



Volume 18

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## Here's the Dirt

A publication of the River Valley Garden Club

Pam McCabe, President

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### *Rooting for You.....by Pam McCabe, President*

I know you have seen many articles about encouraging pollinators, but I am going to emphasize it again. Maybe this will be a fresh perspective for you, or maybe you are miles ahead of me in bringing pollinators to your garden.

I'm starting a new garden, so I have to revisit what I did to bring bees, butterflies, and birds to my garden. I need to address three questions: (1) What do I plant that bees, butterflies, and birds love, and so do I; (2) What features need to be present that make bees, butterflies, and birds want to linger in my garden; and (3) Which of my actions may be detrimental to the existence of bees, butterflies, and birds?



First, let's look at what to plant. You need blooms year-round, so plan to have something blooming all the time. When selecting plants, include some red, think diversity of flower shapes, and use masses of color. I'm just beginning to understand the concept of providing over-wintering places for beneficial insects — like native grasses. This is a way to keep ladybugs in your garden.

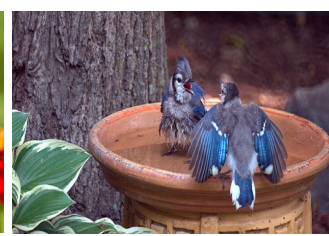
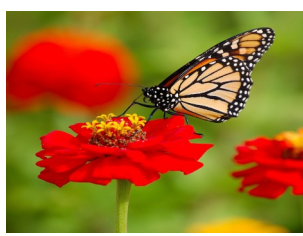
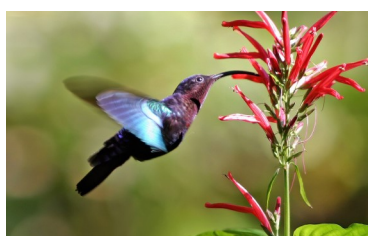
Next, think about what other features besides plants should be present in your garden. Include a water source. This can be a birdbath, a shallow bowl, or a dripping fountain. Provide

perching places within the water feature by placing pebbles or twigs.

And lastly, think about your own behavior that may discourage bees, butterflies, and birds from visiting your garden. Limit your use of pesticides by looking for alternatives and employing the principles of Integrated Pest Management. Use organic fertilizers and biodegradable mulches.

You can create an inviting oasis for bees, butterflies, and birds, even if you only have container gardens. Make your garden a place where both humans and nature meet and interact on a positive and beneficial way. If you are just starting to invite bees, butterflies, and birds to your garden, be patient. It may take a year or two before they find your garden.

Happy Spring!





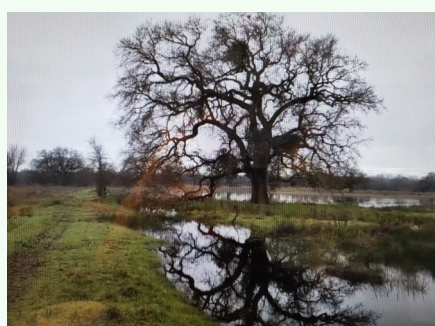
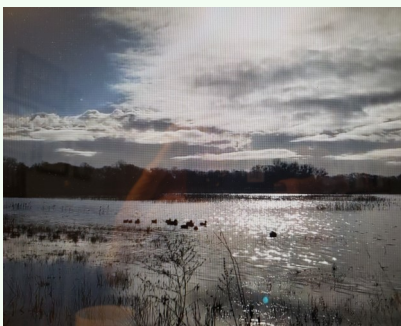
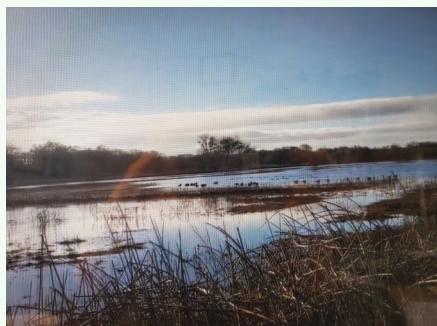
## 14th Annual Galt Winter Bird Festival

The 14th Annual Galt Winter Bird Festival was a virtual event this year, but that didn't stop visitors from experiencing interesting narrated trips through the wetlands that are part of the Pacific Flyway, or enjoying a multitude of birds, both resident and transient.

