



AN EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY GARDEN AT SIERRA NEVADA COLLEGE

THE NORTH LAKE TAHOE DEMONSTRATION GARDEN IS AN EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY GARDEN WHICH PROMOTES LAKE-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPING TO HELP PRESERVE OUR UNIQUE AND FRAGILE ALPINE ENVIRONMENT

Thyme in the Garden

by Jan Steinmann

JUNE-SEPTEMBER: FUN SUMMER WORK DAYS. We'll be planting new native plants; installing and repairing irrigation; creating the turf demonstration; seeding the wildflower meadow; and planning the Defensible Space demonstration. Project Mana will be planting raised beds with vegetables and herbs. Join us for activities that interest you by contacting Margaret at 775-831-8437 or Jan at jsteinmann@LTOL.com.

JUNE-AUGUST: FREE GREEN THUMB THURSDAY CLASSES will return to the Garden from 6:00-7:00 pm every Thursday, June 22-August 10. See the enclosed class list for topics and schedule. Contact Kelley Kelso at 775-586-1610, ext. 26 for more information.

JULY 21: OPEN ANNUAL MEETING, WINE AND CHEESE GARDEN PARTY. See the progress of the North Lake Tahoe Demonstration Garden and learn how you can participate.

AUGUST 20: Dedication of the new Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences building (TCES). The Garden is adjacent to TCES, sharing the same parking.

OCTOBER 12: Middle School students' tour of the TCES and Demo Garden.

OCTOBER 13: TCES Grand Opening to the public, 2:00 - 4:00. Garden tours will be held before and after the opening.

Continued on the right

From the President's Plot

by Mimi Komito

Beside my backyard pond, the fuzzy white panicle blossoms of a redtwig dogwood (cornus) contrast by day with the nearby pink rose blossoms (rosa woodsii), and by night reflect the moonlight. Both my senses and my calendar tell me it's finally summer at Tahoe, but knowing Mother Nature reserves the right to change her mind, I'm not packing away my sweaters just yet.

At the Demonstration Garden, summer started June 15th with a highly successful tour for the members of the Incline Rotary Club, many of whom lingered long after to ask questions. With John Cobourn's and Jan Steinmann's excellent and enthusiastic assistance, we conducted a presentation and tour, which we expect to be the first of many. By inviting members of North Shore service groups to the garden, we hope to garner support and attract new Friends of the Garden.

Our summer education program began in June with Kelley Kelso offering her ever popular Green Thumb Thursdays. See the enclosed class schedule and check your local Tahoe newspaper for topics and times. Local papers will also announce our ongoing Garden Work Days when we hope to see both familiar and new faces in the garden.

Much has been accomplished with our garden demonstrations, but we still have much to do. We'll join forces with the North Tahoe Fire Protection District to work on the Defensible Space demonstration. We'll also start the several Alternative Turf demonstrations, which will feature both shade-tolerant and sun-loving grasses.

The most exciting event this summer will be our Grand Opening of The Garden on July 21st, held in conjunction with the Garden Board's annual meeting (with election of officers), and open to all community members. We'll serve food and drink, and take tour groups through the garden to explain the various demonstrations. Board Members will be available throughout the afternoon and evening to answer questions about the garden and how those who are interested can volunteer to participate. So put on your garden party hats and join us for the festivities.

I look forward to seeing all of you for the Grand Opening, and to working with you in the garden this summer. As always, if you have ideas or suggestions regarding the garden, please email me at mimi@bagel.com. I always enjoy hearing from fellow gardeners.

ANY TIME: JOIN FRIENDS OF THE GARDEN. Learn about donation and naming opportunities as we plant specially donated trees, and add benches, exhibits, and personalized stepping stones.

STROLL THE GARDEN. This summer enjoy a walk in the garden and have a picnic in the gazebo.

Check www.demogarden.org, or your local newspaper for more information.



Tahoe Tomatoes at 7000 Feet

by Ronda Tycer

Truth be told, I'm not the best gardener in the family. Before we married and my husband Richard moved to Tahoe from the San Francisco Bay Area, he kept a garden in his back yard. As a foodie and gourmet cook, he considered growing his own vegetables and herbs *de rigueur*. In contrast, I've never planted a seed in my life.

By the time Richard moved to Tahoe, I'd already lived here a decade, and had a healthy respect for the mountain version of Mother Nature. He, however, came to the lake as full of hope and optimism as the Donner Party. Even before we moved into our new home, he had pots of tomatoes growing on the upper deck, watered by the foreman in charge of construction. But Tahoe's short summers and cool nights greatly lengthened the tomatoes' ripening time even on our south-facing, sun-drenched deck. Returning from our October vacation, the crew told us those were the best tasting tomatoes they'd ever eaten.

Undaunted, the following year, Richard planted early ripening seedlings and started them in April. He again bought the seedlings in 4" pots, transferred them to large pots full of perfect potting mix, and topped the pots with tomato cages. To acclimate the seedlings, he put lids on top of the cages until the leaves had "hardened off" to the UV.

