



Here's the Dirt

A publication of the River Valley Garden Club

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

In Greek mythology, Narcissus spurned suitors, vainly preferring his own company to others. Nemesis, the goddess of retribution, led him to a pool, knowing he would be doomed upon seeing his own reflection. Narcissus fell deeply in love with his reflection and could not tear himself away, and was slowly transformed into a golden flower. It is easy to see why these blooms have risen to mythic status — their charms are irresistible!

Given the variety, size, color, and bloom time, bulbs add a significant return on financial and time investment. The term bulb is associated with a family of perennial plants formally called herbaceous geophytes. Bulbs store nourishment for the plant's life cycle during dormant periods when the weather is either too cold or too hot for them to flower. The major types of bulbs include true bulbs (daffodils and tulips), corms (crocus), tuberous roots (dahlias), rhizomes (iris), and stem tubers (potato).

In the Sacramento region, it is recommended to plant daffodils after our first rain. I plant the biggest share of my daffodils under a large stand of oak trees. If it hadn't rained, I could not dig in the hard-packed clay. I tell myself, "In the spring, you will be glad you planted these." Generally bulbs should be planted two to three times the bulb height, but in clay soil, you can plant them slightly shallower — thank goodness.

Most experts advise planting daffodils in informal plantings — suggestions include tossing the bulbs over your shoulder and planting where they land; planting in groups of 7-9 bulbs; or as Bill the Bulb Baron recommended, planting 20-25 bulbs within a three foot circle.

In the past, I have always put some bone meal in the planting hole, but I recently read that fertilizer is not necessary at planting time, since the bulb is dormant. Bone meal may not be a good choice, since it attracts rodents and skunks. This year I will try applying a high phosphorus fertilizer when the first shoots come up — this is the signal that the plant is ready for nutrients. You are not to fertilize after the bulbs start to flower.

This year I am revisiting tulips. I have avoided them since the second year I lived in Rancho Murieta, as the deer ate all my tulip blooms! I will be planting tulip bulbs in my fenced back yard. I ordered a mix of lavender, yellow, and purple tulips for my border garden, and white fringed tulips, called Honeymoon, for my moon garden.

Given the challenges we have endured in 2020, the spring blooms should signal a degree of hopefulness in 2021. It's something to look forward to. □



Scholarship Winners Acknowledged at Farmers Market Stage

If this year's scholarship winners are any indication, the future of horticulture and **sustainable landscaping** looks bright. Both winners received their scholarship award of \$1,000 in a ceremony on the stage at the Farmers Market on Saturday, September 12.



Kathy Truong

Kathy Truong (left) is attending American River College where she earned her certificate in **Sustainable Landscape Design** and is looking forward to obtaining her degree in Horticulture. With a passion for volunteering in the community, she has spent many hours at Soil Born Farms tending the native plant nursery. She has volunteered at the Sacramento Tree Foundation, where she helped plant edible trees in local neighborhoods, parks, and elementary schools. At the Sacramento Valley Conservancy, she helped staff a booth at Earth Day and plant native California species at Camp Pollock, which is located on the American River Parkway.

Kathy is also training to become a docent at Sacramento Splash, an organization that brings awareness to the preservation of vernal pools.

The CEO of 7 Generations Producers, where Kathy is interning this summer, writes, "Having worked in the agriculture industry for over a decade, I am well equipped to say that Ms. Truong has the potential to be a true leader in the industry."

Christian Nielsen (right) graduated from Cosumnes River College with a degree in **Sustainable Landscaping**, and is now attending CSUS working toward a degree in Horticulture.



Christian Nielsen

Prior to attending college, Christian owned a small landscaping business that focused mainly on tree removal and pruning. This experience gave him a deep understanding of soil types and soil structure and created an interest in irrigation systems, as well as the value of **sustainable landscaping**.

Christian's ultimate career goal is to work for the State of California in the field of Conservation. He believes in taking care of the earth and giving back to the community.



A Letter of Recommendation for Christian noted that he has always had a love for gardening and horticulture, and he has the patience, understanding and skills to nurture plants and gardens.

As the concept of **sustainable landscaping** may be new to some of us, please see the article on the following page. □

Scholarship committee members with scholarship winners: Back row, left to right: Committee member Joyce Adams; Berniece Jones, Committee Co-Chair; Loretta Lutz, Committee Co-Chair.

Front row: scholarship winners Christian Nielsen and Kathy Truong

Just What is Sustainable Landscaping Anyway?

We are all painfully aware of the extensive urban growth and culminating sprawl that has occurred over the last century which has had a significant impact on the habitat that birds and other wildlife once called home. Today, homeowners with yards and gardens have an opportunity to curtail the continuing loss of habitat and give back to nature by creating their own backyard wildlife garden.

