



## *Here's the Dirt*

**A publication of the River Valley Garden Club**

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

I'm a checklist person, but sometimes (let's be honest) most times I get a bit behind. The last set of checklists I found had "TO DO's" for Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's and vacation. None were completely checked off, but time has marched on, so it's time to start a new checklist, and guess what — it's Garden Checklist time! After these past few weeks, that list is long, but have no fear— Garden Checklists are here!

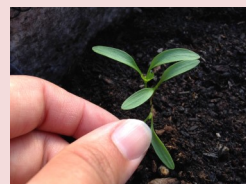
Garden Checklists are one of my favorites to follow. I like that you can find a checklist for every month and for every gardening zone. I always feel like if I use the checklist for guidance and to jog my memory along with my favorite standard 4 Ps of gardening — Prune, Pluck, Pick up, and Prep— I'll be okay.

Looking out at my backyard I'm thinking it looks like a royal mess — tree limbs all over, pots and garden beds all needing some TLC...Needless to say, I'm exhausted just looking at it all. So, baby steps to start. I'm ready, gloves on, tools ready — clippers, shovel, brooms, and rakes, and my handy checklist. Here goes nothing!

Good luck to all of you with fences down, trees in various states. Here's a checklist to get you started. While I know it all looks overwhelming and a bit of a mess, just think — spring is just around the corner.

Here is the checklist:

- ⇒ Spring Garden Planning — Dream and sketch
- ⇒ Garden prep and maintenance — prune, amend soil, mulch, divide, transplant, and fertilize
- ⇒ Clean out and clean up garden beds — add to the compost pile!
- ⇒ Mulch garden beds
- ⇒ Prune perennials and trees/shrubs and roses
- ⇒ Divide and transplant (daylilies, Shasta daisies, rudbeckia to name a few)
- ⇒ Fertilize garden beds — good time for slow release organic fertilizer
- ⇒ Garden tool assessment — sharpen and clean
- ⇒ Don't forget your houseplants—now is a good time to repot and fertilize
- ⇒ Start seeds indoors — assume last frost will be late February or early March
- ⇒ Final harvest of winter vegetables
- ⇒ Plant trees, shrubs, and some vegetables.



*Happy Gardening!*

*Deb*

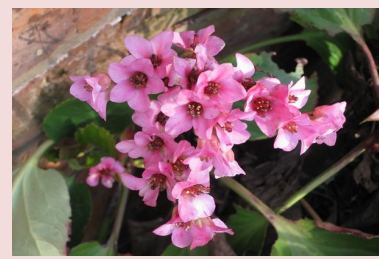
## *Plant of the Month — the Lovely, but Surprising Bergenia*



Like most Northern California gardeners, I spent much of the week following the big storm in major clean-up mode. There were so many things to deal with — a large patio umbrella with stand in the swimming pool, several hefty branches down in places that were hard to reach, giant undrained puddles everywhere, and a major section of fence hanging into the abyss.

None of this was fun, or even interesting, but gardens can hold little surprises. As I was dumping out major amounts of water from overflowing containers, I noticed a small pink flower smiling at me from a pot that was nearly buried under small branches and redwood twigs. It was my Bergenia plant, purchased several years ago during a tour to the Filoli Gardens on the South San Francisco peninsula. I had never seen it bloom before, but perhaps that's because I generally don't snoop around my garden in late January when it's cold outside. It appears that I have been missing something beautiful enough to ward off the winter blues.

Bergenia are actually native to the Himalayas and mountains of China, so it's quite a surprise that they can be grown in our zone. My *Sunset Western Garden Book* states that the plant blooms in spring, but here it is— blooming away in winter. I remember the directions stating that Bergenia perform best in shade, but will tolerate sun in cool summer climates. Well, we don't know anything about cool summer climates here, so my Bergenia has lived for the past several years in a large pot tucked under some vines near a wall.



My *Sunset* book goes on to say that Bergenia will endure neglect, poor soil, and some drought, but appreciate good soil and regular watering, feeding, and grooming. Apparently I forgot about this description with the exception of the word “neglect.” I forgot that I even had this plant, but now that it's blooming so beautifully, perhaps I should plant it in the ground. The directions say to cut back yearly to prevent it from becoming too leggy.

Planting my Bergenia in the ground means I can perhaps start a new shade garden. Companion plants to Bergenia are listed as ferns, hellebores, hostas, rhododendrons, and Japanese aralia, all of which I love, and some of which I already have.

How delightful to learn about a flowering plant that I barely knew lived in my garden — and what a nice surprise to see such a pretty bloom after so many gloomy days.



