



Here's the Dirt

A publication of the River Valley Garden Club

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

My yard is calling me.....

As I look into my garden, hands on my hips, I feel a bit overwhelmed. It's Fall—or at least thinking about being Fall — and my yard is starting to transition, although my head is not quite there.

Yes, it's getting dark earlier, it's a little cooler in the evenings and mornings, and although it's going to be 93 today, I do see 70s approaching, and (dare I say it) a little rain??? So yes, Fall is on its way.



I have a love-hate relationship with Fall — love the changes in the air, the color we see slowly creeping up, but I hate the garden chores of Fall that need to be done. But my garden is calling me — so I walk through my garden, doing one of my favorite things — making a list. I'm a big list-maker (thank you, Mom) and this one is a doozy, all action words — cut, trim, remove, pull, dig, mulch, spray, put away, toss.. So I start at the top of my list.

But as I start the work this list has intended, I also see the fun of Fall emerging, as I position chrysanthemums in every color, and pumpkins of all shapes, colors, and sizes.

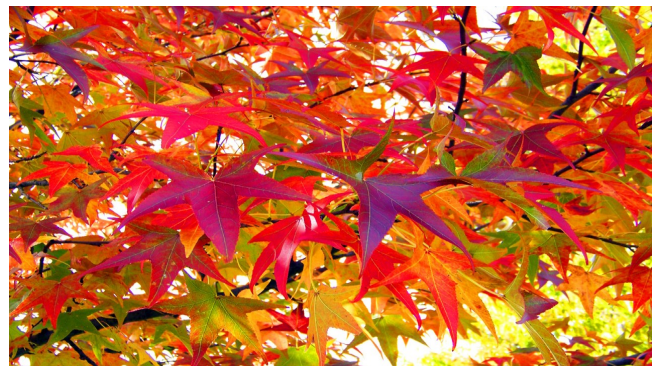
And in my mind's eye, I see the starting celebration of Christmas — where the lighted Christmas trees will go, the pots for the red and white cyclamen, and pumpkins replaced by poinsettias.

And, as I dig up my glads, clean out those vegetable and flower beds that will be my cutting flower garden next year, I know that the work I'm doing now is the start of the fun, joy, and happiness my garden brings me in the spring.

So, yes, it's a lot of work to do — but just think about what we are creating!

Happy Gardening!

Deb



River Valley Pickers



Donna Hansen finds a buried treasure

When Debbie Kolmodin answers her phone, she never knows who is on the other line or what treasures they wish to donate to our club.

As chair of our Community Outreach program, she has connected with our community to ensure our residents know that we welcome donations of pots, plants, garden décor, seasonal items— in short — any and all manner of things that we can plant, divide, propagate, paint, rehab, or just scrub and shine so they are ready for the next plant sale.

Recently a resident called to offer a donation of garden pots and related items if we would come and dig them out of his back yard. Responding to the invitation, Debbie and a crew of volunteers went over with trowels, a shovel, a garden glide, and lots of muscle and dug dozens of pots out from under wet leaves, garden debris, and a spider or two.

Most of the pots were in surprisingly good condition and just needed a bath. A few needed some paint. But all have been cleaned up, and some have been planted with a lovely plant for our **upcoming plant sale on Saturday, October 9** — our last sale of 2021. Any pots that are left over and items not sold at the October 9 plant sale will be featured in our **End-of-Season Sale** in Nancy Compton's driveway on **Saturday October 16 from 9 a.m.—1 p.m.**



Terra cotta pots by the dozens



Linda Beagle and Berniece Jones hunt among the tree trunks, downed branches, and miscellaneous items such as tiki poles to see what lurks below the surface



Within a day or so of this donation, Debbie received a call from a resident who plans to re-landscape and wanted to donate a giant spider plant that does not fit into the updated plan. This spider plant, which apparently lived through several winter frosts and blazing summer sun, was enormous, filling an entire wheelbarrow AND a blue plastic container that held the overflow spiders.



Thus far, fifteen spider plants have been divided, with the possibility of dozens more to go.

