




Garden Notes

www.sustainableclaremont.org

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Welcome to the SC Garden Club newsletter!

 Please send us questions about gardening and we will do our best to answer them!

Square Foot Gardening: If you couldn't attend Jo Ann Carey's talk but want to know something about this technique, here are the basics:



1. Locate an area, preferably close to the house, that gets at least 6 hours of full sun a day and that is not too near trees, or where water puddles after rain (no fun to slog through mud on the way to the boxes).
2. Build a bottomless box frame out of fir, cedar, or redwood (pine rots too quickly; treated wood can kill the plants)
3. Make it 6 to 8 inches tall and 4 ft wide. The length can be whatever works for you, but the width should not be more than 4 ft. You need to be able to reach the center of the bed from the path without having to step on the soil as this would damage the soil texture.
4. Line the bottom with weed cloth. If gophers or moles are a problem, put down hardware cloth too.
5. Leave a path about 3ft wide between boxes for easy walking and kneeling.
6. Fill the boxes with a mix of 1/3 blended compost, 1/3 peat moss, 1/3 coarse vermiculite. Fairly pricy to start but lasts a long time.
7. Having a permanent grid is important as a planting guide. You can hammer nails in the top edge at 1ft intervals and use nylon clothesline to make a grid of 1ft squares.
8. In each square, plant 1 to 16 plants, depending on their size—16 radishes (4x4), 4 lettuces (2x2), one cauliflower, etc.
9. If growing from seed, put only 2 or 3 seeds at each location and cut one seedling off when they are a couple of inches tall (don't pull out extras or it may disturb the roots of the one you keep). If you are transplanting seedlings, leave a slight depression around them to capture water.
10. Water gently by hand from a watering can or using a spray attachment held upside down so the water falls gently.
11. As soon as you have finished harvesting from one square, add compost and plant a different crop, not the same one.

Ornamental of the Month: *Chasmanthe floribunda*



African flag is a South African native which will seed itself around if given moderate water. The plant dies down in summer but sprouts again from corms in winter and will eventually form a large clump of sword-shaped leaves about 3ft tall. Flowering stalks about 3-4 ft tall appear in February or March, each with 2 or 3 dozen orange-red flowers. A favorite of hummingbirds!

Edible of the Month: *Sambucus nigra ssp caerulea*



Blue elderberry is a large, deciduous shrub or small tree native to our area. It has big, bright green compound leaves, and in spring it produces 3-4" flat clusters of tiny cream-colored flowers. These are followed by dark blue berries with a white bloom. Birds love them! If any are left for you, they make good jam, pies, and a tolerable wine.

12. If you are growing tall or vining plants like tomatoes or peas, put the support/trellis on the north side of the box so the plants don't shade the other ones in the box (unless they need a bit of shade, of course.).
13. For color and fun, include some plants with pretty flowers. Nasturtiums have edible flowers, and the buds can be pickled like capers (there are many other edible flowers too and our June talk will be about these). Some people think the smell of marigolds reduces the number of pests.
14. For more information, get Mel Bartholomew's book "All New Square Foot Gardening". And Jo Ann's site is <http://squareftgardens4u.com>.

Favorite quote (courtesy of Sharron Neyer)

"When I go into the garden with a spade, and dig a bed, I feel such an exhilaration and health that I discover that I have been defrauding myself all this time in letting others do for me what I should have done with my own hands."

Ralph Waldo Emerson



California native plants: Some of us went to a talk at RSABG on January 25 to learn about winter care for natives. According to presenter Antonio Sanchez, most need pruning/dividing between November and January, so we'll report on this next fall. For now, just let them grow!

Save the date: The 4th Annual Claremont Garden Tour will be on Sunday, April 6 from 1-4pm! A chance to see some outstanding local gardens and talk to the owners (and a painless way to help fund future activities of the Garden Club too!). More info to come!

Towards a more sustainable garden: For a quick summary of ways to achieve one, <http://www.sustainableclaremont.org/garden-club/gcmethods>.

Bird Walk: If enough are interested, Audubon will give the Garden Club a special bird walk at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden on a weekend morning. If this appeals to you, please email us and we will let you know the date.

Upcoming events and more

Feb 3: "Our sustainable home", Mike Shea talks about how he made his house and garden more sustainable, 7pm, 420 N Harvard, Claremont

Feb 8: Smart Gardening Workshop, 9:30-11am, Joslyn Center, Larkin Park, 660 Mountain Ave, Claremont. Discounted compost bins. Info about composting, water-wise gardening, worm composting, grass cycling. Free, no registration needed.

Feb 12: Garden Club meeting, 7-9 pm Napier Center at Pilgrim Place; **Birds in the Garden**, Dan Guthrie, President Pomona Valley Audubon Society

Feb 22: Medicinal Plants of California, 10 am to 1pm Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, \$20 members, \$25 non-members. Register at <http://www.rsabg.org/community-education/836-medicinal-plants>

Did you know?

Botanical Latin: Not surprisingly, 'floribunda' means 'many flowers'. "Nigra" means 'black' and 'caerulea' means 'blue'
Plant miscellanea: Seeds have three main parts: a protective seed coat, a food store, and an embryonic plant just waiting for the right conditions to surge into growth!

Things to do in February

General

- ✓ Check if you need a tetanus booster

Pest/disease management

- ✓ If animals are a problem with compost bins, set on concrete pavers, cover sides with hardware cloth; also cover lid (use a hinged lid with a catch)
- ✓ Wash citrus with a spray of 1-2T dishwashing soap (not the kind for machines) added to 1 gallon water, or sponge pests off leaves.

Edibles

- ✓ Plant mesclun and winter vegetables
- ✓ Plant bare-root asparagus
- ✓ Fertilize avocados; also cane berries when they show growth

Ornamentals

- ✓ Plant azaleas and camellias
- ✓ Deadhead cool season flowers for continued bloom
- ✓ Cut back and divide woody and overgrown perennials when new growth begins

Please send photos and info about plants you've grown, gardens you've visited, gardening lore you've learned.

Sue Schenk, editor

The Metropolitan Water District is offering rebates for turf removal, rain barrels, soil moisture sensor systems. Info at: <http://socalwatersmart.com/index.php/home/?p=res>

Note: At the February meeting, the Board will ask the membership to approve a bylaws amendment to give the Board authority to make future amendments. Current bylaws are posted on the website.