



# Here's the Dirt

A publication of the River Valley Garden Club

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

Last week I had two surprise blooms – a begonia and a clematis. Is it something I did, or was it Mother Nature that produced these surprise blooms?

First let's examine the begonia. A few years ago I bought two begonias at the Sacramento Begonia Society's annual sale. — one called Escargot, and the other called Fireworks. The names give you an idea of the intriguing leaves. The Fireworks begonia has black, metallic silver, and purple leaves. I chose them for their leaves, not knowing that they produce blooms.



I planted them in 12" plastic pots and placed them in my backyard shade garden. The one called Escargot died after a couple of years, but the one called Fireworks looked better this summer than it ever has.

What caused my begonia to bloom in October? Was it something I did, or was it Mother Nature intervening? Was it that I used a foliar fertilizer on it? Was the plant mature enough to produce blooms? Was it prompted by our unseasonably warm October weather? Was it due to climate change effectively reducing the frost we get in this area?



As I dug deep into the web, I found out that my begonia is called a rex begonia, meaning king begonia, and it originates from India. I also found out that they are either grown indoors, outdoors as an annual in zones 3-9, or outdoors as a perennial in hardiness zone 10. We live in zone 9. I learned that I should move it to a smaller clay or terracotta pot and it should be in a sunny **indoor** location at above 60 degrees. Oh, and sometimes they produce small blooms, described by some as "insignificant flowers that are typically pinched off to encourage strong leaves." It may not be a significant flower, but I think it is pretty and a welcome surprise.

For the clematis, I also pursued the question — was it something I did, or was it Mother Nature that caused it to bloom in October? Prior to our member garden tour, I cautiously trimmed back my clematis. They were looking so bad. I have two of them and I learned several years ago that the two have very different pruning rules. I learned the hard way that one of them likes to be cut back almost to the ground after blooming, while the other one won't bloom the next year if pruned severely. This has to do with whether the blooms develop on old growth or new growth. I apparently have one of each. The one that doesn't tolerate much pruning was looking kind of messy, so I carefully tried to remove the brown, crispy leaves to clean it up.

*Rooting for You.....continued from front page.....*

Clematis can survive in hardiness zones as low as 3. It is tough and easy to grow, but pruning is rather tricky. You have to know which type you have. One source said it is important for you to save the label that comes with your clematis for a description of pruning requirements depending on when it blooms and if the blooms are on old wood or new wood. You can get clematis that bloom anywhere from late winter to late fall — another bit of information you need from the label.

In conclusion, was it me, or was it Mother Nature that caused my surprise blooms? For the begonia, I think maybe my foliar spray might have spurred blooms, or maybe the plant was mature enough to produce blooms. For the clematis, I think it was a freak of nature — why was there a flower bud in October? My pruning should have discouraged blooming, not encouraged it.

Ah, gardening — there is so much to learn!

***What was that giant truck doing by Laguna Joaquin?***

After nearly a year of researching the process involved in acquiring and installing a Blue Star marker, obtaining permission from RMA, locating a perfect resting place, and planning a ceremony, the Blue Star Memorial By-Way Marker project is ready to be launched.

Earlier in the year, co-chairs Debbie Kolmodin and Nancy Compton checked out potential locations for the marker. Of importance was that the location be easily accessible, visually pleasing, and prominently displayed for all community members to view and enjoy.

Rock shopping came next, and a perfect rock with a flat side was chosen. On October 22, the rock was delivered by a giant truck and installed under a tree looking out on Laguna Joaquin.

The ceremony is planned for Wednesday, November 11 at 11 a.m., and will include a color guard from local Boy Scout Troop #633, patriotic music by Angie Friedrich, and thoughts from veteran community member Jack Seigal. Shane Looper, President, California Garden Clubs, Inc. will be in attendance and will address the group, as will Pacific Region Garden Clubs, Inc., Director Robin Pokorsky.

Club members and their families are invited. Current health protocols that include **wearing of masks and social distancing** will be observed. As the ceremony will last approximately 20-30 minutes, chairs will be provided for honored guests only. ☐



## Last Farmers Market and Awards Ceremony

Saturday, October 10th, was the last Farmers Market appearance for our club until next spring — and it was truly an enormous success, netting nearly \$700 for our Scholarship/Grants program.