He began watering every other day until the new fruit set; then he watered every day (or twice a day) until the green fruit started to color. From then on he watered only as needed to keep the fruit from splitting and to concentrate the flavor. This frenetic watering schedule meant that if we wanted to leave the house for more than a day, not only did we have to arrange for a tomato sitter, but also, until we returned home, Richard obsessed about the watering being done right.

From late April through May, Richard physically moved the 50-pound pots out on the deck in the morning and dragged them back in at night. In late summer/early fall, when the evenings cooled dramatically, he placed large black plastic garbage bags over each plant to keep them warm.

Even with Richard's fussy nurturing, once again, the tomatoes began ripening just as we left for a September vacation abroad. As per Richard's request, our tomato sitter dutifully watered the plants twice a day for 3 weeks at a cost of \$5 per day. We don't know the actual cost per tomato, because we don't know how many he picked and ate. He claimed the chipmunks scaled the stucco walls of the house and enjoyed as many as he did.

The next year, with 2 years of hard-won experience under his belt, Richard planted cherry tomatoes, hoping they'd ripen faster than the larger varieties. Again he tended and watered and paid for our tomato sitter when we left town. But that year

fall came early, and the few tomatoes that ripened weren't tasty. After this disaster, Richard told me to shoot him if he even so much as suggested growing tomatoes again.

Yet last year, home Richard came with his seedlings. Once again he went through the extraordinary labor and expense of potting, tending, and fretting. But beginning in July we left on a regular basis to care for an elderly family member in the SF Bay. Rather than paying a tomato sitter, Ram imposed on neighbors' with the promise that they'd share in the harvest, which was, in the end, so paltry there was almost nothing to share. Not only did we accrue substantial social indebtedness, the few tomatoes we ate were no better than the heirlooms I bought at Raley's for \$5 a pound. In despair, Richard hauled one of the smaller pots down to our Bay Area townhouse where he enjoyed a few gnarly cherry tomatoes until Thanksgiving.



This year, if I see a tomato seedling anywhere near our Tahoe deck, I'll gladly follow through with Richard's final, fatal request. Tahoe summers are too precious to sacrifice playtime for tending tomatoes, and I've spent my last summer looking at an artless array of pots, hoses, wire cages, black plastic garbage bags, and dying tomato leaves on my deck. Richard may enjoy his tomato folly, but at least here at 7000 feet, I'm chalking up another one for Tahoe's Mother Nature.

Veggies That Thrive Survive...

Tahoe gardeners won't likely have a bumper crop of "home-grown 'tomaters'" to share with their neighbors, but with diligence, skill, luck, and a sense of humor, we can sometimes glean some worthy vegetables, fruits, and herbs from our mountain gardens.

Eric Larusson (co-owner with Virginia Treblock) of The Villager Nursery in Truckee (www.villagernursery.com) imparted the following advice for those of us green-thumb lake lovers who have the gumption, grit, and unwavering optimism to grow our own veggies.

Eric points out that great soil is a prerequisite for any garden and since no "good," let alone "great," soil is to be found in Tahoe's rocky ground, your garden soil must be created from scratch.

[Jan—Eric told me how to test and amend the soil, but an easier and more surefire method is to make raised beds and fill them with perfectly mixed soil. I suggest *Full Circle Compost*—whose experts will tell you what you need. You can mix their compost with Tahoe dirt with good results.]

Eric also emphasized how important location is to your garden's success. The ideal garden location is on a gentle, south-facing



Secrets of Growing Tomatoes at Tahoe

by Mimi Komito

When I first moved to the Lake, someone told me, "You can't grow tomatoes at Tahoe." Like any gardeners worth their compost, I took that as a challenge. I'm happy to report that every year I not only successfully grow tomatoes, but finicky peppers as well. Here are my gardening secrets.

Raised Beds

My most prolific gardens were in raised beds. I used 2x12" lumber for the sides and 2x2" posts to reinforce the corners. To make the beds manageable the largest was 3x6 feet. The depth of 1 foot was just right to warm the soil to jump-start the growing season. The corner posts stuck up about 2 feet above the soil in the bed. I then draped the beds with plastic sheeting stapled to the corner posts to protect the beds from critters and weather.

Fertilizer

I used a good mix of compost and regular potting soil mixed with a slow-release granular fertilizer specifically for vegetables. I'm usually loathe to use fertilizers, but because of vegetables' relatively fast growth and short lives, they need extra help to mature in our short season. The raised beds helped prevent leaching fertilizer into the watershed.

Planting Schedule

I planted the seeds as soon as the snow had melted and the soil was workable. I either raise tomatoes and veggies from seeds started under grow lights in the garage, or buy seedling plants in Reno or Carson, which are available by late April.

Mini-Greenhouses

I created mini-greenhouses by covering the beds with plastic sheeting. To raise the plastic, I used regular schedule 40 PVC to

create 24" posts positioned at intervals along the edges of the beds, and flexible black drip hose (1/2 - 3/4") to create "hoops" across the beds, securing the drip hose inside the PVC posts. Four hoops per bed were sufficient. I then draped clear plastic sheeting over the beds and stapled it to the corner posts as well as along the long edges of the beds. I slit the plastic at the short edges so I could fold it back during the day to allow for air circulation while still being able to close up the mini-greenhouses at night. [See diagram on our web page at www.demogarden.org.]