This virtual tour offered stunning views of the Cosumnes River Preserve, while learning about some bird species that march to the beat of their own drum, such as the great horned owls, the great blue herons, and bald eagles. The tour also included information about managed wetlands, how they work, and why they're so important to sandhill cranes, shorebirds, ducks, geese, and other waterfowl that migrate during the winter season.

The mission and vision of the Cosumnes River Preserve is:

- ◆ To permanently protect flood plains, wetlands, valley oak riparian forests, vernal pool grasslands, and agricultural lands;
- ◆ To sustain a variety of habitats for native plants and animals;
- ◆ To reduce barriers and provide opportunities for all to appreciate the flora and fauna.



The Cosumnes River is one of the last free-flowing rivers west of the Sierra Nevada range, as it has no major dams or levees. Although California wetlands once included 4-5 million acres, today, the habitat loss is between 90-95%. This is a serious issue, as wetlands are essential habitat to a variety of fish, plants, wildlife, and other organisms. Additionally, the oak riparian forest today is less than 2% of what it was in the mid-1800s. All of these issues speak to the damage that humans have wrought on the natural environment.

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## 14th Annual Galt Winter Bird Festival.....

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*Oak gall*

Something that often happens during a nature walk is that the naturalist (or tour guide) will mention interesting features observed during the walk that are not scheduled aspects of the tour, such as oak galls seen on Valley Oak trees. Oak galls are growths or swelling of plant tissue, usually caused by an infestation of small wasps or midges who lay their eggs under the bark. These are not destructive to the tree unless there is an overwhelming number of galls, which may then be removed by pruning.

Another interesting bit of information pertained to vernal pools, which are seasonal bodies of water that provide habitat for distinctive plants and animals. They are typically devoid of fish, and thus allow the safe development of natal amphibian and insect species.

During most years, a vernal pool will experience inundation from precipitation, followed by evapo-transpiration during dry months. Vernal pools are characteristic of Mediterranean climates, like California's Central Valley. Unfortunately, due to human activity, about 90% of California's vernal pool ecosystems have been destroyed, primarily due to urbanization, climate change, and improperly managed grazing by livestock.

Buttonbushes are prevalent throughout the preserve and function as an essential buffet for the wildlife. Waterfowl and other birds love the seeds. Wood ducks use the plant for nest protection, and mallards eat the fruit. Insects and hummingbirds feast on the nectar, and bees use the buttonbush to make honey. Interestingly, the town of Buttonwillow, California, is named for the buttonbush.



*Buttonbush*



*Vernal pool near the former Mather Air Force Base in Sacramento County*

used for medicine herbs. Additionally, cattail down was used for moccasin lining and pillow stuffing.

Cattails also symbolized peace and forgiveness between friends and lovers who may be quarreling. If you hand a cattail to a friend, you are signaling that you are thinking of them, and that you wish them peace and prosperity.

It's amazing how a stroll through nature can reveal so many fascinating aspects of our world and our surroundings. Even a virtual stroll is enriching.

Another prominent feature of this area are cattails, also known as bulrushes. These played a prominent role in many Native American communities, as the heads and seeds were an essential part of their diet. The leaves and stalks were used for weaving mats and baskets, and the roots and pollen were