Both the pots and the spider plant donations are typical of the calls that Debbie receives which have resulted in many items that help with our plant sales. Our community has been so generous and we are truly grateful for the support.



Program Schedule 2021-2022

Many thanks to the Program Committee for developing a fun and interesting program year! Below please find the schedule, program title, and brief description.

September 28, 2021: “Saving Wildlife Saves Us”

The Education Team from this nonprofit, which is dedicated to saving injured and orphaned animals, will describe their mission and bring rescued birds and/or animals that they are rehabilitating to be released into the wild, as well as those who can no longer live in the wild.

October 26, 2021: Bats: A Love Story

Our presenter, JoEllen Arnold, met her first bat in 1997, and since that time has traveled to several continents to learn about different species. She is on a mission to open people’s hearts and minds to these highly beneficial creatures that are in grave danger of extinction. JoEllen comes highly recommended.

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

This program is being hosted by the Elk Grove Garden Club with our club, as well as the Gardeners of the Grove club as invited guests. The speaker will be Rebecca Sweet who will provide clever answers to spruce up tired gardens. Meeting location will be a church in Elk Grove. We will carpool from the RMA building. (** This bonus program will begin at 10 a.m. Car pooling encouraged.*)



January 25, 2022: Re-scape Your Outdoors: Regenerative Landscape Design for Changing Times. Speaker Solieil Tranquilli, owner of Tranquil Gardens, a landscape consulting company, will present climate-wise solutions for our landscape and gardens as we shift from our Mediterranean climate towards a Sonoran climate, the desert climate of Arizona and Northern Mexico.



February 22, 2022: Attracting Hummingbirds to your Pollinator Garden. The speaker will be Carolyn McMaster, a Master Gardener with a special interest in hummingbirds and pollinators.

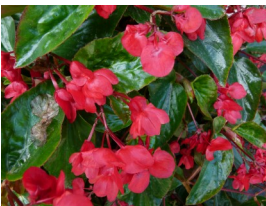
March 22, 2022: Paloma Pollinators

Sean Krietich, our speaker, believes in the importance of bees, and will bring his pollinator hotels which are handcrafted from local wood. His presentation will include bees and bee boxes; the boxes will be for sale.

April 26, 2022: Flower Show Fun: How to Grow Amazing and Prize-winning Flowers. The presenter, Nina Blonsky, is a Certified Flower Show Judge certified through the National Garden Clubs, Inc.

May 24, 2022: The Wonderful World of Begonias.

Paul Tsamtsis of the Sacramento Begonia Society will be the presenter. His program will cover everything you wanted to know about growing this beautiful addition to your home and garden. Paul will bring several samples for display and sale.



These are all begonias!



Landscape Design School



Are you one of those gardeners who drives around looking at other people's gardens? Do you secretly envy their sense of design and color and wonder why your garden doesn't look that perfect? Do you salivate when visiting public gardens and wish you could actually live there— maybe over by the lotus pond or under the towering redwoods? Then this program is for you!

The National Garden Clubs, Inc. has created a ***Landscape Design School*** which is a series of four course designed to provide participants with the following:

- ◆ A greater sense of appreciation, pride, and knowledge about our private, public, and historical gardens;
- ◆ Become better informed in order to promote positive changes in our surroundings to encourage beauty, utility, convenience, solid ecological practice, and ease of maintenance;
- ◆ Develop 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 as providing leadership, educational programs, scholarships, awards, and promoting better landscape design.



A tidy cottage with beautifully landscaped surroundings

This program is being offered by the Valley Lode District on the following dates:

- ◆ **Course 1: January 15 and 16, 2022**
- ◆ **Course 2: February 12 and 13, 2022**
- ◆ **Course 3: February 26 and 27, 2022**
- ◆ **Course 4: March 12 and 13, 2022**

This program is open to the public as well as garden club members. The regular cost of each course is \$75; however, as a club affiliated with the Valley Lode District, our cost will be \$45 per course.

The courses will be held at the Stanislaus County Fairgrounds Floriculture Building, 900 North Broadway in Turlock. Nearby lodging is available.

