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Here's the Dirt

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

At the start of every new year, there are two things I always do — and no, it's not make New Years resolutions. The first thing I do is buy a new calendar and transfer birthdays, anniversaries, and enter all of my scheduled events. The second thing I do is buy a Farmer's Almanac.

I've been buying Farmer's Almanacs since I was young, certainly before I started to garden. My Nanny used to follow the Farmer's Almanac meticulously — especially the best days to plant, the weather forecasts, and the full moon schedule. My Grandpa always followed the "best days to fish" schedule. My Grandpa always wondered how a farmer could know the best days to fish, but figured he could use any help he could get.

My favorite section has always been the "Best Days of..." This section tells you the best days of the year to bake, cut your hair, potty train your children, get married, buy a house, and cut wood. I mean, really...who knew??

This year, my favorite article in the 2022 Farmer's Almanac is "Mother Nature is Changing the Way We Garden." This article was intriguing to me; it basically says that climate change has made nature's documented cycles unreliable. We can no longer use the calendar to plan our gardening. We've all heard of plants blooming earlier or later than normal, animals migrating sooner or later, etc. This article introduced me to the practice of Phenology — to garden based on what nature around you is telling you, instead of by things less connected to nature, like a calendar.

When I lived in Grand Junction, Colorado, I wanted to know when to plant a flower garden, knowing that the climate was certainly different from what I'd become accustomed to in Sacramento. I went to the local nursery and asked them when was the best time to plant. They told me, "When the goose neck breaks. Needless to say, I didn't understand, and I'm sure I looked confused. She then pointed to The Mesa — a large, flat-topped mountain nearby and showed me a place where the snow on the mountain was in the shape of a goose. She said, "When the snow melts enough on The Mesa, it will look like the neck of the goose has been broken. Plant then. I looked up at the Mesa, then at her, and I said, "When is that usually?" She smiled and said, "Just wait." I didn't buy any plants, but I certainly watched that "snow" goose, and sure enough, in the middle of May, well — you know what happened. This is just one reason The Mesa was one of my favorite things about Grand Junction.

As gardeners, we know our gardens well, and have watched each year as our gardens and gardening habits have shifted and changed. Who knew we were phenologists?? Happy Gardening!

Deb



Plant of the Month — *The Mighty Valley Oak*

Quercus lobata, more commonly known as Valley Oak, is a large and mighty oak that grows into one of the largest oaks in North America. They are also very long-living trees, sometimes attaining the age of 600 years. Those of us who live in California's Central Valley are accustomed to seeing these sturdy trees that grow from the interior valleys all the way to San Diego.

The branches of this large and lovely oak have an irregular spreading and arching appearance that provides a distinctive silhouette against our clear winter skies. Often their profile resembles an animal stalking its prey, or people in a variety of dance positions.

In fact, if you take Scott Road to Folsom, you are treated to a fascinating array of silhouettes so life-like that I've been tempted to pull off the road and take pictures; however, the lack of safe places (or any place) to pull over makes just thinking about this a daunting task. In advanced age, Valley Oaks seem to mimic humans, as they appear to take on a droopy characteristic.

Valley Oaks not only offer abundant shade and sculptural interest, but they do their best to provide a copious number of acorns to add to the food supply of various mammals and birds, including the acorn woodpecker, western scrub jay, yellow-billed magpie, and our ever-ubiquitous ground squirrels.



Valley Oaks are opportunists, in that they have the means that allow them to live in challenging environments. They can live without excessive water, but must have access to a water source. Young Valley Oaks can have a tap root 60 feet deep, as it searches for ground water in a landscape characterized by seasonal droughts. As the tree matures, the tap root sloughs off and the tree develops a tiered root system 2-4 feet below the soil surface that allows the tree to avoid, rather than endure, drought conditions.

It is well-known that native peoples included acorns from the Valley Oak in their diet, both by grinding them into a flour or meal-like substance, or eating them raw. Apparently these oaks bear acorns so low in bitter tannins that they may be eaten raw, although I prefer to leave this taste-testing experiment to others. How fortunate we are to live alongside such magnificent trees that add so much to our native landscape, our summer shade, and our entire ecosystem.



