



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

Happy Holidays! It's that time of year when I feel like I have too much to do and too little time. So as I write this, I've told myself to just stop and take a moment to reflect about all the gifts of this beautiful time of year.

This garden club is extremely lucky to have the group of women we have on this board. Over the next few newsletters, I'd like to take the opportunity (if they let me!), to highlight a few of these wonderful women.

Each time I send out the newsletter I receive emails thanking me for the beautiful newsletter, telling me how interesting it is, asking me if I write it. I reply to each of these emails — returning the thanks — I appreciate you letting us know how much you enjoy it. However, I'm always very clear letting everyone know how lucky they are that I do NOT write the newsletter — our wonderful Nancy Compton does. But did you know that's not all she does for this garden club? Not only does she write and edit this beautiful newsletter, she also is the RVGC VP for Programs, lead for RVGC Grants program, one of my mentors, and always there to lend a helping hand.

So, I thought I'd introduce you all to Nancy Compton.

DID YOU KNOW that Nancy....

- ◆ Loves lilacs, forsythias, and houseplants, and — yes plants, plants, plants!
- ◆ Her first garden was a small plot of carrots and radishes at the age of 5;
- ◆ Has the same birthday (May 8) as Harry Truman and sent him a birthday card as a child;
- ◆ Has lived in Milwaukee, NYC, Modesto, and on a 38 foot boat;
- ◆ Has lived in the same house in Rancho Murieta for 20 years;
- ◆ Has 3 children, 2 local and one in Florida, and 3 grandchildren ranging in age from 12 to 27;
- ◆ Had a 40-year career in public education — teaching English, English as a Second Language, and eventually becoming principal of the third largest adult school in California;
- ◆ Loves gardening, painting, spending time with friends, meeting new people, and traveling;
- ◆ Belongs to the River Valley Garden Club, Sacramento Fine Arts Center, and the League of Women Voters;
- ◆ Serves on the board of the California Garden Clubs, Inc.
- ◆ Contributes to the CGCI newsletter and serves on the Board of the Pacific Region of the National Garden Clubs, Inc.

Thank you, Nancy for all you do! You are a HUGE part of the heart of this club!

And to all of you, have a wonderful holiday and Happy New Year!



Trip to Hollandale Poinsettia Farm — our final tour of 2021



Greenhouse filled with Poinsettias at Hollandale Nursery

This always-popular tour attracted twenty-three RVGC members and guests who snapped up poinsettias — red, white, and variegated — from a cavernous greenhouse at the Hollandale Family Farm in Lodi.

The history of this small nursery goes back decades — 48 years ago, to be exact, when Gerry Warmerdam started the business after moving to Lodi from Holland. As a new immigrant he looked around and decided that the U.S. was not growing nearly as many flowers as his native Holland, and he decided to do something about it.

Beginning with 10,000 square feet of land, the family eventually expanded to 90,000 square feet. The business is now in the hands of Al and Sam, Gerry’s adult children, and runs mainly by selling wholesale to retailers, but they have many loyal individual customers through word of mouth, and they love garden clubs.

The nursery begins growing their poinsettias from stem cuttings that they order from San Diego, the major growing region for poinsettias in the U.S. Throughout the growing process, the family stays vigilant, controlling humidity, temperature, fertilizer, and water, until their greenhouses are filled with brilliant poinsettias in November. The difficulty and attentiveness it takes to grow poinsettias explains why, when I asked if I could propagate poinsettias at home, the “no” response was accompanied by a not-very-well-concealed chuckle.

After the holiday season is over, the Warmerdams grow flowers such as tulips and chrysanthemums, and they also grow vegetables, like tomatoes and peppers.

Caring for poinsettias:

- Keep away from drafts and areas where temperatures fluctuate
- The worst thing for a poinsettia is overwatering
- The best way to water is throw in five ice cubes every three days so the water dissipates slowly

Fun Facts About Poinsettias:

- ◆ Poinsettias are native to south Mexico
- ◆ Joel Robert Poinsett, the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico, introduced the plant to the United States in 1825
- ◆ Despite popular belief, poinsettias have not been scientifically proven to be poisonous or toxic



Members and guests enjoying lunch at Michael David’s Winery

And now for the real question.....