At the end of the four courses, participants may take an examination to become a Landscape Design Consultant. 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 can be applied to our own landscaping. *For further information contact Nancy Compton at ncompton43@att.net or (916) 600-1992.*

Plant of the Month: the Vibrant Red Maple



The red maple tree (*Acer rubrum*), named for its brilliant fall foliage, is a fast-growing tree that typically reaches 60-80 feet in height. They are native to the eastern deciduous forest, which of course does not include California. However, they do very well here because they are so versatile and adaptable.

Red maples do well in sunny or shady spots, wet or dry soil, and high or low elevation, making them one of the most versatile trees in existence.

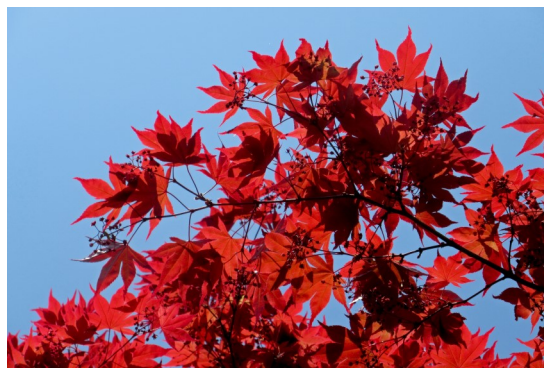
Adaptable roots help the red maple cope with different soil types. If the tree grows in wet soil, it grows a short taproot and extensive lateral roots to soak up surface water.

When red maples grow in dry sites, they send out a long taproot and short lateral roots.

Early in the spring, red maples develop a fruit called *samaras*, which have an enclosed seed on one end, and a thin, wing-like projection at the other. Many people refer to them as helicopters or whirlybirds, because the “wing” makes them spin when they fall from the trees. The seeds are typically gobbled up by

small mammals like squirrels and chipmunks.

If you have a red maple, it’s really good to have a large rake, as they have a multitude of leaves, most of which seem to drop on the same day. One year I was raking my red maple leaves when I realized how beautiful each leaf was. Why was I raking them up and then throwing them away? Each leaf seemed to be a work of art. That’s when I decided to press them between the pages of my *Sunset Western Garden Book*.



After a couple of weeks I opened my garden book and was thrilled to learn that the red maple leaves had actually retained their color. This is when I started incorporating the red maple leaves into some of my paintings, and have had fun using them on cards and art forms ever since.

The red maple has many claims to fame, including having the greatest north—south range of any tree species. It is also the state tree of Rhode Island, where in 1890, a school commissioner gave students a list of trees and asked them to vote for their favorite. Red maple won, but it wasn’t officially adopted until 1964.



The selection of the red maple may have been because Rhode Island is a Dutch term meaning “red island.” Since the state bird is the Rhode Island red hen, it seems to make sense that this tree would have been selected for its color.

The nation’s largest red maple lies in the Great Smokey Mountain National Park. It was declared champion in 1997 by American Forests, and is listed in the National Register of Big Trees.

Protecting Succulents through Legislation

You will remember an interesting story written in these pages a year or so ago about a native succulent called *Dudleya farinosa* which was in danger of extinction due to illegal poaching. This story came to light when a woman was waiting in a post office in Mendocino behind a man who was mailing sixty boxes overseas. This, naturally, took a long time, and the woman became annoyed.

When her annoyance turned to curiosity, she asked the man what was in all those boxes, after which he put his index finger to his lips, made a “shhhhh” sound, and pointed to the coast. Then he said, “Something very valuable.”

Excusing herself, the woman stepped out of the post office and called the local Fish & Wildlife Office. Shortly thereafter a game warden appeared. He suspected abalone poaching, but when he opened one of the boxes, he was incredulous. Poached succulents?

What has been driving this poaching is the emerging demand for *Dudleya* in Asia where a mature plant can command a price of as much as a thousand dollars in the underground economy. Apparently poachers will typically book a flight from Korea or China, fly in, rent a car, go to a moving and storage center and buy a large number of boxes, and then begin their drive up the coast. They harvest the plants, process everything in a hotel room, and ship them back to Korea, China, and other Southeast Asian destinations.



