



Here's the Dirt

A publication of the River Valley Garden Club

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

Happy New Year! Wow! Here we are — starting a new year — we made it! Welcome to 2022!

As I think about the past two years, my first thought — holy moley, what a crazy two years we've been through. My second thought — gratitude for all we have. I am filled with hope that this year is the year we continue our trek to "normal," whatever that is. As my friend often reminds me, Life is Good.

Hard to believe we've been surrounded by COVID-19 for two years. Hard to believe that in the past two years we've masked, isolated, re-opened, stepped back, and tiptoed through our lives. Hard to believe that in the past two years we've been through fires, drought, and downpours.

And yet, through all of this, there are so many things that have been good and have been constant — family, faith, friends, my sweet and crazy dog Finn, our comforting gardens, and yes, the River Valley Garden Club. These have all been my refuge, my guiding light, my "something to look forward to."

For many, our gardens have been our source of comfort, of peace, and our escape. They have reminded us that change is good, regardless of whether the change is caused by season, or through one of our "bright" ideas. Our gardens have kept us calm, made us laugh, frustrated us, been our refuge, and shown us resilience when battered by the hot, unrelenting sun or drowning, windy storms.

And yes, thankfully, RVGC has been constant, thanks to the Board and to all of you. Whether it's been ZOOM meetings, newsletters, plant sales, field trips — they have all given us a glimpse of normality and something to look forward to. And now, starting in January 2022, the "back to normal" continues with our monthly, in-person meetings back into our "home" (the RMA building). YAY!

And so my New Year's wish for you —

As we leap into 2022, Be safe, be happy, be brave, be bold, be positive, be creative, be resourceful, be productive, and be thoughtful as we embrace 2022!"



Why are so few flowers blue?

Recently I read that the color most rare in flowers is blue — a color seen on only 10% of the 280,000 flowering plants on earth. Apparently the reason for this is that there is no blue pigment in the plant kingdom, and colors that appear to be blue are actually permutations of violet or purple.

Those flowers that do come in shades of blue, however, are often some of our favorites — like hydrangeas, periwinkle, clematis, cornflower, delphinium, statice, lupine, and sometimes pansies.

The question then becomes — why is blue so rare? The answer comes from the chemistry and physics of how colors are produced and how the human eye sees them.

For a flower to appear blue, it needs to be able to produce a molecule capable of absorbing very small amounts of energy in order to absorb the red part of the spectrum.

Researching this topic led to some interesting details. For instance, bees apparently can see the color blue much more easily than humans. In fact, the mystery of the blue flower comes down to the appeal of the color blue to bees. An article appearing in the January 2021 publication, “The Conversation,” states that nature’s rare color owes its very existence to the vision of bees. Further, the article explains that the scarcity of blue flowers is partly due to the limits of our own eyes. From a bee’s perspective, attractive bluish flowers are much more common.

Despite the apparent rarity of blue flowers in nature, in harsh conditions, such as the mountains of the Himalaya, blue flowers are more common, which shows that in harsh environments, plants may have to invest a lot of energy to attract the few available and essential pollinators.

Urban environments are important habitats for bees and other pollinating insects. Thus, having bee-friendly gardens with blue flowers that bees really appreciate is a convenient and potentially important contribution to enabling a sustainable future.

Apparently, by planting and maintaining a good variety of flowers in many colors, our pollinators will come and provide their pollinating services in exchange for a place to find food, drink, and a safe location in which to rest.



A stunning blue hydrangea



Statice, a staple in mixed bouquets



A bee enjoying his time on a bluish flower



Bluish clematis

Holiday Party a Big Hit!

Never let it be said that RVGC members don't know how to party! This year's social committee, chaired by Berniece Jones, did a fabulous job of organizing, decorating, and hosting a magnificent event enjoyed by all who attended.

Focused on the theme of "Seven Swans a-Swimming," the room was decked out in maroon and white, even including the cookies which were hand-made and lovingly decorated.

As this was a pot-luck, members brought their best, most delicious salads, appetizers, main dishes, and desserts, all of which complemented each other and together made for a first-class buffet.