How many poinsettias can 23 gardeners buy and stuff into their vehicles??????????

Send your answers to the newsletter editor at

ncompton43@att.net. The answer will be revealed at the holiday party.

River Valley Garden Club – the Year in Review.....

When it comes to club programs and activities, our club really rocks. Do you realize that during a pandemic year we were able to have seven programs (three were Zoom) ten tours (yes – 10!) a great workshop, and we earned more than we ever have through our plant sales?

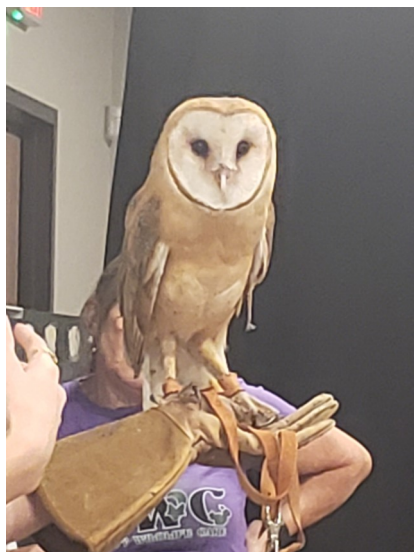
In January, February, and March, we learned via zoom about honey bees, building resilient gardens, and how create a national park in our own back yards. By April the weather had warmed and we hosted a native plant truck by Miridae, a local native plant nursery. How cool is a plant truck??



Miridae Mobile Nursery operated by UCD grad students

In May, we visited Irene Slavins’ beautiful garden in Wilton. We learned that between her vegetables, chickens, and honey from her own hives, she and her family eat mainly locally sourced food. The tour of her massive garden included an explanation of the use of shade cloth, irrigation, planting, propagation, mulch, seasonal crops, and harvesting. Her horses provide a steady stream of compost, and her bees help with pollinating her plants.

In September we met several rescued birds, rehabilitated and hosted by volunteers at the Tri-County Wildlife Care in Jackson. We all fell in love with these birds and with the mission of the nonprofit. When it came time to vote on our 2021 grant recipient, Tri-County Wildlife Care was first on the list.



A rescued barn owl from Tri-County Wildlife Care

And who ever could have guessed that bats were so cute? Our November program, provided by bat expert JoEllen Arnold, introduced us to the world of these tiny creatures who control our insects, are important seed dispersers, and interestingly, have better eyesight than humans?



Bat cuteness on display

Never let it be said that we don’t have fun at our meetings. How can we not have fun when our raffle ladies, Vivian and Roseanne, bring racy hats to try on for selfies, or when Vivian Baier shows up dressed up as a pollinator?



The Year in Review.....(continued)

Where did we go in 2021? For starters, who could ever forget our over-the-river-and-through-the woods adventure to visit the Worm Whisperer? (Except it was through the dusty roads, around the tumble-down buildings, and past the random goats). Pam McCabe got lost in the first field of dust, never to be seen again that day. But what an interesting tour! This one-man operation breeds and ships out hundreds of pounds of worms every month to as far away as Alaska and New York, and nobody would ever guess that this prolific worm breeder operates in a blazing field of cardboard and dust somewhere in the hinterlands between Lodi and Highway 99. We learned about the concept of vermicomposting, which increases fertility, water retention, and carbon sequestration in the soil. This is sustainable farming, resulting in clean, healthy soil, while keeping food waste out of the landfill.



*Antuan Jackson (A.J.), the
Worm Whisperer*

In May we visited Horton's Iris Farm in Loomis, and it drew such a large group of members and guests that we had to take two pictures to get everyone in. This privately-owned garden, open to the public in April and May is known for its abundant iris-blooming season when over 12,000 varieties of irises show their stuff. Interestingly, this property was homesteaded in the 1870s with the deed being signed by Ulysses S. Grant. Attendees enjoyed a picnic lunch after wandering through the iris gardens.