## *Roses: Planting, Pruning, and Maintenance: Advice from the Pros.....*

It's not only gardeners, but the general population that seems to prefer roses over all other flowers. Their gorgeous colors and beautiful scent appeal to the senses bringing warm feelings and wonderful memories to enrich the soul. They can be, however, a lot of work, and to simplify a gardener's life, Green Acres has provided some advice for the planting, pruning, and maintenance of these stunning posies.

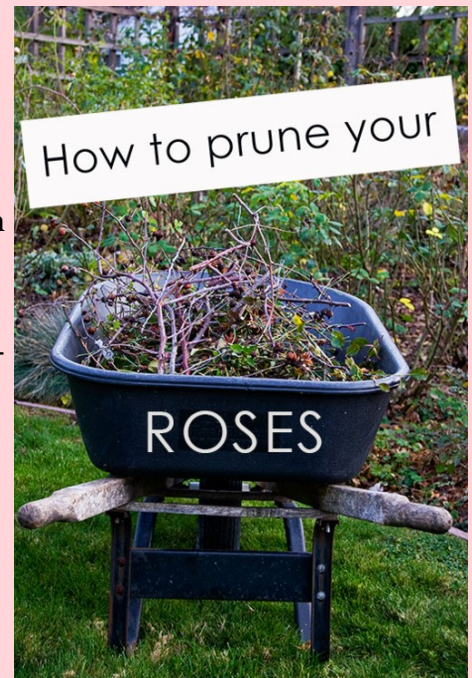
### **Planting:**

- ◆ Select a location that gets at least four to six hours of direct sunlight per day.
- ◆ Dig a hole two times as wide as the size of the pot and as deep as the rootball.
- ◆ Mound soil inside the hole so the rootball sits one to two inches above ground level to ensure good drainage, prevent diseases, and provide room for root growth.
- ◆ Plant roses in plantable peat pot (if purchased in one).
- ◆ Cut slits down the side of the biodegradable pot and cut the top collar to the soil level.
- ◆ Amend native soil with one part rose planting mix to one part native soil, adding starter fertilizer at the rate recommended on the label.
- ◆ Add a two-to-three inch layer of mulch around the base of roses, leaving a four-inch space between the mulch and the trunk.



### **Pruning:**

- Remove dead or damaged canes to the crown (base) of the plant.
- Remove all weak or spindly growth in the middle.
- Remove any suckers at the base of the plant.
- Many rose types benefit from removing one-third of the top growth and removing all but three to five canes in a vase-shaped configuration.
- Make your pruning cuts at a 30 to 45 degree angle, about one quarter inch above an outward facing bud.
- Seal any pruning cuts that are larger than one-half inch diameter to prevent insects from entering the wound.
- Use the right tools; clean, sharp pruning shears that are the right size for the branch being pruned. To save your skin from being scratched or poked, use long gloves.



*(for tips on maintenance, continue to next page.....)*

## Tips on Maintaining Your Roses.....

- ◆ Immediately after pruning, remove all leaves and debris. No leaf left behind!
- ◆ Apply two cups Alfalfa Meal and one-half cup Sol-Po-Mag (*Google this. It's a product of Hydrobuilder, a company in Chico*) to each rose after pruning.
- ◆ Spray roses after pruning with dormant spray oil to prevent disease and insects.
- ◆ Fertilize regularly during the growing season to keep plants blooming and looking their best.
- ◆ Remove spent flowers to keep roses blooming throughout the growing season.
- ◆ Refresh your mulch to help keep plant roots warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Mulch also



builds humic acid in the soil, which conditions the soil to help absorb and maintain moisture.



## *Safety in the Garden.....*

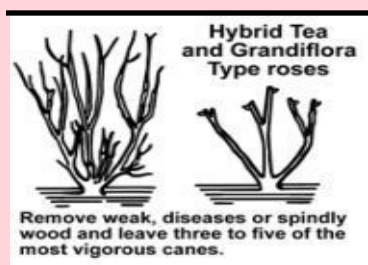


Polls repeatedly tell us that most accidents happen at home. What is not specified is how many of these home accidents occur in the garden. The U.S Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that about 28,000 people seek medical treatment in just one year for injuries related to using nonpowered garden tools, including rakes.

This report made the following suggestions to keep from becoming a raking statistic:

- ◆ Stretch the muscles of your arms and legs before you begin — just like you do for any other exercise.
- ◆ Wear protective gear, including gloves, closed-toe shoes or boots, long pants, and sun protection.
- ◆ Use the right rake for the job. A light, fan-shaped rake is great for gathering up leaves, while a flat-headed metal rake would be used for something like smoothing soil before planting.
- ◆ Choose a rake that fits you, avoiding one that's too heavy or too large to handle comfortably.
- ◆ Change positions as you work, alternating which hand and foot are in the front.
- ◆ **Never set a rake down with the teeth pointing up!**





## *Pruning 101: A Synopsis of a Green Acres Demonstration*

On a sunny Saturday in January, all of the Green Acres locations presented a talk and demonstration on pruning, which is a garden topic that bears repeating as a reminder to gardeners just how important this garden chore can be to the eventual health of our gardens. Pruning is a crucial gardening skill used to shape plants, direct growth, promote better flowering or fruiting, and increase vigor of the plant or tree. Always prune with clean, sharp tools, and be sure to use the appropriate pruning tool for the size of branch being removed. Below is a synopsis of this presentation.