The brightly wrapped packages and gift bags under the Christmas tree sat waiting in anticipation of the annual gift exchange which is accomplished by every attendee receiving a number, after which the person whose number is called selects a gift from under the tree. However, that's only the first option. The second option is to steal a gift from another person if their gift looks more appealing.

Check out the photo on the right which shows Pam McCabe pilfering Ellison Cowles' gift. Although Ellison appears to be in major distress, she does have the opportunity to go back to the Christmas tree and select a gift — or steal a gift from someone else. Fortunately only one "steal" was allowed, or the game could have continued for several days.

A frequent maneuver for enticing a person who is looking around the room to decide if it would be preferable to grab someone's gift or go to the tree is to show off the gift as if in a commercial. This was the tactic used by Margaret Watson-Hopkins (photo at left) as she cleverly tried to interest gift-seekers in her Chia Pet.

Although last year's Zoom party was certainly creative and fun, it was a treat to see everyone in person again and to share in the fellowship our garden club enjoys.



Even the cutlery and napkins were elegant



Even the cookies carried the swan theme



Margaret Watson-Hopkins showing off her Chia Pet



Pam McCabe relieving Ellison Cowles of her gift



Row 1: Paula Swanson, Diane Swan. Row 2: Sharon Barton, Helen Mary Scheinert. Row 3: Deb Rooney, Pat Rooney.



Left to right: Candy Hearn, Maria Lopez, Catherine Riebe, Rosann Stevenson

Refresh Your Garden Design: Simple Strategies to Awaken a Weary Garden

RVGC members have a rare opportunity to hear Rebecca Sweet, a nationally-recognized speaker who is a landscape designer, author, and lifelong gardener whose articles have been featured in *Sunset*, *Fine Gardening*, *Woman's Day* and *American Gardener*, and has been a guest on the critically acclaimed PBS series "Growing a Greener World."

Rebecca will help us refresh our garden designs by bringing harmony to our very own backyards. Based on her new book, *Refresh Your Garden Design*, she will share her secrets to reviving our gardens in ways that are inspiring, informative, and easy to put into practice. Be ready to learn how to take your garden to the next level by using timeless design principles in unconventional ways. Some of Rebecca's topics include looking at our gardens with fresh eyes, introducing harmony back into the garden, and creating harmony with foliage and color.

This program, which is a joint presentation for which we will join the Elk Grove Garden Club and Gardeners of the Grove, will be held on **Thursday, January 13**, beginning at 10:30 a.m. at the Laguna Town Hall, 3020 Renwick Avenue in Elk Grove. We already have twelve members signed up, but we can still take a few more. Contact Nancy Compton at ncomp-ton43@att.net or (916) 600-1992.



Rebecca Sweet



A garden with harmony and color

In-person Monthly Meetings Return!

Yes! Beginning with our regular monthly meeting scheduled for Tuesday, January 25, we will be meeting at the RMA building as we did prior to COVID protocols which left us struggling to find a suitable a meeting location.



Soleil Tranquilli

Our **January 25** speaker, Soleil Tranquilli, is the owner of Tranquil Gardens, a landscape consulting company dedicated to promoting sustainable landscape practices, including drought-tolerant, California native, and California-friendly plantings. She encourages gardeners to consider alternatives to the traditional water-intensive grass lawn and expand wildlife into their sanctuary.

Soleil believes that a fine landscape design should unify home and garden into a paradise which reflects its owner, while honoring the environment.

The doors will open at 6:30 p.m. for our social time, which includes chatting with fellow gardeners, buying raffle tickets, and munching on cookies. Our program will begin at 7 p.m. We are so looking forward to seeing everyone again!

Learn Principles of Landscape Design

National Garden Clubs, Inc. Accredited School of Landscape Design

Four Weekend Courses

Course 1: Jan 15-16, 2022

Course 2: Feb 12-13, 2022

Course 3: Feb 26-27, 2022

Course 4: Mar 12-13, 2022

**Create your happy place. Your home. Your garden.
Your oasis. Your sanctuary. Your sanity.**

The instructor for courses 1, 2 and 3 will be Professor Dale Pollard, Modesto Junior College, now retired. Dale specializes in Environmental Horticulture and Landscape Design & Maintenance, and has served as a Board Member for the Hughson Arboretum.