*Cattails*



## Plant of the Month: The Strawberry Tree

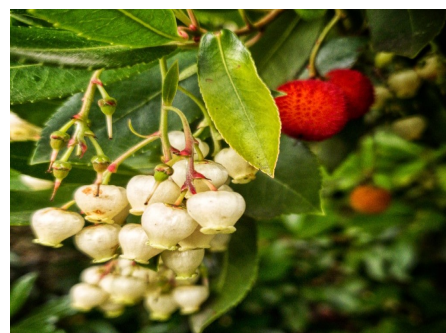
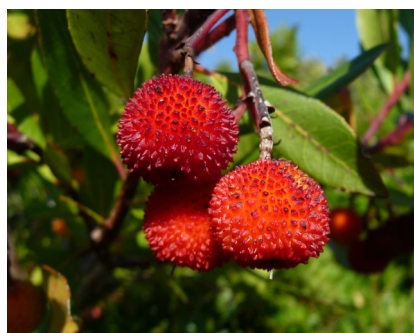


Noted for its remarkable flowers, fruit, and shiny leaves, the Strawberry tree, *arbutus unedo* is a charming broadleaf shrub or small tree pollinated by bees. The round, greenish-yellow fruit appears in the winter, and then gradually ripens to a bright red.

Research reveals that the fruit is edible, but I have two of these trees in my yard, and one day awhile back decided to taste the fruit. I can emphatically attest to the fact that it has absolutely no flavor whatsoever, and may be described as bland and mealy. In fact, the species name “unedo” is Latin for “I eat only one,” which seems to illustrate how unappetizing the fruit can be, as reported by Pliny the Elder, a Roman naturalist and philosopher (who oddly now has a beer named in his honor).

The foliage is a lush and handsome evergreen native to the Mediterranean and Ireland, which is baffling, as these climates are distinctly unlike.

This may speak to the ability of the Strawberry tree to adapt to a variety of growing conditions. It may also speak to the peculiar connection between Ireland and Spain, which includes a variety of curiously different trees growing in western Ireland, particularly in the Kerry and Sligo area. It seems that at some point in history, various Irish rascals boarded boats heading to Spain to avoid being arrested, returning decades later, perhaps bringing Strawberry trees and other flora with them.



The *Sunset Western Garden Book* explains that the Strawberry tree may grow in zones 4-24; damaged in severe winters in zones 4-7, but worth the risk. It also states that “in California, it is one of the best lawn or raised-bed trees. Sun or part shade; needs some shade in the desert.”

In Portugal, the fruit is made into a brandy called *aguardente ce medronos*, or a honey liquor called *Dom Cristina*. From the flower, Sardinians create a bitter honey which is used for homeopathic purposes.

The Coat of Arms of Madrid, Spain, is a bear reaching up to eat the fruit from a Strawberry tree. Evidently this tree enjoys much significance in a variety of cultures. For our purposes, however, it is a lovely tree that is easy to care for, pretty to look at, but let's draw the line at adding the fruit on top of our strawberry shortcake. Even a generous blob of whipped cream can't provide enough flavor.

## *Community Outreach Project: The Farmers Market Returns for 2021*

By Debbie Kolmodin

Spring will be here before we know it, and with that season, comes our annual plant sale fundraiser event!

After last year's successful six month run participating in this community event, it has been decided that we make this an annual fundraiser. Not only was it lots of fun, but also very profitable, allowing us to fully fund our scholarship and grants program. As chair for this event, I need to ask a couple of favors of all members:



*Farmers Market booth in the summer of 2020*

(1) We are looking for members to donate plants and gardening items, to include things like yard art, and all items themed or related to gardening. This could include indoor, as well as outdoor gardening.

We need **six able-bodied men** (one man for each month) to step up and volunteer their time to help Don Kolmodin set up the large canopy and seven tables in the early morning hour of 6:45 a.m. on event day — and then return at 11:45 a.m. to take it all down. It takes about 25 minutes to set up, and then again about 25 minutes to take it down

If you can help by volunteering your husband, or if there is a male member who would kindly lend a hand — it would be greatly appreciated!

