



# Here's the Dirt

A publication of the River Valley Garden Club

Deb Rooney, President

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

I have a confession to make — I cannot grow vegetables.

I know it's that time of year. I see the beautiful beginnings of tomatoes and peppers and corn at the nurseries, and I start to look and dream, but sadly, this year I'm facing my reality and not even trying.

What is it about tomatoes and peppers that flummoxes me? I'm a smart person, I have beautiful roses, lavender, and my backyard is an oasis. But vegetables elude me.

I know I'm not alone. My husband, Pat, and I share this love-hate relationship with growing tomatoes. For so many years, in so many different ways, we've tried. I think out of the last ten years, we've had one good year of tomatoes. Every year I amend the soil, plant, feed, water, and wait diligently...but...nothin'.



*These are not from Deb's garden*

And every year I share my frustration with my fellow gardeners. And every year, I so appreciate all the encouragement (and guidance) we receive from friends and family — I really do. But truthfully, it's all so confusing. And honestly, we've tried it all.

- \* It's all about the dirt...chicken manure, compost, aerate...Nope.
- \* Oh, wait. It's all about the container...in the ground, in a raised bed, in a container, hanging up side down?? Ah, nope.
- \* But really, it's about the type...Better Boys, Big Boys, Beefsteak, Grape, Roma, Ace, Early Girl...Nope.
- \* It's really about the timing — seeds in the house, early March, late April...Nope, nope, and nope.



*Deb's tomato plant perhaps?*



*Is this Deb's tomato plant?*

So after much research and thoughtful consideration, we've decided that Davis Ranch, Strutz Farms, and all of our surrounding farmers' markets are the best way for us to go. We're so lucky to be surrounded by so many wonderful options. I'm very grateful.

So for all of you vegetable growers, enjoy the fruit of your labors and the bounty of your gardens.

We'll be thinking of you and think of us, if you have any extras!



*Nope...probably not Deb's tomatoes*

*From the Desk of Deb Rooney.....*

One of my favorite things about being active in the River Valley Garden Club is meeting new people. I'm always interested in how people ended up in Rancho Murieta and why they joined the garden club.

As a club we are growing. Some people are active on the board, some attend meetings, some attend workshops and field trips. However you enjoy the RVGC, we're always very happy to see you!

Living in a small community, we're always very likely to see someone we've met in the grocery store, the hardware store, or enjoying our beautiful outdoor space. So let me introduce you to two very lovely ladies and volunteers in our club — Donna Hansen and Debbie Kolmodin.



Donna Hansen

**Donna Hansen** and her husband Phil moved to Rancho Murieta 4 1/2 years ago from Chester in Plumas County, having previously lived in Cameron Park for 26 years. Donna was invited to join the RVGC in 2018 by Vivian Baier — thank you, Vivian! Donna enjoys gardening, especially in containers. Did you know that Donna:

- \* Is retired as a Personnel Officer for the California Office of Emergency Services?
- \* She and Phil drove to Baja religiously each year—camping, kayaking, and fishing from 1984 to 2018?
- \* Caught a 200 lb. marlin while fishing in Baja?
- \* Was a camp cook for an outfitter five weeks of the year in Colorado?

In 2021, Donna graciously volunteered to manage Penny Pines — collecting donations and working with the Forest Service to manage our donations. Donna also is part of our refreshment committee for membership meetings, attends workshops and field trips, and offers her truck to transport plants and raffle items to and from meetings and sales. We so appreciate everything she does!

**Debbie Kolmodin** and her husband Don returned to Northern California, landing in Rancho Murieta in September 2010 after living in southeastern Pennsylvania and southwestern Tennessee.



Debbie Kolmodin

In 2021, Debbie saw the Community Brief in the **River Valley Times** about a succulent wreath workshop RVGC was having. She went and liked the group, and joined the club. Her garden passion is creating container plantings and collecting yard art.

Did you know that Debbie:

- \* Is a California licensed cosmetologist and worked as a stylist in the mid '70s, but spent the majority of her working career as an Executive Assistant for major corporations in California, Pennsylvania, and Memphis, Tennessee?
- \* Met the Reverend Jesse Jackson?
- \* Has had a job and earned her own money since she was 12 and still has her original Social Security card?