Course 4 will be taught by Elias Armenta, Professor, School of Landscape Horticulture at Merced Community College. Professor Armenta specializes in Landscape Design and Construction, Landscape Maintenance, and Elements of Horticulture.

All courses will be taught at the Stanislaus County Fairgrounds Floriculture Building, 900 North Broadway in Turlock. The regular cost of each course is \$75; however, as it is being sponsored by the Valley Lode District, and we are now members of this district, the cost for our members is \$45 per course. At the end of the four courses, participants may take an examination to become a Landscape Design Consultant through the National Garden Clubs, Inc. For those of us who have no intention of starting a new career (and most of us don't), the learning alone is a valuable experience, the principles of which may be applied to our own landscaping. There are only a few slots left, so if you are interested, contact Nancy Compton at ncompton43@att.net or via cell phone at (916) 600-1992.



May 10 – A Date for your Calendar.....

On Tuesday, May 10, the River Valley Garden Club will be hosting a meeting of the Valley Lode District, which means that members of all twenty-one clubs in the district will be eligible to attend. Details are still in the preliminary stages, but we do have a great location – the Parasol Room of the Rancho Murieta Country Club. It will be a morning meeting and will include lunch. If you are interested in working on the planning team for this event, please contact Pam McCabe at pamsaloha@gmail.com. Vivian Baier, our Raffle Chair, is determined to have a gorgeous and splashy raffle and is looking for donations of the following items:

- Large baskets
- Bird house
- Women's Health Basket
- Gift Cards (to add to set-ups)
- * Garden Tools & Supplies
- * Dog Supplies
- * Air Fryer (new)
- * Popcorn & Games Basket
- * Beach supplies
- * Stand for Glass Dish Bird Bath

To donate contact Vivian at vivianbaier@yahoo.com or (586) 930-2105.



Norfolk Island Pine

Plant of the Month: the Stately Norfolk Island Pine

Recently I was blessed with a new addition to my growing and somewhat unruly family of plants. A family friend asked if I would mind taking in a Norfolk Island Pine, as its owner was no longer able to care for it. Since my home already looks like a wayward nursery and there's always room for one more plant, I readily agreed. I've always loved the design principle that blurs the lines between indoors and out, and a small evergreen with fluffy boughs and bright green needles that lends a woody vibe to any home is more than welcome.

I remember seeing these stately conifers growing outside in the more tropical growing zones 10 and 11, but in our zone, it is a house plant, although it may be set outside during the warm summer days to soak up the sun.

The plant that I received was in much too small a pot with dried-out soil, and curiously, a small block of wood whose purpose may have been to shore up the main trunk, although it seemingly served no purpose at all and took up room that should have been earmarked for soil. I removed the plant from its way-too-small pot, found a larger, more suitable pot, added new soil, some liquid fertilizer, and found a location near an east window

My research revealed that when grown as an indoor plant, the Norfolk Island Pine needs a potting mix that is porous, sandy, and slightly acidic. Adding additional peat moss and sand to standard potting mix will take care of the acidity and porosity that the plant needs.

The Norfolk Island Pine is a gymnosperm, meaning that a single plant contains both male and female reproductive organs, which is good to know despite the fact that I had no plans to propagate it. I learned that virtually all Norfolk Island Pines are grown from seeds that are usually imported from their native Norfolk Island, which is located in the South Pacific between Australia, New Zealand, and New Caledonia. Most home growers don't bother with seeds or propagation, and in fact, are warned not to take a cutting for this purpose, or the plant may die.



Although the Norfolk Island Pine prefers full sun, they are quite forgiving and can take long periods of time in dim conditions, which is why they can be grown indoors during our often-dreary winter days. Then when the weather warms up again, the plant may be moved outdoors and grown as a patio plant.

It is an honor to serve as a foster mom to this gorgeous and robust plant, and I look forward to seeing it grow and thrive in my home.