### **Here are the dates for our Farmers Market Plant Sales:**

- ♦ **Saturday, May 8**
- ♦ **Saturday, June 12**
- ♦ **Saturday, July 10**
- ♦ **Saturday, August 14**
- ♦ **Saturday, September 11**
- ♦ **Saturday, October 9**



**What can you donate?** Plants you've divided, seedlings, cuttings, bird houses, garden art, succulents and /or succulent arrangements, cute and quirky items for the garden, like metal stakes with sunflowers, rocks painted like little critters, produce from your garden.....

***All questions pertaining to the Farmers Market may be directed to Debbie Kolmodin at [cagodmother60@gmail.com](mailto:cagodmother60@gmail.com) or via cell phone at (916) 458-2129.***



## ***March Meeting: “Plant America, Plant Native: Creating a National Park in Your Own Backyard***



*Dr. Elizabeth Seagull who is  
planting a National Park in her  
own back yard*

For our March 23 meeting, RVGC is excited to announce that we have a speaker who will address our National Garden Club President's theme of ***Plant America***.

Entitled, “**Plant America, Plant Native: Creating a National Park in Your Own Backyard**,” this talk will focus on bringing wildlife into your yard by using native plants and sustainable gardening methods.

Dr. Elizabeth (Betty) Seagull is a lifelong gardener and nature enthusiast. She was a professor at Michigan State University for thirty years, and after retiring, had a private psychotherapy practice for fourteen years.

Now fully retired, her passion is to save the world by planting native plants and creating an environment friendly to all the little insects and critters with whom we share our planet.

Dr. Seagull was president of her local Wild Ones, Red Cedar Chapter (*Wild Ones being a group devoted to wildlife, not a motorcycle movie starring Marlon Brando*).

She has served on the Executive Board of the Wildflower Association of Michigan since 2016, and edits quarterly newsletters for two different wildlife groups.

She may be described as a true amateur home gardener, as none of her professional degrees are related to the topic of this presentation. A love of nature, enthusiasm, energy, eagerness to learn, and experience with the many successes and failures of home gardening with native plants are her most relevant credentials. If she can do it — then so can you!

This will be our final Zoom presentation of the season, and is scheduled for **7 p.m. on Tuesday, March 23**. As the weather seems to be warming up, we are planning outside events for April and May. Stay tuned for details.

Looking forward to seeing everyone on Zoom on March 23! Sign-in details will be sent out a few days prior to the session.



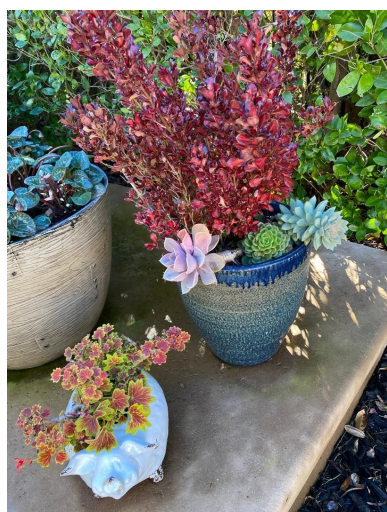
## *Members' Corner*

In mid-February, Pam McCabe sent out an email asking what our members have been doing in their gardens during these colder months. We received three responses, so perhaps many of our members are just dreaming about their summer gardens, or maybe just taking a break.

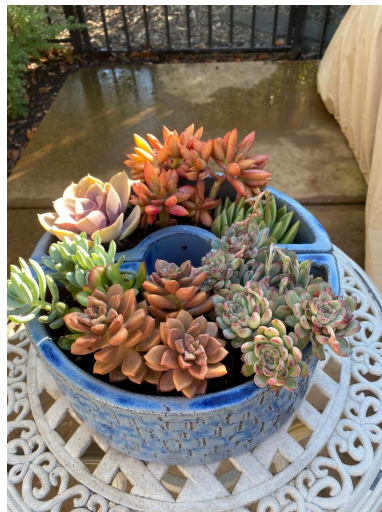
Sharon Barton responded that although she doesn't have any photos at the moment, her Sweet Peas are popping up all over. Sharon loves the independent flowers that reseed themselves and appear in new places. Here are some Sweet Pea photos from the web. Absolutely beautiful colors!