### **When to Prune:**

- ◆ Most plants will benefit from pruning in dormancy before leaf-out in spring (mid-December to mid-February).
- ◆ Flowering ornamental shrubs differ depending on whether they bloom on new or old wood. If it's old wood, prune after bloom. If new wood, then prune in the spring before new growth.
- ◆ It is recommended that most fruit trees be pruned during dormancy, with the exception of apricots and cherries, which should be pruned after they fruit in the summer.

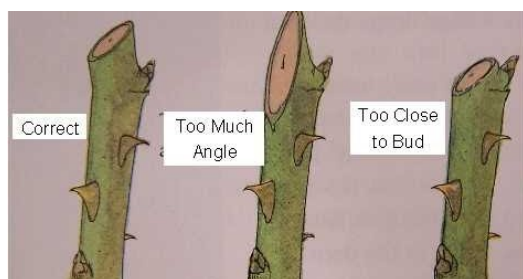


### **Pruning Techniques:**

- ◆ **Pinching:** The removal of young shoots to shape the plant or direct growth. Pinching the terminal shoot will result in bushy, lateral growth. Pinching the lateral shoots will result in elongation of terminal growth.
- ◆ **Shearing:** A technique used on ornamental shrubs to create a formal hedge look. All branches are cut to the same length to encourage even growth of lateral branches. Shear so that the base of the shrub is slightly wider than the top, which allows sunlight to reach the bottom branches.
- ◆ **Heading:** The removal of the tip or terminal portion of the branch to stimulate vigorous lateral growth. Good for immediate reduction of the size of the plant, but the resulting lateral growth will be tightly clustered to the branch, which permanently alters the form of the plant.
- ◆ **Thinning:** This reduces plant size and directs energy to remaining branches. Remove lateral branch back to point of origin, which is the main branch or trunk. For plants that send up branches directly from the roots, remove branch to the ground.

### **Now for Basic Pruning:**

- ◆ Remove dead and damaged canes. Dead canes should be removed back to the crown.



- ◆ Starting from the base and working your way up, remove all weak and spindly growth. Remove any suckers away from the trunk or root of the shrub.
- ◆ Always cut about one quarter inch above an outside facing bud.
- ◆ Seal a pruned cane with sealant if it is a half inch or larger to prevent insects from entering through the wound.

# A big "thank you" from Debbie Kolmodin.....



*Gail Bullen and Debbie Kolmodin at a Plant Sale*

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their support during the past three years with our garden club's fundraiser six-month annual plant sale event.

Two members that have been supportive all during this time are Nancy Compton and Donna Hansen.

Coming at the crack of dawn for set-up and then take down, working the sales, Donna storing and transporting tables and Nancy creating containers with her artistic painting and plantings has been so appreciated.



*One of the tables at the Plant Sale. Notice how many plants have been sold!*

Numerous other members donated with plantings they created for our sales. Team work at its best! Some of the nicest giving people are gardeners. So thank you all!

As Community Outreach Project Chair for the past seven years, I have had the pleasure of working on quite a few community projects helping get our club's name out there to the Rancho Murieta residents. The residents of our community have been so supportive with their generous donations to help us raise money to fund our Scholarships and Grants program.

This six-month plant sale event has been the largest fundraiser for our club. It was a lot of work year-round for me, but I truly enjoyed taking on this task.

One of the projects that will remain in place for a long time to come is our contribution of a gardening article in the monthly publication of Rancho Murieta Neighbors Magazine. Nancy Compton has graciously consented to write and delight the magazine's editor with her vast knowledge of interesting gardening articles so much that they feature her articles in their other area magazines. We thank Bob and Nancy Mees for their generosity in letting us continue.

The Veteran's Blue Star Memorial is another project that is near and dear to my heart, and one I am very proud of. Lots of hoops to jump through to get that in place. Keeping it looking good with plants and decorating with flags for certain holidays so our community could enjoy on behalf of our club has been an ongoing labor of love. I've heard so many residents comment on how they love seeing this and thank us for placing it here to honor our veterans

I realize that the time has come for me to step aside and let someone else bring new community projects to



*Plant Sale items ready for customers*



*Veterans Blue Star Memorial*

the table and continue to do things for our community. All my best to the members who will now take over this position.





