toilet paper roll, spread peanut butter around it (creamy or chunky—it doesn’t matter), then roll it in your bird seed and hang it from a tree branch. Don’t forget to hang it near a branch or fence board for the little birds to stand on.

This looked like fun, so I made one, hung it just outside my kitchen window, then came inside and by the time I got to my kitchen window, the birds were all over it. They eat one now every day, including every drop of peanut butter. Try it with the grandkids!



Plant of the Month: Daffodils



Almost nothing says “spring” as surely as the lovely daffodil — one of the most cheerful harbingers of longer days, warmer weather, and extended sunshine.

Native to Europe and North Africa, they have adapted quickly to new and diverse areas, and grow in most regions of North America, except the hottest, wettest areas, such as South Florida. Not only are daffodils beautiful, they thrive with little care, are not fussy about summer watering, need only infrequent division, and are totally unappetizing to gophers and deer.

Daffodils are lovely in the garden, in woodland settings, near water, in rock gardens, or in borders. They naturalize in sweeping drifts where space is available, and look stunning in containers. They also make gorgeous cut flowers to brighten any home. However, as a recent speaker at the “Workshop Wednesday” series, sponsored by the Pacific Region Garden Clubs, Inc., shared, daffodils contain a toxin that drips out of the cut stem. If you plan to combine daffodils with other cut flowers, you will need to drain out the daffodil toxin, or it will damage the other flowers, causing early wilting, or even death (to the other flowers — not the gardener).

Ridding the daffodils of the toxins is easily accomplished by putting the cut daffodils in a vase of water by themselves for several hours, then dumping out the water and rinsing the vase before add-



ing the daffodils and companion flowers to complete the bouquet.

When buying bulbs, look for those that are solid and heavy. In our growing zone, the recommendation for when to plant bulbs is after the soil has cooled in mid-autumn. I usually plant bulbs in November, but have planted both earlier and later for reasons I cannot recall, and the following spring's bloom has always been beautiful.

The ***Old Farmers Almanac*** recommends that the flowers may be dead-headed as they fade, but be sure to leave the strap-like leaves remaining for at least six weeks, as they contain the nutrients for next year's flowers. The Almanac also recommends adding bone meal to the soil once the daffodils have gone by, as this will enhance next year's blooms.

Because they appear so early in the spring, daffodils symbolize rebirth and renewal, but they also symbolize inspiration, creativity, and forgiveness. Here is a short poem from the 1991 issue of the *Old Farmers Almanac* which was, no doubt, written during a cold spring:

***Chillier...
But daffodillier.***





Want Better Tomatoes? Try Companion Planting.....

It seems that when backyard gardeners — even container gardeners — are asked what vegetables they grow, the first word out of their mouths is “tomatoes.”

This is, no doubt, because home-grown tomatoes are always far more tasty than supermarket tomatoes, they are easy to grow, and they love Sacramento’s hot summer days.

There is no end to what we can learn about growing tomatoes. Every expert has suggestions, and every web site that focuses on gardening includes a landmine of information on bigger and better ways to grow tomatoes. The very helpful and up-to-date web site [the spruce.com](http://the-spruce.com) recently ran an interesting article on companion planting, highlighting the planting of vegetables that play well in the same sandbox, so to speak.

The piece is entitled, “Best and Worst Companion Plants for Tomatoes,” and refers to the practice of growing crops in close proximity to each other to enhance nutrient uptake, provide pest control, encourage pollination, and increase crop production. Although the practice has not been scientifically validated, many experienced gardeners vouch for their carefully compiled list of companions.

Fortunately, tomatoes make good companions to many popular garden veggies. Some companion plants reportedly help boost the health and vigor of the tomato plants, some are known to improve flavor, and others allegedly repel insect pests and diseases. Here are some examples:

Basil: This companion repels insects, improves growth, and enhances flavor. And since many culinary dishes use both tomatoes and basil, growing them together ensures a healthy, ample supply of both.

Carrots: When planted with tomatoes, carrots help loosen the soil, although if planted too closely, the carrots may not become as large as they would otherwise. But they will still be quite tasty.