Plastic Sheeting

Shortly after our last frost about mid-June, I slit the top of the plastic and folded it down so it only covered the sides all the way around. The side plastic still offered protection from critters, cold winds, and cool nights. To the drip hoses I tied climbing vegetables—beans, peas, zucchini, and even cherry tomatoes because their branches weren't as heavy as regular tomatoes.

I realize not everyone has room in their yards for large raised beds, but I've employed the same techniques using wooden barrels, which worked great on my sunny decks. I used 4 to 6 1x1" sticks around the edge of the barrel and stapled the plastic sheeting to the sticks. Since the barrels were small in diameter, I didn't need the support of the drip-hose hoops. Again, I kept the plastic around the bottom of the plants even after the frost danger was minimal. Most vegetables—especially tomatoes and peppers—need constant temperatures to set fruit. Since Tahoe nights tend to be so much cooler than our days, the plastic helps maintain root temperatures through the night.

Although my secrets to success require extra work, I reap the rewards of the best tasting veggies at Tahoe, and you can too.

...At Tahoe

by Jan Steinmann

hillside, neither near the top nor the bottom of the hill. Cold air drains into low pockets, and often at the top the wind is too cool for plants to produce. Keeping a supply of frost protection "floating row cover" fabric on hand is imperative. We get cold nights in all four seasons. You can create artificial warm pockets using windbreaks like a hedge or your house. Trees that block the wind but not the sun are ideal.

According to Eric, a garden needs at least 6 hours of direct sunlight a day. Limbing dead branches and thinning live branches on surrounding trees can increase the sunlight on your garden.

Eric's Suggestions on What and When to Plant:

Cool Season Annual Vegetables: These hardy, frost-tolerant vegetables can be planted from seed in the cool months of early spring, or may be planted from nursery seedlings later. Favorite cool season vegetables include beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, celery, collards chard garlic, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, and lettuce.

[Jan—I've found all kinds of lettuces including arugula do reasonably well in Tahoe. Cut what you need for dinner and let the plant continue to produce. Re-seed often throughout the summer.]

Other cold season annual favorites include parsnips, peas, potatoes, spinach, turnips, and radishes, which come up quickly and are delicious, even the big white daikons.

Cool Season Perennial Vegetables: Although these vegetables don't always produce immediately, once established they'll return year after year. Perennials include asparagus and rhubarb, which produce succulent new growth during the cool spring months and can be planted quite early. These are also pretty plants but definitely require constant feeding and watering. Perennial herbs such as chives, lovage, catnip, marjoram, mint, oregano, sage, tarragon, and thyme also survive in this climate.

[Jan—I can't over-emphasize the value of these herbs. They are gorgeous, great flavor enhancers, and do well at Tahoe. Oregano vulgaris is a bit invasive but its lavender flowers are lovely, and it's so easy to remove and so resilient. I find it easy to love this mountain transplant.]

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Veggies That Survive...

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Warm season annual vegetables. Eric also has suggestions for those quixotic folks who want to try planting warm season annuals here at the lake. I have personally known a few gardeners who tried growing squash and melons with modest success, but most of us head to the Farmers' Markets when these are in season. If you're one of the valiant veggie growers—best of luck, and contact Eric for advice.

Certainly Tahoe gardeners who attempt to grow tomatoes need all the help they can get. Local nurseries offer seeds for many short-season, cold setting varieties. The Villager has approximately 20, most of which were tested in Truckee and the remaining in Michigan. (If you succeed in planting tomatoes from seeds, I worship you.)

Although we mountain gardeners are as hardy as the veggies we grow, all the diligence and skill in the world can't guarantee our gardens will fulfill their promise. I've learned that as long as you keep your expectations realistic, and enjoy gardening for the sake of it, you'll reap rewards no matter how your garden grows.

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We hope you enjoyed this newsletter and will help to ensure the educational efforts of the **North Lake Tahoe Demonstration Garden** by becoming a *Friend of the Garden*. The NLTD Garden is a nonprofit organization and your donations are tax-deductible. A donation of \$25 or more, will make you a *Friend of the Garden* and will help maintain free community education classes, purchase replacement plants and tools, support our newsletter, and encourage our efforts to teach responsible gardening techniques that preserve the fragile environment of Lake Tahoe. Clip and return to PO Box 5387, Incline Village, NV 89450.

Membership Acceptance and/or annual renewal: \$25 \$50 \$100 Other _____

Name: _____ Telephone and/or email: _____

Address: _____

Yes, I would like to participate in the garden in other ways as well. I would be interested in helping with:

The Newsletter Garden Maintenance Special Events Teaching/Mentoring

The North Lake Tahoe Demonstration Garden is an educational community garden which promotes lake-friendly landscaping to help preserve our unique and fragile alpine environment.