Mature trees may be watered once a month using the bucket method or a soaker hose.

Sacramento Regional Water Authority's Guidelines for Watering Trees

Homeowners worried about their trees during our seemingly endless drought conditions can benefit from the guidelines published by the Sacramento Regional Water Authority which suggest watering using the bucket method. This method provides trees — particularly young trees — the water they need without wasting water.

Bucket watering is actually a Zen method of tree irrigation — slow and steady as Mother Nature would do it. This simple watering method also helps train young trees to grow deep roots, helping them become established and more drought resistant.

The Sacramento trees most likely to show drought stress include coastal redwoods, birches, red maples, and tulip trees, although during very dry conditions, young trees of all kinds are at risk, particularly those that are under five years old.

According to Pamela Frickmann Sanchez, Education Program Manager with the Sacramento Tree Foundation, the first few years after planting, trees need about 10-15 gallons a week, preferably split into two waterings per week. Water from lawn sprinklers is not adequate to help trees become well-established.

Sacramento's heavy soils need slow water applications to allow moisture to soak in. Sanchez advises us not to leave the hose running, as much water can be wasted by running off too quickly. By using the bucket method, you will know exactly how much water your tree is getting. Older trees can also benefit from watering using a soaker hose.

Sacramento Tree Foundation staff experimented and found that a single 1/8 inch hole — located on the bucket's side about one inch above the bottom — was most effective. Multiple or larger holes made the water drain out too fast.

Here is how to accomplish the hole in your bucket: Make a small hole as described above, then cover the hole with tape, fill the bucket, and place the bucket close, within a foot of the trunk to newly planted trees, as their root ball has yet to spread out. Then remove the tape. Alternate sides with each bucket application. As the tree grows, move the bucket farther away from the trunk. The feeder roots that need the extra water most are located along the dripline at the edge of the tree's canopy.

Mulch will also help your trees keep that moisture longer. Apply 2-4 inches of organic mulch (wood chips, leaves, bark, etc.) out to the tree's dripline, leaving six inches of space between the trunk and mulch.

How Much Water do my trees need?

Tree Age	Frequency	Amount
1 year	2-3 x per week	5 gallons
2 years	Once a week	10 gallons
3 years	Every other week	15 gallons
3+ years	Once a month	Use a soaker hose at dripline for one hour



A soaker hose may be made by cutting holes in an old hose

Flower Show School Scheduled!



Learn the design principles needed to enter, excel, and judge flower shows!

If you love flowers — and who among us does not — then you might want to consider attending the upcoming Flower Show School which is scheduled to be held at the Stanislaus Ag Center in Modesto beginning in April.

The Flower Show School is sponsored by the National Garden Clubs, Inc., to enhance the knowledge of attendees so they may embrace the creativity of floral design and beautify their homes and communities using the skills they have gained.

Flower Show School is a comprehensive program that teaches all you need to know about entering, competing, and judging flower shows based on NGC principles.

There are four courses, each with a specific curriculum that includes horticulture design and flower show procedures.

Subjects are taught by qualified instructors, and attendees are provided with examples of horticulture design and display, and they will learn how entries are judged and critiqued. Learn what it takes to get that blue ribbon!

Upon completion of two courses with a passing grade, a student becomes a Provisional Judge and is eligible to join a Flower Show Judges Council.

All courses include topics related to flower show procedures, horticulture instruction, and design instruction.

The course schedule is shown below:

Course I: April 8-10, 2022

Course II: September 17-19, 2022

Course III April 14-16, 2023

Course IV: September 24-26, 2023

The cost for each course (two days) is \$165.

For more information go to:

[**http://gardenclub.org/resources/ngc-schools-guide-for-students-and-consultants.pdf**](http://gardenclub.org/resources/ngc-schools-guide-for-students-and-consultants.pdf)

Nancy Compton has some registration forms and may be reached at (916) 354-0354 (home), (916) 600-1992 (cell) or ncompton43@att.net.



We're Going Places!

