Garden Notes

"Creating edible and ornamental gardens"

www.sustainableclaremont.org
gardenclub@sustainableclaremont.org

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Welcome to the SC Garden Club newsletter!

❧ ***Happy New Year! Please send us questions about gardening--****we will do our best to answer them!*

Hardiness zones: Local native plants are pretty much guaranteed to tolerate local temperature conditions, but will plants that originated in other areas grow well here? Generally, plants offered at nearby nurseries are likely to be fine (or the garden centers would have unhappy customers!), but what about other plants, bulbs, and seeds you order?

Cold hardiness: The US Department of Agriculture created a map dividing the country into 11 cold hardiness zones. We are in zone 9 where the temperature doesn't go below 20°F, so plants labeled 9-11 should be OK.

Heat tolerance: The American Horticultural Society created a map dividing the country into 12 zones depending on the number of days a year the temperature is likely to be over 86°F. We are in zone 8, with 91-120 days above that, so plants labeled from 1-8 should be OK here.

Sunset magazine: Sunset created a much more detailed map for the West, taking cold, heat, wind, rain, etc into account. We are in Sunset zone 19.

A final word: Soil type, wind, sun, soil pH, nutrients, nearby structures, water, can all affect the microclimate where you want your plant to grow, so don't be afraid to try plants a bit outside our zone–they may surprise you!

Favorite quote: (courtesy of Sharron Neyer)

My green thumb came only as a result of the mistakes I made while learning to see things from the plant's point of view. H. Fred Dale

Seeds: the next generation

Creating diversity: Almost all flowering plants reproduce through seeds. These contain a plant embryo and food to nourish it when it starts into growth. Just as in animals, the plant embryo gets one copy of each of the organism's chromosomes from each parent. Which copy of each chromosome a gamete gets is random, so many different eggs and sperm are made. When they combine, even more different offspring are produced. This creates diversity in the characteristics of the new plants and some are likely to show qualities that allow them to grow and reproduce in new areas or in altered conditions better than the parent plants. People take advantage of this diversity by breeding for characteristics such as size, color, and heat as in the peppers shown above (photo from Wikipedia).

Ornamental of the Month

Heteromeles arbutifolia

Toyon is sometimes called California holly, and it is the shrub for which Hollywood was named. Grows in sun or part shade at a moderate rate to about 10' x 10'. Evergreen leaves are about 4" long with teeth on the edge. Lightly fragrant blooms in summer, with berries in the fall. Favorite of bees, butterflies, and birds. Low water use (photo from the Bernard Field Station).

Edible of the Month

Melissa officinalis

Lemon balm likes part shade and moderate water. It is a 1ft tall perennial which should be cut back to the ground in winter. Bright green, scalloped, crinkled leaves about 2" long release a strong lemony scent when touched. The small pale flowers are pretty but not impressive. Re-seeds and spreads slowly by stolons (photo from Wikipedia)

Maximizing diversity: The greatest chance for new genetic combinations to arise occurs when pollen from a different individual fertilizes an egg. If an egg is fertilized by sperm (carried in the pollen) from the same plant, the level of diversity is lower, so many plants have mechanisms to prevent this. Some make sure that their pollen and eggs aren't mature at the same time; some recognize chemical signals on the pollen and don't allow self-fertilization. This is one reason why some trees need another variety nearby in order to set a good crop of fruit. Of course, many plants have no such restraints and produce fruit regardless of whether they have another individual of the same species nearby.

Minimizing diversity: If the parent plants produce gametes that are all identical for a particular trait, they are called "true-breeding" for the trait. If they are fertilized by their own pollen, or by pollen from another plant of the same true-breeding variety, all their offspring will look like the parents for that trait. However, if they are fertilized by pollen of a different variety, the offspring will vary so growing from seed can sometimes be disappointing (if you wanted ones like the seed-producing parent) or exciting (if you find a desirable new variation). For this reason, most fruit trees are grafted rather than grown from seed so all of the progeny have the parent's qualities. As mentioned in the September newsletter, hybrids contain characters from two different true-breeding parents so they will not themselves breed true.

Strawberries, bare root trees

Before planting, squeeze a ball of soil–if it doesn't break apart easily, the soil is probably too wet to work safely, so wait a few days.

January to March is the time to plant strawberries, or to replace plants that are over three years old. If you are using plants from runners, be sure to bury the roots but not the leaf bases, and avoid planting a new bed where eggplant, peppers, tomatoes, or potatoes have been grown as they share some diseases with strawberries.

You can plant bare root trees now. Choose ones with a strong leader, side branches more horizontal than upright, and a mass of fibrous roots that aren't circling around. Keep the roots moist and soak a few hours before planting. Dig a hole twice the size of the root ball but only an inch or two deeper. Loosen the soil but don't add any amendments or the roots may not grow outward.

http://www.redding.com/lifestyle/bare-essentials-6-tips-for-growing-bare-root

Upcoming events and more:

January 14: Garden Club, 6:30 pm, Napier Center, 660 Avery Rd, Claremont
Talk by landscape designer John Kosta at 7pm: **"Designing water-wise gardens that are lush, low-maintenance, and fabulous**!"

Balboa Park, San Diego shows: Orchids (Jan 24-25); Camellias (Feb 7-8); Cacti (Feb 14); Fungi (Feb 15) http://www.sdbgf.org/shows.html

Armstrong classes: http://www.armstronggarden.com/pages/classes

Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden: www.rsabg.org/upcoming-events

Huntington Library: Free talks plus plant sales on second Thursdays: Jan 15 is about Roses www.huntington.org/WebAssets/Templates/content.aspx?id=538

Did you know?

Botanical Latin: "Arbutifolia" means leaves similar to those of *Arbutus unedo* (strawberry tree); "melissa" refers to honeybees, which like lemon balm flowers.

Plant miscellanea: Many plants have hairlike structures (trichomes) on stems, leaves, or flowers. These can help reflect heat or trap moisture; tangle insects; make the plant less appealing to eat; produce chemicals that sting (like the ones on the nettle at left-photo from Wikipedia) or smell bad and repel predators.

Things to do in January

General

- ✓ This is a good month to clean and reorganize your pots and tools
- ✓ Consider starting a garden notebook
- ✓ Order plants and seeds

Pest/disease management

- ✓ Check citrus for snails lurking there; remove branches touching ground to make it harder for them the crawl up
- ✓ Check bay and hollyleaf cherry leaves for overwintering whiteflies
- ✓ Remove all leaves from apples to reduce incidence of apple scab

Edibles

- ✓ Prune fruit trees; plant bareroot ones
- ✓ Continue to plant winter vegetables

Ornamentals

- ✓ Feed epiphyllums: 0-10-10 or 2-10-10
- ✓ Prune roses and conifers
- ✓ Clean up under camellias and azaleas; plant new ones
- ✓ Look for winter- and spring-blooming succulents; add to garden
- ✓ Drought-tolerant plants blooming now: New Zealand tea tree, Aloes, coral tree, Hardenbergia

Please send photos and info about plants you've grown, gardens you've visited, gardening lore you've learned, questions you have. Sue Schenk, editor

The Metropolitan Water District is offering rebates for turf removal, rain barrels, soil moisture sensor systems. http://socalwatersmart.com/index.php/

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