



Here's the Dirt

A publication of the River Valley Garden Club

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

I love dahlias. Many years ago while visiting my mom in Washington State, we went on a garden tour that included a dahlia farm. The owner of the farm went to my high school and is now a commercial dahlia grower.

One of the memorable sites from our India trip in February 2020 was the mass plantings of dahlias — it took my breath away. When I returned from that trip (incidentally at the onset of the pandemic) I was inspired to plant several dahlia tubers in close proximity.

Last year, when we were in lockdown, remember how Berniece Jones sold dahlia tubers from her front porch? I bought two of them from her and added them to my dahlia patch. I had glorious dahlia blooms from July through the end of October.

I've previously shared my gardening space challenge since moving to a condo — well, I found room for two dahlias. I ordered them from my high school alumnus in Washington. One is called "Just Married" in honor of my granddaughter's upcoming marriage this month.



A Just Married dahlia bloom

Dahlias are not only beautiful in your garden, but they make outstanding cut flowers. They like full sun. When you plant the tuber, it is wise to place a stake next to the tuber. Dahlias require staking, and if you wait to place the stake, you may puncture the tuber. You should not water dahlias until they are about six inches high, as watering earlier could cause the tubers to rot.



To have a bushy plant with more flowers, it is important to pinch out the center growing point when the plant is about one foot high. I also found it helpful to feed my dahlias with a foliar spray.

If you haven't planted any dahlia tubers yet, you still have time, since they can be planted through June 1st in our area. ☐



Tour to the Worm Whisperer Farm



While all of our club tours include some measure of adventure, the trip to the Worm Whisperer takes first place in the odyssey of actually finding the location. First, one must turn onto Dillard Road, then turn left before reaching Highway 99, eventually arriving at the parking lot of a wholesale nursery in Galt. Then a phone call must be placed to the Worm Whisperer, who will guide you through a labyrinth of dirt and dusty roads, random goats, odd pieces of farm machinery rusted in place, and ramshackle barns and out-buildings that began collapsing during the Great Depression.

Eventually this route will take you to a wide-open field featuring stacks of cardboard boxes, open pit compost piles, and the congenial Worm Whisperer himself, whose name is Antuan Jackson (AJ).

AJ is a one-man operation that breeds and ships out hundreds of pounds of worms every month to as far away as Alaska and New York. He takes pride in his vermicompost, which is essentially a super soil that contains five times more nitrogen, seven times more phosphorus, and eleven times more potassium than regular soil. This super-soil results in a higher yield of better tasting produce without the use of chemicals.



The Worm Whisperer became fascinated with the process of how worms are so critical to the health of our soil when he searched for a way to ensure that his wife, who was ill with cancer, was eating healthy, chemical-free food.

He describes his process as “just regular old composting stuff, using cardboard, food waste, poop, and earthworms doing their earthworm thing.”

AJ believes that as a society, we can do better than tossing our food waste into a landfill. We need a way to clean our waste, and then use it to grow healthy food without the use of chemicals. “This is what the worms can do for us,” he said.

Vermicomposting increases fertility, water retention, and carbon sequestration in the soil. This is sustainable farming, resulting in clean, healthy soil.

The Worm Whisperer is passionate about his work and his focused desire to change the way society currently looks at waste, like food scraps and animal waste, which can easily be recycled into rich soil.

He truly believes he is on a mission to enrich our soil, reduce disease and waste, enhance the understanding of our food-and-waste cycle, and bring people closer to the earth.

It’s a mission worth pursuing.



Plant of the Month: The Lovely Sunflower



Did you know that the National Garden Bureau,* a nonprofit whose mission is to inspire and connect gardeners nationwide, has declared **2021** as the **Year of the Sunflower?**

And it's no wonder, as it seems that everyone loves sunflowers. Large, colorful, and stately, the sunflower is heat-tolerant, resistant to pests, and just simply beautiful.

Sunflowers make excellent cut flowers, and are attractive not only to humans, but to bees and birds as well.

As sunflowers dislike having their roots disturbed, it is recommended that their seeds be sowed directly into the ground. Choose a sunny spot, as these beauties need direct sunlight 6-8 hours each day. Be sure that the location has well-draining soil, and is preferably located away from being affected by strong winds. A long a fence-line or near a building would be ideal.

Sunflowers should be planted one to one and a half inches deep and about six inches apart. If you wish, you can plant multiple seeds, and then thin them out leaving the strongest specimens when the plants are approximately six inches tall. While the plant is still small, water around the root zone about three to four inches from the plant, and sprinkle snail or slug bait around it.



Sunflowers are heliotropes, which means they turn to face the sun as it travels across the sky. In the morning, they face the east. During the day, the motor cells in their stem tilt the flowers to follow the sun across the sky. By evening, they will face west. But some time overnight when we are all asleep, they turn east again to await the rising sun.