Typically, our Farmers Market day begins just about daybreak, with Debbie and Don Kolmodin saving our space, often in the dark, and then Don Kolmodin, Pat McCabe, and Ray Trujillo erecting the pop-up tent and setting up the tables. By 7:15 a.m., members start bringing in plants, garden art, bird houses, flower arrangements, and related items that the general public seems to love.

An added bonus was the Awards Ceremony that began at 10:30, at which time the RVGC awarded our 2020 grants and honored those who have contributed so much to the success of the club.

Accepting a \$500 grant for Mountain Creek Middle School's garden program was Michelle Blomberg, one of the founders of the school garden, which has now become a part of the school curriculum, and won a first place award in the School Garden category from the California Garden Clubs, Inc.



Michelle Blomberg accepting award for Mountain Creek Middle School

Also accepting a \$500 grant on behalf of the Murieta Trail Stewardship was John Wetherford who expressed gratitude for the gift to help maintain the trails.

Greg Gayton, Community Services Director for Green Acres Nursery received a Certificate of Appreciation for the many generous donations the club has received for the Farmers Market Sales.



Debbie Kolmodin with Greg Gayton of Green Acres

Gail Bullen, reporter for the *River Valley Times*, was gifted with a Penny Pines acre for her exceptional coverage of the club's many events and activities.

Bob and Nancy Mees, publishers of the *Rancho Murieta Neighbors* magazine, were also awarded a Penny Pines acre for including an "In the Garden" column written by our members in their monthly publication.

It's no wonder our club is so successful with the many community partners and supporters who help further our mission. ☐



John Wetherford, Murieta Trail Stewardship



Gail Bullen, *River Valley Times* (left), and Bob and Nancy Mees, *Rancho Murieta Neighbors* (right)

## Hiking the Gnome Trail



You will recall last month’s story about the Murieta Trail Stewardship being awarded one of the club’s grants this year. The Stewardship was formed as a community volunteer service organization working in cooperation with local agencies to support the trail network behind Rancho Murieta.

The mission of the Murieta Trail Stewardship is to create, enhance, and preserve great trail experiences for hikers, walkers, bird watchers, mountain bikers, trail runners, equestrians, and all those who enjoy the outdoors. This list doesn’t mention gardeners, but club members decided that we belong in the last category — those who enjoy the outdoors.

As many members had not hiked the trails before, two hikes on consecutive Tuesdays (in honor of social distancing), were planned, and the Gnome Trail was the selected footpath. The origin of the

Gnome Trail is somewhat murky, at least to this writer, but it couldn’t have been more delightful. It’s enough to bring out the child within.



Hikers are immediately greeted by all manner of little gnomes, peeking out from behind small trees, lurking in the bushes, loitering amongst the river rocks, and swinging from low-hanging branches.

A gnome with a tall hat standing perpendicular to the trunk of a small oak tree invites hikers to “bring us gnome friends.”

Hikers have apparently been paying attention, because there is no shortage of gnomes, seemingly everywhere.



Even a gnome food truck is available for hungry gnomes in need of an ice cream cone fix.

The culmination of the hike was finding the Wedding Party, a large group of gnomes grouped around a bride and groom (and a strange-looking pastor) guarded quietly by a fawn.



The RVGC has added a gnome to the trail, but since gnomes can be sneaky, they’re not always easy to find. See if you can find our gnome elsewhere in this publication.



## Sacramento is Tomato Country

Tomatoes are almost synonymous with Sacramento. They love our long, hot summers, and gardeners love them because they're so prolific.

But did you know that today's summer favorite was feared in Europe for more than 200 years? A little publication called *Pocket Worthy* tells why.

To begin with, the nickname for the fruit was "poison apple" because it was thought that people got sick and died after eating them. But truth be told, wealthy Europeans used pewter plates, which were high in lead content. And because tomatoes are so high in acidity, when placed on a pewter plate, the tomato would leach lead from the plate, resulting in many deaths due to lead poisoning.

When pizza was invented in Naples in the 1880s, the tomato began to enjoy widespread popularity in Italy, confirming the prevalent belief that tomatoes were best eaten in warmer climates.