Taking the lead on protecting this succulent, the California Native Plant Society worked with Assembly Member Christopher Ward (D-San Diego) to create AB223 — the first California bill specifically drafted to protect plants from poaching. This bill makes it unlawful to uproot, remove, harvest, or cut *Dudleya* from land owned by the state or a local government, and would make it unlawful to sell, possess with intent to sell, transport for sale, or export it for sale.

As this article was being written, the bill was sitting on Governor Newsom’s desk, with gardeners, naturalists, and outdoor enthusiasts hoping he had an interest in native plants and keeping California’s natural plant diversity intact. However, it was just learned that he has signed AB 223, causing my daughter to exclaim, “Plant Lives Matter!”

As gardeners and stewards of our public lands, we are proud that the Governor understands the need to champion environmental responsibility, especially with so many competing priorities. Thank you, Governor Newsom, thank you Assembly Member Ward, and a big thank you to the California Native Plant Society for bringing this issue to those who can act to protect our native plant life from those who would destroy it for nothing but greed.



The Sound of Rustling Leaves.....

It seems that retired English teachers never die...they just continue to collect interesting words that they cannot wait to share with friends.

Thus I give you the word **psithurism**, which means the rustling of leaves (and isn’t recognized by Spellcheck). So may you have a happy and relaxing autumn, enjoy this cooler weather, and listen with pleasure to the psithurism all around you.

Our First Meeting Featured Tri-County Wildlife Care

The River Valley Garden Club's first inside in-person meeting was held on September 28, and what fun it was! Our raffle team of Vivian Baeir and Rosann Stevenson brought Halloween-themed hats for members to try on and take selfies or photos of each other.



Mo (new member), Nicole Sullens (returning member), Deb Rooney, President

Our new meeting location at the Community Church on Cantova Drive was quickly turned from a recreation room to a meeting room, thanks to members who hauled chairs, folded up the ping pong table, moved high-top tables, and found a music stand to use as a podium.

The evening's presenters were the Education Team from the Tri-County Wildlife Care, a nonprofit whose members care for injured, ill or orphaned wildlife with the goal of releasing them back into the wild.



Sharon Barton (Tours), Rosann Stevenson (Raffle team)

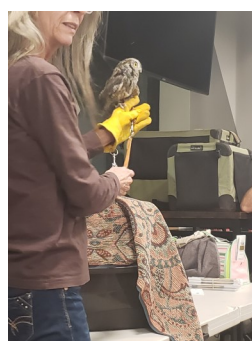
The Education Team introduced us to several raptors, beginning with a Swainson hawk named Tiago who is unable to be released into the wild because he has such a human imprint that he thinks he's a chicken. Denise, who introduced Tiago, said that Swainson hawks migrate 14,000 miles to Argentina. She also mentioned that they love grasshoppers (and eat them by the dozens). They may be seen hovering around fields with tractors, as they stir up the critters which the hawks can then pop in their mouths.



Tasha, a barn owl



Denise with a Peregrine falcon



Screech owl



The Education Team from Tri-County Wildlife Care

Next we met Tasha, a barn owl who is so imprinted from humans that she actually seeks out people. A normal barn owl would be screaming at a roomful of people, but Tasha just looked around like it was a normal Tuesday. Barn owls surprisingly have the best hearing for hunting of any animals. Tasha is a big eater, devouring four to six mice each day.

Then we met a peregrine falcon, once considered extinct due to DDT. Peregrine falcons are fascinating birds that dive at 200 mph when in pursuit of prey. They dive so fast they can take down a goose, a duck — even a crane. Peregrine falcons hunt from the air and can see over a mile. A notch in their beak is used to sever the vertebrae in its prey. This bird's name was Flash — consistent with his ability to move quickly. And finally we met Brutus, a saw-whet owl that is rare, threatened, and endangered. All agreed that it was a lovely program, with much interaction and learning,