*Some of the members and guests who attended the Horton
Iris Farm Tour in May*

In June we visited Angel Wing Farm, a working farm so close to home that many of us could have walked. According



*Sherrie Hart, our guide and host at
Angel Wing Farms*

to the highly enthusiastic Farm Manager, Sherrie Hart, the farm was created to serve the Gate Restaurant at the Murieta Inn & Spa. All fruits, herbs, and veggies used at the restaurant come from the farm, to ensure that their menu items are farm-fresh and healthy. The farm includes an olive grove, and eventually the olives will be used to make olive oil.

By September we re-visited the Arboretum at CSUS where our hosts and guides were Dr. Baad, professor emeritus who has developed the garden throughout the past forty years, and Laura Halpenny, our scholarship winner. Though we had seen the gardens in the spring, Laura wanted us to see it with the fall colors. Both Laura and Dr. Baad provided information on their goals to improve and expand the Arboretum. For some reason, no photos of this tour have survived, but we can cheerfully attest that we did what we always do at the end of a tour — go to lunch. This time it was at Danielle's Creperie on the corner of Watt and Fair Oaks.

The Year in Review.....still continued.....



Members enjoying the tour of Park Winters

In October, we took a really interesting trip to Winters to visit a Victorian country estate and gardens called Park Winters, where our exceedingly knowledgeable and chatty tour guide, Rafael, explained the history of the farm, and farming in the general area, and introduced us to a 150-year-old fig forest, as well as a huge variety of herbs and spices. The highlight of the tour was the opportunity to pick our own bouquet, and although it was the end of the season, we still managed to find flowers that created sprightly and colorful bouquets, such as poppies, cosmos, Bells of Ireland, and sunflowers.



Pam McCabe selecting flowers for her bouquet

At the end of October, we visited the Sherwood Demonstration Gardens in Placerville where El Dorado County Master Gardeners have created sixteen demonstration gardens ranging from a shade garden to an orchard garden, a rock garden, a cottage garden, a native species garden, and a garden devoted to the U.C. Davis All-Stars — plants that are reliably good performers in our growing zone. Environmental benefits of using All-Stars include reduced water use, reduced carbon emissions from power equipment, reduced chemical run-off as they need no fertilizer or pesticides, and they support native birds and pollinators.

In early November, some of us visited the Chrysanthemum Show sponsored by the Sacramento Chrysanthemum Society which featured an enormous variety of mums, as well as floral designs using chrysanthemums. A judge provided a wealth of information about the elements of floral design. Information on basic growing and care of chrysanthemums was provided via posters and several handouts.

This just about covers what we learned and where we went, but several other things were going on as well. Our six Second Saturday Plant Sales, May-October, netted a total of **\$4,943** for our Scholarship/Grants program! Community Outreach Chair Debbie Kolmodin got very creative by asking the community for donations — and boy did we get donations! Pots, garden art, unusual plants (like Queen's Tears), even ceramic pots that we had to dig out of a community member's back yard — she was on it. And Berniece Jones' garden sink was filled with terra cotta pots that she washed and refurbished, ready for new plants to sell.

We also awarded a \$2,000 scholarship to Laura Halpenny, a very accomplished student of Horticulture at CSUS with a dream of having her own landscape design business.

In November, president Deb Rooney led a workshop on how to make a kokedama. Whoever said “we can't do anything because of the pandemic” needs to join the River Valley Garden Club! Yes, team — we really do rock!



Laura Halpenny, our scholarship winner

Plant of the Month — The Ranunculus — a harbinger of spring

What could be a more spectacular burst of color in the springtime than a clump of ranunculus? And why are we talking about them in late fall when they haven't even bloomed yet?

We're talking about them now because if you want to treat yourself to this show-stopping flower in the spring, there's still time for planting.