By the mid 1800's hundreds of tomato recipes appeared in periodicals and newspapers, but fears and rumors of the plant's potential poison lingered. Then — a new concern emerged: the Green Tomato Worm, measuring three to four inches in length with what appeared to be a horn sticking out of its back. The worms started attacking tomato patches in New York. Rumor had it that a mere brush with such a worm could result in death.

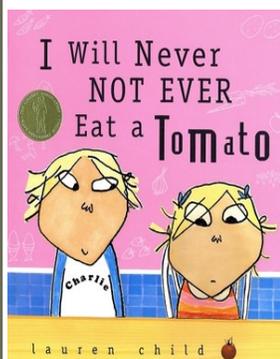
So tomatoes have been under their share of suspicion for generations. But the real question is: Is a tomato a vegetable — or is it a fruit? Apparently it depends upon whether you're a botanist or a Supreme Court Justice. It seems that in 1887 the Supreme Court was apparently not as busy as it is today, because they took up the question about tomatoes being a fruit or a vegetable. Their decision? Tomatoes are a vegetable. Botanists disagree.



In its strict botanical sense, the tomato is a fruit, as a fruit is the fleshy or dry ripened ovary of a plant enclosing the seed or seeds. Thus apricots, bananas, grapes, even bean pods, cucumbers, and almonds are all technically fruits.

Each summer I like to try growing different types of tomatoes, attempting to find the most perfect one for salads and pasta sauce.

This summer I grew a tomato plant called *Summerlast*. Although my other tomatoes are done for the season, as we go to press, the *Summerlast* is outside pushing out great, red, delicious tomatoes, even though I've stopped paying attention to it, or even watering it. So the *Summerlast* wins the prize in my garden for 2020, and I will certainly be looking for several plants next season.



If you have ever had children, you know that they often have a dubious relationship with vegetables, and tomatoes in particular. In fact, there is even a word for this condition: That word is **lacanophobia**, which literally means "fear of vegetables."

The cure for this condition is growing up and becoming a gardener who enjoys growing this spectacular summer veggie in the warm Sacramento sunshine. □

## *Plant propagation topic of October meeting*

With propagation being the focus of RVGC's October 27 meeting, the club met at Stonehouse Park in three socially-distanced groups with a presenter at each of the three stations.

At Station #1, Irene Slavens talked about her enormous garden in Wilton, and brought some of the vegetables she has grown from seed. She also demonstrated the process for propagating roses by cutting off a stem. It's interesting that cuttings from the top and side of the plant are preferred, as they seem to root better than cuttings from the middle or bottom. *Directions on rose propagation are included in this newsletter.*

At Station #2, Pam McCabe explained how to propagate geraniums, which is also done by using cuttings from the main plant.



*Pam McCabe discussing the method for propagating geraniums*

Geraniums are a popular plant to propagate, as they are easy to maintain, tough, and extremely prolific.

One major plus is the fact that geraniums have no dormant period, which means they can be propagated throughout the year.

At Station #3, Nancy Compton demonstrated two methods for propagating succulents: one method uses succulent leaves, which, when separated from the main plant can lay on a shallow bed of cactus and succulent soil, eventually producing a baby at the cut end. Another method of propagating succulents is by separating pups from the main plant.

At the end of each presentation, the presenters packed up their items in little red wagons and rolled on to the next station, so that by the end of the program, attendees had seen all three demonstrations.

Our meetings in the park have been enormously successful and thoroughly enjoyed by our members; however, cooler weather is on the horizon. Typically the club does not schedule a program in November or December because of the holidays.

Therefore, our next program is scheduled for Tuesday, January 26 at which time we will be Zooming with Jan Fetler, former member and Master Gardener, who will provide us with a program focused on the importance of bees in our lives and on our planet. For the January meeting we will be returning to our regular evening meeting time — 7 p.m. **(\* Note: All photos in this story by Gail Bullen)**



*Irene Slavens demonstrating rose propagation*



*Nancy Compton showing how to propagate succulents by separating a leaf that will then produce a baby*