Debbie Kolmodin sent several photos of her succulents:



*I think I see a barberry, a touch of cyclamen, some tiny geranium leaves, and a ghost plant*



*A lovely blue pot of succulents*



*Interesting assortment of succulents accompanied by a little green bicycle*

**Calling all members:** Any time you are working on an interesting garden project or would like to share photos of your garden, please feel free to send your photos to share with other garden club members. In fact, for next month's issue, it would be fun to see what is popping up in our collective gardens. We can call it, "Spring in the River Valley." Send in your photos of daffodils, hyacinths, irises, or whatever is coming up, even if it's a surprise! You may send them to the newsletter editor at [ncompton43@att.net](mailto:ncompton43@att.net).  
(See "Members' Corner continued on following page.....")



## *Members' Corner.....continued*

Irene Slavens has really been busy in her garden in Wilton. She reports that she really enjoys this time of year, because the peach blossoms are coming out and they're so pretty.

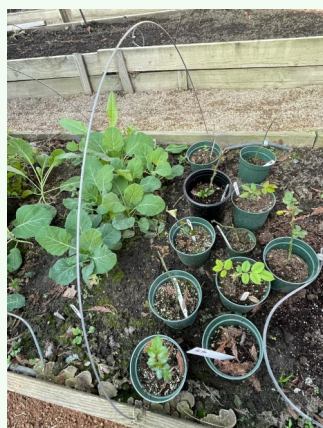


*Irene's peach blossoms*



*Mini-greenhouses made from cranberry juice bottles*

This is an experiment with cantaloupe and watermelons which were planted early and covered with greenhouses made from greenhouses made from cranberry juice bottles. Some sprouted a mere two weeks after planting!



*Rose cuttings in little pots next to cabbage*



*Propagated rose — top view*

Top view of a rose that Irene propagated. It is planted near what she calls her "big girl roses."

Irene taught us how to propagate roses at our propagation clinic in October. Did anyone else try it? If so, send photos!



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## ***Garden Trivia and Fun Facts.....***

- ◆ There are more microorganisms in one teaspoon of soil than there are people in the world.
- ◆ The fastest growing woody plant in the world is bamboo, which has been known to grow 35 inches a single day.
- ◆ The average strawberry has 200 seeds, and is the only fruit that bears its seeds on the outside.



## *Landscape Design School Planned for 2022*



The Valley Lode District has announced that it will host a National Garden Club Landscape Design School in early 2022. The focus of this series of courses will be to enrich the gardening experience by allowing gardeners to:

- ◆ Develop a sense of appreciation, pride, and knowledge about our private, public and historical gardens;

- ◆ To become better informed in order to promote positive

changes in our surroundings to encourage beauty, utility, convenience, sound ecological practices, and ease of maintenance;

- ◆ Encourage a better understanding of the landscape design process to promote landscapes that will sustain sound management;
- ◆ Stimulate interest in all phases of landscape design, including community planning;
- ◆ Develop a contingent of qualified Landscape Design Consultants to serve in such decision-making areas of public life, and providing leadership, educational programs, scholarships, awards, and promoting better landscape design.

These in-person classes will be held on the following dates:

**Course 1: January 15, 16, 2022**

**Course 3: February 26, 27, 2022**

**Course 2: February 12, 13, 2022**

**Course 4: March 12, 13, 2022**

The Landscape Design School curriculum has been developed by National Garden Clubs, Inc., and then customized by the course instructors. Classes are open to garden club members and to the public.

Additional information will be forthcoming. Stay tuned.....

### **Membership Update**

Please update your membership information to include the following changes:

- ◆ New address: **Pam McCabe:** 27081 Mace Boulevard, El Macero, CA 95618.  
No house phone.
- ◆ **Loretta Lutz:** New email:  
LorettaRuthLutz@gmail.com



*Accountant explaining to a gardener that plants cannot be listed as dependents on IRS tax forms*