**Continued on next page.....**

*From the Desk of Deb Rooney (continued from previous page.....)*



And did you know that Debbie:

- \* Has had swimming pools in three homes, but has never learned to swim??
- \* Has a guilty pleasure of watching crazy reality cable TV shows?

Debbie has held many volunteer and board positions with the club, including Greeter Chair, Refreshment Co-Chair, Discount Chair, Workshop Chair, Sunshine Chair, and is currently Community/Fundraiser/Outreach Chair. We are grateful for her volunteerism and support over the years.

So now when you see Donna and Debbie out and about – say “Hi!”



***Tickled Pink About This News!***

Last week the City of Sacramento announced that in partnership with the Sacramento Tree Foundation it was awarded \$3.2 million from Caltrans’ Clean California Local Grant Program to build on the legacy of the newly-named Robert T. Matsui Waterfront Park by breaking ground on a cherry blossom park that will bring together nature, art, and culture.

Previous phases of accessibility, landscaping, and hardscaping improvements to the existing park have greatly improved its usability. This additional funding will help transform this section of

Sacramento’s riverfront into a destination that showcases public art and celebrates the contributions that Japanese Americans have made to our region.

Throughout the world, people gather each spring to picnic on the grass or walk under blossoming cherry trees. In Japan, this tradition is called *hanami* and draws thousands of families to picnic, play, and relax in its parks.

For the stunning display of pink cherry blossoms flanking the Sacramento River, this grove will be named the Hanami Line. Overlooking the river with sweeping views of the downtown skyline, the Hanami Line at Robert T. Matsui Park will connect Old Sacramento, West Sacramento, the SMUD Museum of Science and Curiosity, and the new Railyards developments in a central location next to the bike trail.

We know that urban trees and green spaces play a prominent role in growing livable, lovable, and thriving communities. Beautification projects like the Hanami Line are crucial to our region’s sense of place and civic pride.

*Reprinted in part from <https://sactree.org/tickled-pink/>*



***Remember.....not all who wander are lost.....***

***Some are looking for plant sales!***



## De-Mystifying Fertilizer



Organic or synthetic? Fall or spring? And what are those numbers anyway? A recent article that came in an email from the **Secret Garden in Elk Grove** described the fertilizing process and made it seem less mysterious. This article is based on that email, with permission from Jennifer Kahl, owner of the Secret Garden.

So here it is spring, and gardeners everywhere are wondering about fertilizing. Which to use becomes a fully loaded question, so here is some information and you can draw your own conclusions.

Jennifer recommends organic over synthetic, because using organic fertilizers is like feeding an athlete a good diet and promoting a proper workout regimen. Synthetic fertilizers are a little like giving that same athlete steroids, which will certainly enhance performance, but is it healthy in the long run?

When a plant is pushed to grow too fast with synthetic fertilizers, you run the risk of the plant actually becoming weaker. Cell walls become thinner as they are stretched too rapidly, and the plant can become more susceptible to pests. This can then introduce a vicious cycle of applying fertilizers and pesticides, and all the while introducing chemicals into the soil which leaves it damaged and barren. Unhealthy soil gives you unhealthy plants, so you are back to fertilizing again. Organic fertilizers are not harmful to worms or beneficial fungi in the soil. By using organic materials, you are ensuring that the soil has what it needs to be healthy, and healthy soil gives you healthy plants.



Fertilizing should only occur when plants are actively growing. Fertilizing when plants are dormant can cause plant damage. In our climate, many outdoor plants actually go dormant in our summer heat. Some plants actively grow in the winter months, so fertilizing is not just a spring thing, and not all plants should be fertilized at the same time.

Okay — now about those numbers: The three numbers on the fertilizer packaging represent the NPK ratio: Nitrogen-Phosphorous-Potassium.

- ◆ Nitrogen for new growth,
- ◆ Phosphorous for root growth and
- ◆ Potassium for overall plant growth.



An easy way to remember which element helps which area of growth is “Up, Down, and All-around.” For example, Cactus Juice Fertilizer is 1-7-6 which means it focuses on root development and overall plant growth.

Dr. Earth All Purpose fertilizer is slow-release, granular fertilizer, with the numbers 4-4-4, which means it helps in all three categories.

The Sesame Street character Kermit the Frog reminds us that it's not easy being green, but with a little lesson in fertilizing, perhaps we can ensure healthy plants and healthy soil which will keep our gardens green.