Eagle Scout Joy Salo receiving a proclamation from Supervisor Sue Frost

## Grant Recipient Joy Salo Achieves Eagle Scout Status

When our club’s board learned about resident Joy Salo’s project for her Eagle Scout designation, it was decided to award her one of our \$500 grants to use toward this project. Her plan was to purchase and install two concrete benches on the far side of Lake Calero on which hikers, bird-watchers, and other community members out for a walk could rest after walking half-way around the lake.

This was a prodigious effort that involved coordinating with RMA’s Maintenance Manager, Rod Hart, developing a budget, ordering the concrete for the base, and sending away for the benches. This project was made a bit more challenging when the benches became part of the supply chain back-up conundrum.

Joy and fellow Eagle Scout Will Kessen were honored at an event called the **Eagle Court of Honor** held on the evening of January 16 at the community church. Jerome Keyes, Scoutmaster of Troop 633, explained the many requirements for achieving this level, which included earning over 21 merit badges, developing and completing a substantial community service project, and taking on leadership with significant responsibilities.

For this newsletter story, my plan was to hike over to Lake Calero and take a photo of the completed project. However, I have workmen in my yard helping with issues related to storm damage and several projects to finish up, so if any of you go over to Lake Calero, please take some photos and shoot them over to me for the next issue.

Meanwhile, I think we can be proud that we were instrumental in helping Joy achieve her goal as an Eagle Scout, while contributing to a worthwhile community project.

## Spring’s Offspring.....

To non-gardeners, it looks like a plain container of soil that redefines the word “boring.” But for us, the heart races and the senses crackle with anticipation. In the beginning, all is quiet, yet there is something exciting happening.

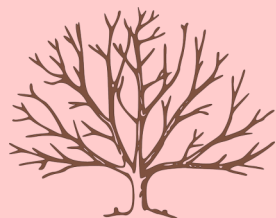


Finally, like a volcanic eruption, a great crack appears as a subterranean force moves the earth upward. Within days, a green shoot pushes above the soil and uncoils to reveal a plant— a mini-representation of what will become an oxygen producer and a vegetable upon which we can depend for food.

All seed-sowing gardeners feel the same excitement during germination. It’s the overpowering combination of childbirth and the pride of parenthood.

This is what we envision as we drool over the seed catalogs that flood our mailboxes. Once opened, a seed catalog is filled with boisterous colors and the promise of paradise. Words such as “luminous,” “profuse,” and “abundant” flow from the pages, and thus weave their spell. And before you know it, the seed-dealers have their hooks into you. We’ve all done it — it’s okay. Not every seed will bring abundant joy. But those that do will make all those days of gazing upon your newborn plants worthwhile. Here’s to the seed-sowers — for they shall be declared true gardeners!

## *Dormant Spray Guide from Green Acres*



When trees and shrubs lose their leaves in winter, they give gardeners a significant head start in the battle against insects and disease that show up in the growing year. Without the cover of leaves, pests, including mites, aphids, insect eggs, and scale are exposed and easy to destroy. Potential diseases are reduced or prevented by spraying in winter, including fire blight, peach leaf curl, and powdery mildew. Properly timed dormant spraying will prevent and kill more insects and diseases than most other sprays during the year.

Green Acres recommends a product called Monterey Liqui-Cop.

This product is used for:

- \* Control and prevention of diseases attacking citrus fruit, nuts, vegetables, roses, and other ornamentals;
- \* Controls peach leaf curl, fire blight, shot hole, and others.

The directions advise users to do the following:

- ⇒ Shake well before using.
- ⇒ Mix approximately 3-4 tsp. per gallon of water.
- ⇒ All plant surfaces must be covered.
- ⇒ May be mixed with Monterey Horticultural oil.



This newsletter does not endorse products; however, this product is endorsed by Green Acres and the information is being shared. Monterey Horticultural oil is used for:

- ⇒ Controlling scale insects, mealy bugs, apple aphids, red spider, mites, leaf miners and other insects.
- ⇒ For use on citrus, fruit, nuts, vegetables, roses, and other ornamentals.
- ⇒ The directions are listed below:

- ⇒ Combine 2.5 to 5 Tbsp of water per gallon.
- ⇒ All plant surfaces must be covered thoroughly (trunk to twig).
- ⇒ Must be above 40 degrees when spraying outdoors
- ⇒ Do not apply if tree has been sprayed with a sulfur material in the previous 30 days
- ⇒ May be mixed with Monterey Liqui-Cop

With a few products, some roll-up-your-sleeves garden time, and some basic knowledge, our gardens will have a great start for a healthy, productive year.