## *Propagating Roses...by Irene Slavens.....*

1. **Gather your tools.** First, you will need some gardening, cutting, and potting tools, including:
  - \* Clean six inch pot
  - \* Potting soil
  - \* Sharp sterilized cutting tool
  - \* Rooting hormone
  - \* Clear plastic bag or mason jar (or use a plastic juice jar. Use a box cutter to poke a hole, then kitchen shears to cut grooves at bottom of juice bottle).
2. **Prepare a pot.** Fill a small pot with potting soil. For best results, replace a quarter of the soil with perlite, peat moss, or vermiculite, or a combination thereof. This will increase air flow and drainage, giving your cutting a better opportunity to root. If the soil is dry, water and allow the excess water to drain out so that the soil is evenly moist.
3. **Select a stem for the cutting.** Choose a healthy and established plant to take a cutting from. The stem should come from the top and side of the plant and it should have at least three leaves on it. Ideally, find a stem that has flowered recently. Look for a stem that's young, but established and hardy that's about six inches long.
  - \* *It's better to take cuttings from the top and side of the plant because they seem to root best.*
  - \* *It's okay if the stem you select has buds and flowers currently on it, but look for a stem with flowers that are starting to wither. This indicates the stem has recently bloomed.*
4. **Cut off a section of stem.** The best tool for taking the cutting is a pair of sharp pruning shears. Cut the stem from the plant at a 45-degree angle just below one of the lower leaf nodes (where the leaf attaches to the stem).
  - \* *Make sure the cutting tool has been sterilized to prevent the spread of disease.*
  - \* *To sterilize your cutting tool, spray it or dip it in water with a small amount of bleach.*
5. **Remove flowers, buds, and some leaves.** With the same cutting tool, cut off any withered flowers and new buds where they attach to the stem. If any hips (fruit) have started to form, cut these off as well.
  - \* *Cut any leaves on the lower half of the stem.*
  - \* *Leave two to three higher leaves to help with photosynthesis. Cut these leaves in half to reduce the loss of moisture.*
6. **Dip the cutting in rooting hormone.** Insert the bottom 2" of the cutting so that the bottom of the stem is covered in hormone. Shake to gently remove excess hormone.
7. **Plant and water the cutting.** With the tip of your finger or a pencil, make a two-inch hole in the potting soil at the center of the pot. Place the cut end of the stem in the hole. Pack the soil at the center of the pot. Place the cut end of the stem in the hole. Pack the soil around the stem and use your hands to firm the soil in place.

\* ***Water the soil so that it's thoroughly moist.***



## *Propagating Roses.....(continued from page 7)*

8. **Cover the stem with a plastic jar.** To cover the stem, insert two eight –inch sticks or wires into the soil on either side of the stem to prop up the plastic. Cover the pot and stem with a clear plastic bag, and affix the bag to the pot with elastic or twine. With a mason jar or plastic juice bottle, simply place over the stem.

*\* Covering the stem with glass or plastic will create a miniature greenhouse, and the cover will help keep in the heat, moisture, and ultraviolet rays the stem needs to root and grow.*

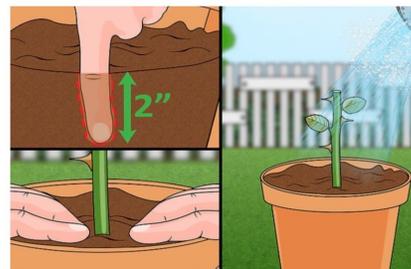
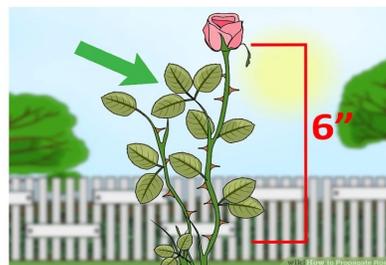
*\* I like the top of the juice jar because you can unscrew the cap and spray the cutting with water. Easy .*

9. **Provide the cutting with plenty of sunlight and moisture as it grows.** Throughout each day, the plant will need plenty of bright sunlight. But to avoid overheating, place the plant in a bright location that receives lots of indirect sunlight, especially around midday.

*\* The jar or plastic will help to keep the soil and cutting moist, but add more water anytime the cutting or soil starts to dry out.*

*\* Placing a heating mat under the plant can help encourage the roots to grow.*

*\*I grew my first ones inside under a grow light. Since it was summer, I didn't need the heating mat.*



This diagram should be helpful when propagating your rose.  
I wonder how many new rose bushes our club will create?



*Oh, hello!*