Today's sunflowers may trace their ancestry to plants found at archeological sites dating back to 3,000 B.C. While they grew with abundance in the area now known as the Great Plains, sunflowers were first purposely cultivated by Native Americans in the Southwest and Mississippi River areas to be used as a source of medicine, fiber, seeds, and oil.

When the European settlers arrived in North America, they immediately recognized the value of sunflowers and sent the seeds back to Europe where they found their way into English cottage gardens and Van Gogh paintings.

Long beloved as a part of the rural landscape, sunflowers have been embraced by gardeners as a showy ornamental plant which makes a statement in a home garden among flowers and vegetables, and creates a homey feeling that makes a gardener smile.

**The National Garden Bureau has an interesting and lively web site. See the story on the next page from their web site.*



Insight Garden Program at San Quentin

The National Garden Bureau, a nonprofit organization described on the previous page, has launched a philanthropic program that supports the building and growth of therapeutic gardens across North America.

Past President Heather Kibble believes that, “Caring for plants and experiencing nature brings healing and purpose to those whose lives have been affected by illness, addiction, violence, abuse, or incarceration.”

Toward this end, the Insight Garden Program was born. Groups interested in seed money for their Therapeutic Garden may write for a grant from the National Garden Bureau.

San Quentin was awarded a grant through this process, and as a result, the prison has developed an environmental education curriculum combined with vocational gardening and landscape training so that incarcerated persons may reconnect to self, community, and the natural world.

This gardening program is designed to transform lives, end the ongoing cycle of incarceration and recidivism, and create safer communities.

The program operates at the intersection of environment, criminal justice, and physical, behavioral, and mental health issues, as well as providing incarcerated individuals with the tools and resources needed to obtain employment upon release.

Over the past sixteen years, the Insight Garden Program has designed, installed, and maintained



two gardens on H Unit at San Quentin, and has worked with over 1,000 participants, many of whom have gone on to be successfully employed by green sector employers, including their community partner, Planting Justice.

One of the participants was amazed by how healthy and beautiful the roses were. “The first time I saw these roses, I was tripping out about how well they were doing, even in these harsh conditions. I thought if they can do so well with all this concrete, fencing, and razor wire, maybe I can, too.”

Research has repeatedly shown that when prisoners are engaged in some form of learning, be it gardening, immersion in an educational program, or career training, the result is a much lower rate of recidivism, more productive members of society upon release, and stronger, safer communities.

May 25 Meeting to Feature Irene's Veggie Garden



Our club meeting on Tuesday, May 25, promises to be a real treat, as we will be visiting the gardens of Irene and Mason in Wilton. This is no casual backyard garden; Irene is a real farmer with a quality vegetable garden that produces gorgeous and healthy produce. This is how Irene describes her venture into gardening:

"I started planting as a child in San Antonio by planting red and blue colored popcorn in our backyard to see if the corn would grow in colors. Much to my dismay, no colors. But amazingly it did grow corn stalks. I have always liked growing vegetables, roses, and going to the country to see wildflowers. Years later when we got a house in Oakland, we started growing veggies and roses in our back yard. The garden was small, but had a bounty of broccoli and lettuce. Our roses did really well, and our front garden was filled up with native plants from Annie's Annuals. (Love that place)!"

Then we retired to Wilton with more land, but not a lot of landscaping. With lots of rototilling, soil from Connor's Sand and Gravel brought in by the truckload, and aged horse manure (courtesy of our horses), we started the veggie garden. That was several years of work with my husband, Mason, doing all the trucking, wheelbarrowing, and massive weeding. The last piece to add was a framework of shade cloth to protect the veggies from the 100 degree heat.

We started our rose garden with about 40 roses seven years ago from POW Nursery. They have now been supplemented with Green Acres roses, and now roses I propagate from cuttings. The roses are quite a project with winter pruning, spring to summer spraying (Beesafe spray for rose diseases), deadheading, and pruning.

Back to the veggies — that is what I really like to grow, so that makes me more of a farmer. There is nothing better for taste and the soul than eating food from your garden. With the veggies, chickens, and bee hives, we eat mostly local. We grow year-round, planting both seeds and nursery starts. We use shade cloth for the heat, and frost guard for the winter. Our horses continually provide us with compost, and the bees help with pollinating the plants. Plus we get some of their great honey in the fall).

Now we are doing lots of experiments. This year my husband planted watermelons and cantaloupes. He cut the bottoms off plastic juice bottles and put them over the plantings, and it worked. We also did the juice bottle green houses for the rose cuttings. Those worked as well. Sometimes you try, and if it doesn't work, you move on...as do all gardeners. That's what makes it so much fun — always learning and getting fun surprises."

Irene's address is **12841 Leo Lane in Wilton**. You will receive an email with directions to her home prior to the meeting.