Master Gardeners Announce Schedule of Garden Events



Sacramento County Master Gardeners announce a new schedule of garden events, along with the hope that they actually will happen. After two years of pandemic-related protocols, the master gardeners remain flexible. For now, the schedule is posted as below:

- **Saturday, January 22: Open Garden.** The Master Gardeners will be back in the Open Garden at the Fair Oaks Horticulture Center. The primary topic will be pruning, since fruit trees and other plants are in dormancy. The Orchard Team will be available to talk about pruning techniques and tools, as well as answer questions.

Also, the entire Horticulture Center will be open for browsing, with Master Gardeners stationed in each area. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn about composting, including worm composting, plus topics such as winter vegetables, perennial herbs, and California natives that bloom in cold weather. Ask about seed starting, too!



- **Saturday, February 12—Open Garden:** same location and format, but the focus will shift to late winter and early spring vegetables, bulbs, and late winter pruning, especially berries. And check out the changes in the Water Efficient Landscape garden as plants begin to wake up.

The Horticulture Center is located at 11549 Fair Oaks Boulevard, Fair Oaks, just south of the library and Fair Oaks Park, which are at the southwest corner of Madison and Fair Oaks Boulevard.



To Plant a Garden is to Believe in Tomorrow

We are so fortunate to be gardeners, because it makes us believers. In a world where the future often seems cloudy and division marks our society, we gardeners sow affection for those who will come after us. They may sit under a tree we planted, or enjoy a daffodil from a bulb we set years before. Our endeavors reflect the need for clean water, healthful air, an enriching earth, and a nourishing environment for all.

We plant lilies and love, peonies and patience, rutabagas and respect, marigolds and meditation, hollyhocks and hope. We plant today for tomorrow, because we believe in the future. Gardeners help create a better, more beautiful tomorrow. We inspire each other by coming together to learn, share, and create. Nature inspires us. We are concerned about bees that help grow food and flowers, and the birds and butterflies that lighten our hearts. We're gardeners, you and I, and we're making tomorrow a better place, one blossom at a time.

From an inspiration by Harry Matte given at the SRVD meeting on 2/17/2020.

What's New for 2022?

January 13, 2022: Refresh Your Garden Design: Simple Strategies to Awaken a Weary Garden.

Speaker: Rebecca Sweet, a garden designer whose gardens have been featured in many national publications, including *Sunset*, *Fine Gardening*, and *Women's Day*, and has been featured on the critically acclaimed PBS series *Growing a Greener World*. Combined meeting with the Elk Grove Garden Club and Gardeners of the Grove. Laguna Town Hall, 3020 Renwich Avenue, Elk Grove. Program begins at 10:30 a.m. (please note time change from that listed in the December issue of "Here's the Dirt." Carpool from RMA. Meet at 9:30 a.m.

January 25, 2022: Re-scape Your Outdoors: Design for Changing Times. Speaker: Soleil Tranquilli, owner of Tranquil Gardens, a landscape consulting company. Soleil will present climate-wise solutions for our landscapes and gardens.

February 22, 2022: Attracting Hummingbirds to Your Pollinator Garden. Speaker: Carolyn McMaster. Sacramento County Master Gardener.

March 22, 2022: Why Bees are Critical to our Ecosystem. Speaker: Sean Kriletich of Paloma Pollinators. Sean started with a couple of bee hives when he was nine years old. Over the years, he has witnessed the degrading of our ecosystem which has killed off billions of bees. He knows that the only way to help bees is to educate humans and improve the health of the ecosystem we inhabit together.

April 20 2022: Flower Show Fun: How to Grow Amazing and Prize-Winning Flowers. Speaker: Nina Blonsky—CGCI Judges Council. Nina is a Certified Flower Show Judge certified through the National Garden Clubs, Inc.

May 10 2022: Valley Lode District meeting to be held in the Parasol Room at the Country Club. Please see article in this issue about this event. This will be a morning meeting and will include lunch.

May 24, 2022: The Wonderful World of Begonias: Speaker: Paul Tsamtsis of the Sacramento Begonia Society. Everything you wanted to know about growing this beautiful addition to your home garden. Paul will bring several samples for display and sale.



The End.....