## Have you “herd” about Goatscaping?



You have, no doubt, seen herds of goats munching everything in sight on your trip down the Jackson Highway or up on Highway 49 on your way to Sutter Creek.

Using goats for clearing land is the latest trend in clearing acres of brush in a relatively short time. Goatscaping is a natural and eco-friendly practice of introducing a herd of goats to achieve “goat mobbing,” which taps into the goats’ natural ability to browse and forage nearly everything in sight when allowed to roam and munch in a large group in a designated area.

Goats are famous for their voracious appetites and unique digestive systems, and often will consume noxious weeds and brush that may include poison ivy, poison oak, kudzu, sumac, raspberries, briars, and brambles.



In Lancaster, New York, a suburb of Buffalo, a small herd of Alpine goats from a company called Let’s Goat Buffalo, a local goatscaping enterprise, was called into action to clear an area of invasive Japanese knotweed along the shoreline of a lake. This effort was part of an overall plan to clean up and clear public areas of noxious plants that had infiltrated the native landscape.

For some as yet unknown reason, these cloven-footed critters prefer to nosh on weeds and thorny plants over grasses. Their prodigious appetites and complex digestive systems efficiently process their massive intake of food. And should you be wondering if they just excrete the seeds of their meals, thus replanting what they have just eaten, you will be relieved to know that seeds of invasive plants become sterilized through their digestive process, thereby neutralizing any seeds from propagation in the manure left behind, which fortunately is odorless and breaks down quickly.

Goatscaping offers many benefits. Not only is it a practical and eco-friendly method for efficient weed management, the goats can easily access neglected areas where tree stumps and other debris has been hidden from view for decades. Goats are non-stop eating machines, often climbing or stretching up to high areas that may be challenging or even prohibitive for humans or machinery.

While using goats to clear land is a practice that has been used from the dawn of agriculture, the novel use of goatscaping in urban and suburban areas is relatively new. Who knew that the latest trend in weed mitigation without the use of pesticides would be a herd of happy, hungry goats roaming and munching at will? Goats are quiet, with light and agile movements that are not damaging to the land like heavy equipment would be, and besides, they are endearing and cute — as long as they don’t escape into a prized rose bed for their dessert.

**Note:** *This article has been adapted from a story in The National Gardener, Spring 2020 edition.*

## *Where Did the Daffodil Show Go??*



On a beautiful Sunday morning, March 6, fourteen members of the River Valley Garden Club traveled the back roads of Amador and Calaveras counties, enjoying the trees just beginning to flower and the California poppies starting to bloom, to the Ironstone Vineyards in the gold-rush town of Murphys.

Ironstone is noted for the production of several leading brands of wine, including Obsession Wine and Leaping Horse Vineyards. As of 2004, Ironstone has been listed as the 17th largest winery in the United States.

But this is not why the garden club was traveling to Ironstone— no — they were there to see the Annual Daffodil Show, which included judging the hundreds of varieties of daffodils that are entered into the show each year.

We started the tour in the Heritage Museum, which is home to a 44 pound crystalline gold piece; artifacts from Gold Rush days gone by; daguerreotypes, maps, and diaries; then moved on to the gift shop which featured jewelry and magnificent gourd art pieces. By then the group was ready to observe the Daffodil Show. But where was it? We looked downstairs from the Museum where it had been held in the past. The room was empty. Perhaps it had been moved to the main building? Several inquiries later, we learned that the show was Saturday, March 5 — not Sunday March 6.



But no matter. The grounds of Ironstone Vineyards displays perhaps one of the most magnificent shows of color and variety of any location in the foothills. Wine barrels full of all types of daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, crocuses, pansies, garden art that even includes an antique truck in the entryway loaded with barrels of daffodils and a local kitty who sleeps under the truck in a peek-a-boo ray of sunshine were delightful to behold.



The tasting room was open, and an extensive art show was displayed downstairs in the Alhambra Music Room in the main building. After our fill of art and wine, several members traveled back down to the old Murphys Hotel to enjoy a tasty lunch.

One vintage item that was not on display that day will be of particular interest to Sacramento natives who remember the Alhambra Theater. The pipe organ from the Alhambra has been fully restored and in use at Ironstone during the showing of silent movies and special events and celebrations.