Garlic: Well, of course we need to plant lots and lots of garlic, as they are tomato and basil companions in the kitchen and in many of the Italian pasta dishes and salads that we love. They also reduce red spider mites.

Marigolds: These brightly colored flowers repel pests who probably don’t like their odor. They also reduce nematodes in the soil, as they probably don’t like their odor either.

Nasturtiums: These not only look lovely, but serve as a trap for aphids, which means we should probably plant this colorful posey absolutely everywhere.

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Want Better Tomatoes? (continued from previous page)



And then there are those plants that are bad companions for tomatoes, and these include:

Cabbage:and all of its shirt-tail relatives, to include Brussels sprouts, collards, cauliflower, kale, kohlrabi, rutabaga, parsnips, and turnips. All of these veggies, when grown in tandem with tomatoes, will stunt its growth, and a couple on this list just take up room in the garden but don't pass the taste test in the kitchen.

Let's briefly focus here on parsnips. I have vivid memories of my grandmother's Victory Garden that included a set of child-size garden tools for me to use when helping tend the vegetables. I was also provided with a small patch of land which I used to grow tomatoes and green beans. Adjacent to my little mini-garden was a row of parsnips, an odd carrot-like vegetable with a strange taste. Whenever parsnips were on the family menu, I became quite skilled at surreptitiously squirreling them into my napkin, and then making sure the napkin ended up directly into the garbage before anyone was the wiser. Okay —moving right along.....

Corn: The corn earworm is the same as the tomato fruit worm (*Helicoverpa zea*). Growing plants in proximity that are susceptible to the same pests can invite disaster and a decimated garden, and no one needs that.

Eggplants, peppers, and potatoes: All of these are in the nightshade family, just like tomatoes, and all are susceptible to blight, which can build up in the soil and become worse every year.

Three Sister Planting: Almost any article on companion planting references the native American tradition of grouping corn, beans, and squash (often pumpkin) in the same area. As the corn stalks grow, beans naturally find support by climbing up the stalk. Beans, as all legumes, add nitrogen in the soil, which supports the large nutritional needs of corn. Squash grows rapidly and the large squash leaves shade out weeds (well, presumably), and serve as a natural weed block.

A good resource on Companion Planting is a book called, "Great Garden Companions," written by Sally Jean Cunningham. This book is written casually and thus is easy to read, and is jam-packed with good information.

May all your tomatoes be large, juicy, and tasty!

HAPPINESS IS



...a large, ripe
tomato.

for more visit www.funhappyquotes.com

Knowledge is knowing that a
tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is
knowing not to put it in a fruit
salad.

Brian O'Driscoll

BrainyQuote

RVC 2nd Annual Plant/Gardening Sale at the Farmers Market

by Debbie Kolmodin, Community Outreach Chair



Spring has arrived, and that's the sign that our 2nd Annual Plant/Gardening Sale is almost here! All the volunteers are in place, and I am very thankful for the help! It takes a village for sure! Co-Chair Nancy Compton has gone above and beyond with gathering plants and yard art so we have a lively selection of plant and garden art material.

Saturday, May 8th will be our first sale. We are looking for donations of seasonal plants. Maybe you're growing some now, and by the time this date rolls around you will have many plants for our sale. If you

would like to donate plants, **please bring them to the sale on the morning of May 8 between 7:15 and 8:00 a.m.** We ask that you make sure the plants are weed-free, planted in good soil, and watered — in other words — ready to sell. If you wish, you can pre-price them too, but this is not necessary, as we will gladly do that for you.

If you are creative and want to plant a painted or decorative pot/container, these are always big sellers. People are always shopping for gift items, and this is the day before Mothers Day. Our plants make wonderful gifts! Right now, those of us who have been storing donations have full garages and backyards, so we cannot take any more into our yards at this time, but we will have room at the sale.



We really appreciate our members who make this event possible by generously donating every month. You, as a member, help make this event successful with your donations. We have had some Rancho Murieta residents who are not club members step up and offer great donations as well — pots, plants, and lots of yard art items.