Grower and floral designer Erin Bensakein, author of "Floret Farm's Cut Flower Garden: Grow, Harvest & Arrange Stunning Seasonal Blooms" said, "With so many wonderful qualities — tall stems, double-ruffled blooms, a light citrusy rose fragrance, high productivity, and one of the widest color ranges imaginable — it is impossible not to fall head over heels for these beauties."



And fall head-over-heels describes me when I first laid eyes on them. It was the mid 1960s and I had just moved to California from the chilly climes of NYC. I was renting a small home in East Sacramento with a rather useless strip of land between my home and the one next door which my elderly neighbor had planted with bulbs. While I enjoyed the daffodils, I had seen them before. But ranunculus? Entirely new to me. I asked her about them, after which I vowed to plant ranunculus bulbs in the fall.

It was exciting to be planting bulbs that were new to me. I had purchased them in several colors and couldn't wait for spring to see them bloom. And when spring rolled around....no ranunculus. I was devastated. So I chatted with my neighbor to see if I could figure out what happened, and she suggested that I dig them up to see if they had been attacked by voles, or perhaps rotted by too much moisture. As I unearthed the errant bulbs, my elderly neighbor was unable to contain her laughter. Apparently I had planted them upside down! Embarrassed by this abject failure, I never planted them again. But fifty-five years later, I am bound and determined to give it another try. Here is what I've learned about ranunculus:

- ◆ Buy them in the fall when they are widely available at nurseries in our climate. They can also be found at big-box retailers, although I tend to favor local nurseries.
- ◆ Larger bulbs produce more flowers, so always buy the largest tuber size available because they will be more prolific and the flowers will be larger. Bigger tubers will produce 10-12 stems in a growing season and as many as 35 flowers.
- ◆ In areas where temperatures don't drop below 10 degrees (that's us), ranunculus may be planted outdoors in the fall with minimal protection. Again according to Erin Bensakein, fall-planted tubers bloom in early spring and continue steadily for six to seven weeks. Late-winter-planted tubers will flower by mid-spring and continue for four to six weeks.
- ◆ Like most tubers, ranunculus can adapt to a wide range of growing conditions as long as

(continued on next page.....)

Plant of the Month.....(continued from prior page...)

- ♦ ...they are given full sun, sufficient moisture, and soil with good drainage. The one environment they cannot tolerate is warm and overly wet, which can lead to rotting. Overly wet does not seem to be a problem in our state at the moment, as we are looking at another drought year on the horizon.
- ♦ Plant ranunculus tubers with the **“claws” pointing downward**, spacing them about 6-8 inches apart. Cover them with about an inch of soil and water thoroughly. After giving them a good soaking, don’t water again until you see some green showing. If planting in containers, it is recommended that you use one or two jumbo-size tubers for every 10-inch pot.

(Please note the above bolded phrase. If I had read this in 1965, I would have been a successful ranunculus grower. Instead, I set the tubers into the soil as if they were water lilies with the tips facing up).

I have decided that my ranunculus will be planted in containers, as I will have more control over water, soil, and drainage. And I promise that whatever happens, I will share photos of my ranunculus with you.



Refresh Your Garden Design: Rebecca Sweet



Rebecca Sweet, Landscape Designer and author

On Thursday, January 13th, the RVGC has a wonderful opportunity to meet together with both Elk Grove garden clubs to hear a nationally-renowned garden designer, author, and speaker give a talk entitled, “Refresh Your Garden Design: Simple Strategies to Awaken a Weary Garden.”

In addition to designing and writing, Rebecca’s passion is teaching gardeners of all skill levels how to transform their gardens and design like professionals. An audience member who heard Rebecca at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show said, *“Rebecca is engaging, funny, charming, and gives her audience real take-away advice for them to transform their own gardens. This is one of the best presentations I’ve ever attended.”*

The program will be held at the Laguna Town Hall in Elk Grove and will begin at 10:30 a.m. We will travel via carpool leaving the RMA parking lot at 9:30 a.m. And as has been our tradition, we will have lunch out together following the presentation.