In developing a sustainable landscape/garden design, every aspect should be considered to ensure the goal of reducing a negative impact on the environment, while including features beneficial to the natural world. It's really not as challenging as it may sound, and a prudent gardener can begin by incorporating some of the following practices:

- ◆ Replacing lawn with native wildflowers and shrubs
- ◆ Saving and reusing graywater and/or rainwater
- ◆ Using permeable paving
- ◆ Growing food by installing vegetable gardens and/or orchards
- ◆ Installing drip irrigation
- ◆ Ensuring that there is no surface runoff or puddles
- ◆ Using a minimal amount of pesticides and fertilizer
- ◆ Using soil management techniques, including composting kitchen and yard waste to maintain healthy soil
- ◆ Using mulch to reduce water evaporation

It is likely that most RVGC members have already incorporated one or perhaps several of these sustainable measures into their gardens, so we're already on our way to adapting our backyards to today's urgent need for reduced water use, as well as reduced reliance on energy and chemicals.

And here is an interesting tidbit from the EPA: Research has shown that one hour of lawn mowing contributes as much smog pollution as driving ten cars for one hour, which is a great argument for ditching the lawn in favor of native plants, and using the time it would have taken to mow the lawn to relax in the hammock with a cold glass of lemonade.



Lovely examples of sustainable landscaping in an urban back yard



Speaking of Sustainability.....

Are you familiar with Cow Pots? Neither was I until I needed more small pots in which to plant cuttings that I was propagating. There’s always plastic, but I was looking for something a bit more earth-friendly.

And then I saw them. Cow Pots — made with 100% renewable composted cow manure! Yes! They are guaranteed to be odor-free, according to the label. I continued reading:

- ◆ Roots easily penetrate Cow Pots, which means you can plant your cuttings directly in the soil;
- ◆ The planted pots biodegrade quickly;
- ◆ They’re easy to use — no waste; no mess!

And besides that, they’re made by American farmers for plant lovers everywhere.

I continued reading: planted Cow Pots break down quickly in the ground. Decomposition is well under way at 3-4 weeks. These are the earth-friendliest, greenest pots you can buy. And best of all, the manure in Cow Pots is a renewable resource, unlike peat, which is mined from bog eco-systems, or plastic, which is derived from finite fossil sources.

The maker of Cow Pots is a family owned and operated dairy farm that has been in business for three generations and believes in biodegradable gardening products for a more sustainable world.

Ask for them when shopping for small, reusable containers. What a novel idea!



Welcome

...to our new members! We’re happy to have you join us.

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| Lilla Burrows | Don Thames |
| Sandra Walker | Katie Thames |



Mountain Creek Middle School Awarded \$500 Grant

In addition to the Murieta Trails Stewardship, as described in our September newsletter, the River Valley Garden Club also awarded a grant of \$500 to the Mountain Creek Middle School in Somerset.

Members Michell Blomberg and Vivian Baier helped establish this school garden five years ago, and it has been thriving ever since, due to the enthusiasm and support of the school community. This school garden was also awarded First Place by the California Garden Clubs, Inc.



Mountain Creek Middle School students enjoying their time in the school garden

The school has provided a classroom for the instructional part of the program, after which the students and advisors go out and tend the garden.

Students are taught about sustainable agriculture and healthy choices for both cooking and eating, and the garden has now become a part of the school curriculum.

Each fall, students are introduced to the garden, and to the concepts of harvesting and tasting. They move along the curriculum to learning about eggplant, purple potatoes, the three sisters story, tomatoes, grapes, and for later in the autumn, they focus on pumpkins, squash, and gourds.

Other fall projects involve making a scarecrow, learning about pomegranates, studying spices, such as oregano, thyme, and celery seed, and making ratatouille from vegetables harvested in the garden.

Cool weather plantings include cabbage, broccoli, and carrots. Seed packets and soil testing, mushrooms and fungus, and pollinators are followed by a lesson that includes making Swiss Chard pancakes. They also learn about acorns to oaks, and incorporate a Sugar Pine tree on their campus into a lesson about how trees grow.

The grant monies will help cover basic needs in the garden and class-



A Swiss chard enthusiast!

room, and they are also hoping to obtain a potting table with a workbench for the students to use as they go about their garden chores.

Spring flowers round out their garden club year, with flower art on rocks and flower art for Mother's Day gifts being favorite end-of-year projects.



Someone's little sister photo-bombing in the flower garden



What is the Penny Pines Program?

Recognizing the crucial role of healthy forests and the tremendous need to restore devastated forest areas, the California Garden Clubs, Inc., of which our club is a part, began contributing to a program which began in 1941 to restore the health of our forests. This program is called Penny Pines.

When the program first began, seedlings could be produced for about one cent each, and approximately 680 seedlings were used to plant a typical acre. So for \$68, seedlings for ten acres could be purchased. Site preparation and planting costs were met through regular Forest Service funding.

In 1964, the original cooperative agreement was rewritten to provide that funds contributed through the Penny Pines program be used for reforestation, rather than solely for purchasing seedlings.

Over the years, more than one million dollars have been donated to the Penny Pines program which has allowed for the planting of 27 million seedlings, renewing 88,000 acres of national forestland in California. Contributions may be used to prepare plantation sites for new trees or planting seedlings grown in Forest Service nurseries throughout California. One of the nurseries is in the Placerville area and was a destination for a club tour a few years ago.