## ***A Passionate Plea for Water, Land, and Air Conservation***



*Member Michele Blomberg with Sean Kriletich, owner of Paloma Pollinators*

Our March 22 speaker, Sean Kriletich, is owner of Paloma Pollinators where he is a beekeeper, woodworker, and seller of natural honey. His is a fully sustainable operation located in Jackson in Amador County.

Sean became a beekeeper at the age of nine, and over the years has become increasingly dismayed over our degrading ecosystem that has killed billions of bees. He believes that the only way to help the bees is to educate humans on the importance of improving the health of the ecosystem that we inhabit. This means writing articles, presenting workshops, and promoting community awareness so that we become ardent stewards of the land.

Like many beekeepers, Sean is also a woodworker who makes houses for native pollinating insects, and also makes healthy wooden toys for children. His bees are raised free of chemicals, and thus the honey he sells is chemical-free as well.

Sean provided an impassioned plea for restoring our ecosystem, ensuring clean air and water, and refraining from using chemicals in our gardens. When asked what we, as gardeners, and we, as a club, can do to help in this effort to protect and restore our ecosystem, he encouraged us to all be responsible stewards of our own land and to share this message with others.

### **Upcoming Field trips you won't want to miss.....**



Sharon Barton, our indefatigable Tour Captain has announced a series of field trips you won't want to miss:

- (1) **Wednesday, April 20 at 1 p.m. — Bee Haven at U.C. Davis.** This will be a docent tour for \$8.00 per person. Sharon will preregister our group in early April, so please let her know if you are interested. We will have lunch at "Scrubs," the cafeteria on campus, and then tour other areas, if desired.
- (2) **Saturday, April 23 at 11 a.m. — the Folsom Garden Tour.** This is a tour of seven private gardens sponsored by the Folsom Garden Club. The cost is \$20 and tickets may be purchased in advance at Green Acres or on the day of the tour at the first garden. We usually visit 3-4 gardens and then stop for lunch. After lunch, we will visit the remaining gardens. Let Sharon know if you plan to join the group so she can make lunch reservations.
- (3) **Wednesday, May 25 at 11:30 am.** Pioneer School Garden Tour hosted by Michele Blomberg. You may sign up at our April meeting.
- (4) **Tuesday, June 14 — a bus trip to Filoli House and Gardens in Woodside.** The cost is \$75 and is being arranged by the Rancho Murieta Women's Club.

*For further information or to sign up, contact Sharon Barton at [golfbum4@sbcglobal.net](mailto:golfbum4@sbcglobal.net) — or (916) 354-0408.)*

**Coming Soon...Annual RVGC Plant/Garden Fundraiser — May 7**

**By Debbie Kolmodin, RVGC Community Outreach Project Chair**

**Mark your calendars for our upcoming May 7th Plant/Garden Fundraiser Sale Event!** You will find lots of great, unique, and one-of-a-kind items to purchase that you won't find in stores for Mother's Day gifts! Come on out and help us kick off our season of monthly sales by shopping with us!



*River Valley Times reporter Gail Bullen with Debbie Kolmodin at our Plant Sale in 2020*

**Date: Saturday, May 7**

**Time: 8 a.m.—noon**



**Location: Murieta Plaza Parking Lot across from the vacant bank building**

If you'd like to donate garden-related items, please contact me directly at [cagodmother60@gmail.com](mailto:cagodmother60@gmail.com) or text me at (916) 458-2129. Look for our Community Brief printed weekly in ***The River Valley Times***, and fliers posted at Murieta Plaza merchants.

Looking forward to seeing you all! Thank you for your continued support.

**Quick Trip to Hollandale Farms and a Nice Lunch!**

Hollandale Farms in Lodi has become our go-to place to buy our poinsettias in winter — but did you know they have beautiful spring flowers too? And veggies?

Eleven of our members traveled to Hollandale and were welcomed by their cheerful staff, including three large, friendly dogs. Imagine their greenhouses filled with hanging baskets of colorful annuals, flats and flats of tomato and pepper plants, enormous coleus, lots of zinnias, African daisies, petunias — as far as the eye could see.

Members began selecting their posies, and before long it became evident that wheelbarrows were more useful than trying to balance several pots at a time.



*Donna Hansen's trunk was full*



*Marlene Heier, Sharon Barton, Diane Swann, Paula Swanson packed their posies into Sharon's trunk*



*A trunk full of flowers headed back to Rancho Murieta*

Following a field trip, lunch is always in order. This day it was Pietro's in Lodi. *Salute!*