Our meeting will start at 10 a.m. and be prepared to be inspired by the lovely and functional gardens, as well as the gorgeous roses. I even love watching her beautiful horses; Ragnar is my particular favorite.

This is an outdoor location, so please wear sturdy shoes, as the ground can be uneven in some places. You will not want to miss this opportunity to see a true veggie farmer in action.



World Wide Naked Gardening Day!



Okay — did you know that World Wide Naked Gardening Day is an annual international event that is celebrated on the first Saturday in May? This year, the first Saturday is May 1st, so you may want to hop to it so you don't miss out on the celebration.

I had heard of this phenomenon before, but didn't realize it was actually a **thing**. But yes indeed, it is a thing, and here is some valuable information you may want to be aware of in the event that you decide to join in the merriment.

World Wide Naked Gardening Day was founded and organized by Mark Storey, consulting editor of *Nude and Natural* magazine, and permaculturist Jacob Gabriel, as a project of the Body Freedom Collaborative. The trend has been spreading quickly.

As originally envisioned, Storey thought this day would involve *guerrilla gardening pranksterism, such as hopping out of a van in an urban environment and immediately engaging in gardening activities in unauthorized areas.

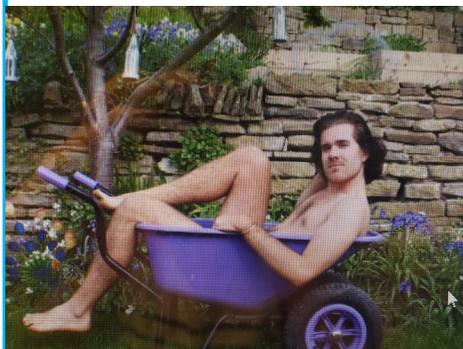
According to NBC's "Today," World Wide Naked Gardening Day has become an annual tradition that celebrates weeding, planting flowers, and trimming hedges in the buff. Organizers assert that, "besides being liberating, nude gardening is second only to swimming as an activity that people are ready to consider doing nude." While this celebratory day is linked to a movement of nudists who promote wholesome and unashamed acceptance of the human body, the day is meant to be funny, light-hearted, and non-political.

So — how do you plan to celebrate World Wide Naked Gardening Day? The list of options is wide open. But here are some gardening activities you'd probably want to avoid:

1. **Planting roses.** Better to stay away from thorny bushes.
2. **Re-potting your cacti.** Working with spiny succulents is best left to another day.
3. **Going to the Community Garden.** This is self-explanatory.
4. **For the sake of your neighbors, perhaps refraining from trimming the low hedges in your front yard.**
5. **Firing up the hedge trimmer.** And think twice about using ANY power tools.
6. **Forgetting to put on sunblock.** — and please refrain from asking some random person to help you with your back.
7. **Posing in a wheelbarrow.** Just don't even consider it. Thank you.
8. **Climbing a tree.** Unless, of course you have a solid plan for getting down.



As yet there is no official word as to mask requirements.



No. Do not do this.

Note: If you are not familiar with the concept of guerrilla gardening, here is the explanation:

“Guerrilla Gardening is the act of gardening on land that the gardener does not have a legal right to cultivate, such as an abandoned site, areas not being cared for, or private property.”

Although guerrilla gardening is considered a property crime, there is very little evidence that any errant gardeners have been prosecuted.

Isn't gardening wonderful? We learn something new every day!

Upcoming Events.....

Monday, May 3: Trip to Horton's Iris Farm in Loomis. Meet at the RMA parking lot at 11 a.m. Horton's Iris farm is located in a peaceful country setting that showcases 1200 varieties of irises in bloom and for purchase. Irises are known to inspire all the senses. Some are fragrant, some are historic, some are reblooming, some have flounces or fuzzy hairs, and all are stately and beautiful. Call our Tour Captain Sharon Barton at 916-354-0408 to reserve your spot. And pack a lunch, as we have reserved picnic tables from 12 noon to 2 p.m.



Saturday, May 8: First Farmers Market outing for 2021. Located on Cantova Drive across from the Catholic Church. The garden club will be there from 8 a.m.—12 noon, and come early, because we have some wonderful succulent arrangements, garden art, veggies, plants and flowers donated by Big Oak and Green Acres Nurseries. If you have items to donate, please bring them between 7:15 and 7:45 a.m. Thank you in advance for your support of our Farmers Market project. Remember — sales from the market is what allows us to fund our scholarship and grants program.



Farmers Market photos from 2020

Tuesday, May 18: Sacramento River Valley District end-of-year meeting at Heringer Estates Winery in Clarksburg. We will be meeting in their beautiful gardens beginning at 10 a.m. where we will hear a speaker who will provide information on growing grapes and the art of winemaking.