Many thanks to Gail Bullen of the River Valley Times for running our announcement weekly under "Community Briefs." This got the word out and residents have stepped up. When I mentioned that the items I was purchasing were for our club's event, quite a few just gave them to me, and several contacted me again to tell me they had more items

to donate. Moving sales with "free items" were very helpful, too. I watched the RM Facebook Groups for these postings, and have procured some very nice garden décor items, as well as plants. Our president, Pam McCabe, was generous in donating some great yard décor items before she moved.

I'm very excited for us to kick off our first sale with some great plants and gardening items! I'm hoping we get a good turnout that day, as it is the day before Mother's Day. What a perfect place to shop for Mom! We will have fresh floral arrangements created by our very own Rosann Stevenson with flowers provided by Berniece Jones from her lovely garden. These were a huge hit last year.

If you have any questions about donation of plants or garden items, please contact me, Debbie Kolmodin, either via email at cagodmother60@gmail.com or text me at 916-458-2129. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have. Looking forward to seeing you all — so mark your calendars and be sure to come out early for the best selection!



Miridae Mobile Plant Nursery to be Featured at April 27 meeting



Our **April 27 meeting** will be a bit different from our regular format, as it will feature the Miridae Mobile Plant Nursery — the ice cream truck of nurseries.

This novel approach to help connect people and plants is a greenhouse on wheels, featuring an assortment of native plants and veggie starts, as well as garden tools and hand-crafted pottery.

Rancho Murieta Ace Hardware has agreed to co-sponsor this event, which will be held at the Rancho Murieta plaza. The mobile plant truck will be set up from **10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and the**

first hour, from 10-11 a.m., will be exclusively available to our club members. Community members may shop from 11—1 p.m., and our members may wish to linger and continue shopping after our **business meeting, which will start at 11 a.m.**

Miridae is an ecology-based landscape design company specializing in the beauty and functionality of native plants. Miridae combines ecology with design to create native landscapes that bring nature home. Beyond the mobile plant nursery, Dr. Billy Krimmel, the company's founder, has a Ph.D. in Ecology from U.C. Davis, and serves on the Board of Directors of the California Native Grasslands Association. In 2020, Miridae earned the Award of Excellence from the American Society of Landscape Architects for its Living Seed Bank — a new approach to a living wall.

Vivian Baier, our Raffle Chair, has promised an absolutely fabulous raffle — including a special guest! So stop by and say “hello” to him, and you may even want to have your camera ready. Rosann Stevenson will be handling the raffle duties this time so be sure to stop by our raffle table and be a winner!

Our actual meeting will be located somewhere on the grassy area (we will scope out an area that is shady and comfortable). Please bring your own chair and something to drink. After the meeting/event, you may wish to linger and have lunch at the plaza at the Local Bean, the Back Yard, or the pizza place.



Husband to Wife: Last night you cooked my favorite meal, and today you washed my car.

Wife: Because I love you.

Husband: Okay, how many plants did you buy?



Coming Attractions.....



Between now and the end of the garden club year there are many events, activities, tours, and zoom programs to ensure the continuation of our zest for gardening, for vegetables, flowers, landscaping, nature....all of the things that keep us sane and happy.

Here are a few you won't want to miss.....

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| * Wednesday, April 21 (time TBD) | Trip to the Worm Whisperer — Elk Grove |
| * Tuesday, April 27 — 10 a.m. | April Club Meeting at Rancho Murieta Plaza
Miridae Mobile Plant Truck |
| * Monday, May 3 — (Time TBD) | Trip to Horton Iris Gardens in Loomis |
| * Tuesday, May 18—(Time TBD) | Sacramento River Valley District
Meeting at Herringer Winery in Clarksburg
Presentation on winemaking
Registration: \$4 / Box lunch: \$6
Wine Tasting: \$10 |
| * Tuesday, May 25 — Time: 10 a.m. | Growing Vegetables with Irene
Meeting will be at Irene Slavens' home and gardens
Address and directions to follow |
| * May 30—June 4 | California Garden Clubs, Inc. Annual
Convention —(via Zoom) |
| * Tuesday, June 22 — 10 a.m.
Stonehouse Park | Club meeting and end-of-year party
Kokodama demonstration by Deb Rooney
Installation of Officers |



Out & About in the River Valley.....