Seedlings are grown from local seeds and acorns, and replanted near the areas where the seeds were collected to improve their chance of survival. Penny Pines funds may also be used to maintain existing tree stands and improve wildlife habitat. Plantations are important for watershed protection, soil stabilization, and shade for recreation areas.

Trees help the ground store water, protect against soil erosion, and add to the scenic beauty of the national forests.

Fifteen national forests in California participate in the Penny Pines Project, several of which are in Northern California, to include the El Dorado National Forest, Klamath National Forest, Tahoe National Forest, Lassen National Forest, Mendocino National Forest, Plumas National Forest, Sequoia National Forest, Shasta-Trinity National Forest, Sierra National Forest, and Stanislaus National Forest.

When the Penny Pines basket is passed around at our meetings, members have always been generous in contributing to this vital project that becomes even more important in an environment with more and hotter fires, resulting in massive loss of our trees.

Thank you for your generous and continuing contributions to this crucial project to ensure the health and reforestation of our national forests.



Field Trip – Wine Tasting at Vannatta’s Winery

By Sharon Barton

Did you know that there is a winery on Grantline, just 5.5 miles from Jackson Road? I didn’t either, but luckily Irene Slavens introduced us to Vannatta’s and set up private wine tasting for RVGC members on September 12th and 13th. It was a relaxing visit outdoors with social distancing. We enjoyed snacks while Julie poured a Riesling, a Chardonnay Blend, a Rose, and four different reds.

Vannatta’s “specializes in hand-crafted, small lot wines of limited production and exceptional quality.” The grapes used are from Lodi, Ione, Wilton, and other local vineyards. They opened in 2015 and feature wine tasting, sales, and special events, such as the Elk Grove Fine Art Tour, scheduled for October 10.

You are always welcome to bring a picnic; Bocce Ball and Corn Hole are also available. Vannatta’s supports local charities. In fact, \$4.00 from the sale of every bottle of their Hawke Cabernet Franc is donated to Chicks in Crisis. Check our their website for more information.

A hike on the Gnome Trail in Rancho Murieta North is coming soon! Watch your email for dates and details.



Left to right: Nancy Compton, Sharon Barton, Paula Swanson, Pat & Pam McCabe



Raffle Update.....

By Vivian Baier

Many thanks to all of those who donated to our September raffle. As a result of your generosity, our September raffle was a huge success!



I am always happy to pick up any items members are willing to donate — always welcome are items such as those you find at a home goods store, and nice plants are the best. I’m also looking for items related to holidays, such as Halloween, Easter, Mothers Day, Picnic, and Spring, as I’m trying to build up an inventory to dip into each month.



Member Garden Tour a Big Success

The pandemic has forced us to be highly creative and look at things in an entirely new light. With the RMA building closed and public gatherings in parks limited to ten or fewer people, the Program Committee came up with a new way to meet: travel to members' gardens and enjoy the fall plantings, learn how other gardeners have solved challenging problems, and share ideas. Members viewed the gardens in small groups to honor the social distancing mandate.

Marleen & John Merchant, Pam & Pat McCabe, Don & Debbie Kolmodin, and Ellison & Ernest Cowles generously offered to have their gardens on tour.

The Merchants had enormous granite rocks to contend with, and they decided to just roll with the look. They ordered and placed over 30,000 more pounds of rocks that have created a natural terraced look that shows off their immense variety of plants. Marleen loves having created a garden that always has something in bloom, even in winter.



Pam McCabe

Both Pam and Pat McCabe grew up on farms and understand the importance of growing their own food. One of their major challenges is keeping the resident deer from eating or destroying everything they try to grow.

Pam's favorite plants grow from tubers, rhizomes, or bulbs — they are reliable, take little care, are showy, and deer don't like most of them.



A snippet of the Merchants' beautiful garden

Ellison and Ernest Cowles had a real challenge as they attempted to cover a sandy, rocky, drought-plagued slope. After six years of trial and error, the Cowles' garden is now a deer-resistant, foliage garden featuring a waterfall and a breakfast landing, which is lighted at night for their viewing enjoyment.



Ellison Cowles on her hillside garden

Ellison's words to the wise: "Our soil and sun/shade microclimate here is a limited environment; use Internet searches and published books only as a guide. Seeing a plant growing is the best proof of its suitability." She especially loves her spring-blooming hellebores and the feathery green accents of licorice plant and lavender cotton.

And what can we say about the challenge the Kolmodins faced as they worked to turn a giant culvert and drainage ditch area into a gorgeous front lawn! It is truly an amazing transformation.

Debbie Kolmodin has been gardening since the age of six, having learned her gardening skills from both her mother and grandmother who could grow anything from a little snip off a plant. Most recently, Debbie has apologized to her plants for all the smoke and ash that have landed on their leaves while giving them a much-needed shower. ☐