Heringer has been a family-owned operation since 1868 when they immigrated from Holland and came to the Sacramento River Valley to farm. Through seven generations the family has farmed various row crops — primarily alfalfa, corn, sugar beets, and tomatoes.

In 1970 they planted their first vineyard. The Heringer family believes... "we are called upon to leave this land healthier and happier for future generations through dedicated sustainability in our vineyard and winemaking practices, conscientious water management, integration of native plants, and rotating cover crops. The vineyards thrive with life and become a home for local flora & fauna." If you have not already made your reservations, please call Pam McCabe at 916-673-7712.

Tuesday, May 25: Meeting and tour of Irene Slavens' gardens in Wilton. Please see story on page 5 of this publication.

Sunday, May 30—Friday, June 4: California Garden Clubs, Inc. Annual Convention—(via Zoom)

Tuesday June 22 — Club meeting and end-of-year party beginning at 10 a.m. at Stonehouse Park, Rancho Murieta. Kokodama demonstration by Deb Rooney and installation of officers for 2021-2022.



Bountiful Blooms....

Note: This article has been summarized from the *National Gardener*, a publication of the *National Garden Clubs, Inc.*, of which our club is an affiliate.



In 1903, Japanese cherry trees were first introduced into the U.S., and many varieties were planted throughout the nation. In 1912, the mayor of Tokyo, Japan, presented Japanese cherry trees to the city of Washington, D.C. as a cultural symbol of hope, renewal, and friendship.

These cherry trees were Kwanzan Cherries, and were planted around the 107-acre Tidal Basin, which is part of West Potomac Park. Built in the 1800s, this man-made 10-foot deep reservoir was built to harness the power of tides from the nearby Potomac River.

Adjacent to the Tidal Basin are well-known and widely recognized National Monuments, including the Jefferson Memorial and the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial.

Named after a mountain in Japan, the dazzling, showy flowering Kwanzan cherry tree is believed to be the hardiest of all species of cherry trees. Each spring in our nation's capitol, Kwanzan cherry trees provide a stunning floral display of large clusters of deep pink double blooms. The blossoms are on full display at the National Cherry Blossom Festival, an annual event that attracts people from across the U.S., as well as visitors from around the globe. It's a breathtaking sight.



Welcome to Our New Members!

As we go to press, we have four new members — with four other membership forms requested by potential new members.

New members are:

Carla Hanlon	Holland Lattin
Athena Spanner	Stacy Garza

We look forward to meeting you and having you join in our club events and activities!

A thought about hoses.....

Last week I did an unremarkable thing by purchasing a new hose. What is remarkable is that for the first time in a lifetime of hose-buying, I read the directions. And here is what I learned, in caps and bold letters: **WARNING! DO NOT DRINK FROM THIS HOSE!**

Really? I spent my childhood without air conditioning. In the summer we opened the fire plugs so they would squirt out a huge geyser that we could run through to keep cool in the sultry New York summers. And we drank from hoses. Lots of hose-drinking. Apparently hoses come embedded with harsh chemicals. Bacteria may have formed inside of dark hoses while waiting to be purchased. I understand that we do not like these things in our body, but do we want them on our plants??

Yarn Bombing at the Shepard Garden & Art Center

If you have ever attended a Sacramento River Valley District meeting, you have traveled to the Shepard Garden & Arts Center in McKinley Park to do so. Many clubs meet at the Center, mostly related to gardens and art.

One such club is the Sacramento Center for Textile Arts (SCTA) which has decided that it would be uplifting for us and the general population to create a Yarn Bombing event to bring a smile and good thoughts to others.

Yarn Bombing is a type of temporary graffiti or street art that employs colorful displays of knitted or crocheted yarns or fiber, rather than paint or chalk. Some engage in yarn bombing as a fun and creative way to use up leftover yarn.

Yarn bombing traces its formal origins back to Houston, Texas, in 2005, when one resident attached yarn to the door handle of her boutique. Since then, it has expanded to city streets, where residents cover telephone poles, bike racks, and tree branches in colorful yarn. As opposed to graffiti, many critics have deemed yarn bombing to be a more acceptable form of urban art, as its sole purpose is to beautify public spaces.

Like all public art, be it sanctioned commissions or self-initiated, unauthorized formats, yarn bombing imposes a particular aesthetic onto an environment that may be appreciated by some, but may not appeal to everyone. Yet, yarn bombing is necessarily ephemeral due to its use of materials, and perhaps the most environmentally friendly graffiti, because it can easily be removed with a pair of scissors with no damage left behind.

SCTA has acquired permission by the City of Sacramento for this display. International Yarn Bombing Day is June 12, 2021. The display will remain until July 7.

Plastic Picnic Forks?

If your garden is turning into the neighborhood litter box, bury plastic picnic forks around your plants with prongs poking up from the soil.

This will stop unwanted cats and other four-legged critters from digging around your plants.