The Tours Committee met on February 1 to plan our field trips for the spring season, and you may want to hang onto your hat, because there's a lot going on! The list below shows only the trips scheduled for March, but rest assured that there will be a lot more to come after final arrangements have been made.

Sunday, March 6: Trip to Ironstone Vineyards

This tour has been a long-time favorite of our club, as we travel to the gold-rush era town of Murphys to enjoy all that Ironstone Vineyards has to offer. Ironstone is a premier Calaveras County destination with wine tasting, fabulous gardens, a daffodil and art show, a heritage museum, and tasty food at their deli.

Giant wine barrels just packed full of colorful tulips greet visitors to this large and lovely estate which often hosts concerts and seasonal events. We can enjoy lunch in their deli. Meet and carpool from RMA at 10 a.m.



A vintage truck at Ironstone adorned with seasonal flowers. Often a kitty can be seen resting under the antique delivery truck.

Sunday, March 13: Arbor Week Festival at the Urban Wood Rescue (Sacramento Tree Foundation). 1-5 p.m. Free.

California Arbor Week is a statewide celebration of trees. We will be joining the Sacramento Tree Foundation for its

40th anniversary party at Urban Wood Rescue. We will learn more about our urban forest from seed to slab, and celebrate the trees that make our region so livable and lovable.

This event includes activities and demonstrations. Food, drink, wood, and wares will be available for purchase. Meet and carpool from RMA at 12:30 p.m.



Native Valley Oak

Wednesday, March 30: Springtime Trip to Hollandale Nursery in Lodi

This family-owned and operated nursery in the outskirts of Lodi is where we go to purchase our holiday poinsettias, but did you know that they also have delightful springtime flowers? Their stock is always healthy and their prices are reasonable and affordable, so we will trek back to Hollandale to stock up on posies for our springtime gardens. Meet and carpool from RMA at 10 a.m. Lunch at Pietro's Italian Restaurant.

Be sure to save the dates on your calendars and get ready to rock & roll as we visit beautiful and interesting places and continue learning more about the lovely destinations that gardeners so love in our region.

Please RSVP to Sharon Barton by March 1st for the first two outings, and by March 21st for the 3rd outing. Call 354-0408 or contact golfbum4@sbcglobal.net. Thank you!



Springtime petunias

Coming to a garden near you.....

This is a new section to let you know what's growing in our garden (to let you know what's happening....)



- ◆ **Discount cards and membership directories will be distributed at the February 22 meeting**
- ◆ **May 10** — We will be hosting the **Valley Lode District** meeting at the Rancho Murieta Country Club. Featured speaker will be Marlene "The Plant Lady" Simon!
- ◆ **Paint and Sip workshop** has been scheduled for **Saturday, February 19th!** Join in this fun event that will be held at the RMA building from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- ◆ **Next General Meeting at RMA — February 22 — 6:30** for snacks and fellowship — 7 p.m. meeting and program. **Speaker — Carolyn McMaster, Master Gardener, who will speak on "Attracting Hummingbirds to Your Pollinator Garden."**



Your Club Needs You Now!



It's that time of year when we connect with our membership looking for people to help support the River Valley Garden Club.

Each February through April we begin recruiting for the year ahead. So think about this: Do you want to have a ton of fun? Want to meet new people and make new friends? Want to help plan parties? Do you like to bake cookies? Would you consider a board position?

The River Valley Garden Club is one of the strongest, most active clubs in the region. We have terrific programs, outstanding tours, amazing workshops — and it's all because we have members who give of their time, energy, ideas, and spirit! And you are a part of the team! Come on out and join us! I'm glad I did.

Please don't hesitate to give me a call if you're interested in being more involved, or if you have questions.

You'll certainly be glad you did! Thank you so much!

Deb



Word of the day: Spuddle

Sometimes I come across a word that I don't know how I ever lived without, and **spuddle** just happens to be one of those words. Here is what it means:

To be extremely busy while achieving absolutely nothing!

Have you ever spent a day spuddling? Frustrating, isn't it? But we all do it, and the best thing to do is laugh it off and stop spuddling. Then relax and have a glass of wine.

Follow me for more gardening tips.....

