



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

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From the President's Plot

by Mimi Komito

"I'm late . . . I'm late . . . for a very important date..."

I feel like the White Rabbit. No matter how big the watch I wear, time seems to be running away from me. I'm always in a hurry, doing things at the last minute—especially so this summer. Where did the summer go? I'm so glad the temperature went back up in early September. For a few days in August it seemed Fall had already descended. Now with the warm weather, there's still time to putter around in the garden. In fact, this is the perfect time to plant perennials, shrubs, and trees. There's just enough warm weather left for them to get their roots firmly entrenched before becoming dormant. Come April or May, we'll be rewarded with beautiful blossoms and spring-green leaves.

Yesterday the warm weather lured me to take a stroll in the Demonstration Garden. I was pleased to see how well all the plants are doing, especially since the Board didn't spend much time on garden maintenance this summer. The Project Mana Garden is looking especially yummy with huge tomatoes that will be ready to pick any day now. George le Bard and his crew have done a masterful job of hand-watering, and making wire cages to protect emerging plants from critters. Board members' time was focused elsewhere, but Amy Roberts and her water-wise specialists took up the slack by installing a great drip system. Plants (but not weeds) are well-watered and healthy.

The Board focused its energy on planning. We finalized the master plan and came up with a timeline for moving the remainder of the old Mountain Campus garden to its new location at the Lake Campus. The master plan includes some exciting new demonstrations. We're almost through with the permit process, and hope to have the major structures in place before snow falls.

As the Lake Campus garden becomes a reality, the Board needs to expand its membership with some like-minded Friends of the Garden. Once plans are implemented, we'll need a variety of committees and committee chairpersons. Some open committees include:

- Education (organizing environmental landscaping classes, and developing garden demonstrations for BMPs and defensible space);
- Maintenance and Development (creating new signage and on-going maintenance of the garden),
- Fundraising and Outreach (engaging community groups such as SNC students, Project Mana, Lake of the Sky Garden Club, UNR Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners, and so on; and implementing good money-making ideas).

We invite any and all of you to contribute your time, expertise, or "armchair advice," even if only on a part-time or short-term basis. If you'd like to lend a helping hand on a committee, don't be shy (gardeners rarely are). We'd also love to have Board members from one of the above-mentioned outreach groups. Send us an email or give us a call (see the contact information of current Board members). Now's the time to let us know what you'd like to see happening in the garden next year. One way or another, we'd love to hear from you!

FLOWER POWER: GERANIUMS (Geranium and Pelargonium)

by Ronda Tycer

Geraniums are so common in alpine settings, they're almost a window-box cliché. They can withstand light frost, so they appear from late spring to late fall. Because almost anyone can grow geraniums, most Tahoe gardeners rarely rave about them. Not only are geraniums oblivious to the color of one's thumb, they're also almost impervious to the ravages of Tahoe's garden pests. Birds, chipmunks, rabbits, and raccoons ignore them completely, as do most squirrels.

Geraniums come in several varieties—in the species pelargonium as well as the species geranium. We commonly use the word "geranium" to refer to all varieties: The window-boxed, large-blossom-covered Martha (or Lady) Washington, which most of

Continued on Page 4





Tahoe Gardeners vs. Tahoe Critters

By Jan Steinmann

We local gardeners differ in our attitudes toward the critters who feast on everything we plant. Some gardeners take an eco-friendly "live-and-let-live" position, while others, reduced to frazzled hysteria seeing expensive landscaping devoured, resort to drastic measures. Many of us who've lived in Tahoe and competed with the critters for decades are resigned to the reality that "sometimes you win and sometimes you lose." Most years, we simply hope for a draw.

For 12 years, I've tried to thwart the animals who compete to eat my Brockway garden—raccoons, bears, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, voles, gophers, and moles. Each year I've changed my plants to adjust to their perpetual onslaught. But every year they do an end run around my crafty security attempts. I've not found any plant that is totally safe, only some less desirable than others. Like us, over time, animals change their eating preferences, so what works one year doesn't work the next.

My attempts to fend off garden wildlife have covered the whole gamut—human hair thrown casually around, diluted Tobasco sauce sprayed on foliage, moth balls strewn near plants, Hav-a-hart traps baited with carrots for squirrels, chicken wire, dogs, cats, you name it, I've tried it. Each technique met with limited success for a brief time. But each solution comes with its own set of problems.

To whit, keeping a dog or cat with strong predatory instincts can reduce squirrels and chipmunks, but be prepared for little "doorstep gifts—dead or almost dead—brought by your triumphant pet. And the smell of mothballs undoes any sweetness your garden may have had. Even the fancy green plastic-coated chicken wire imprisoning your plants detracts from their beauty. And whatever painful spray you use for the wild animals will hurt tame animals as well.

Although wildlife will eat almost anything in my garden, I've found they avoid (or at least, leave until last) certain strong-smelling plants, like herbs, and a few resilient perennials. I've had the best luck with:

Lavender, Sage, Chives, Oregano, Mint, Alliums;

Artemisia, Daisies, Gaillardia (Indian Blanket Flower);

Daffodils and narcissus;

Some Chrysanthemums.

My biggest disappointments have been with Tulips and Lilies.

Annuals generally get eaten but I've found that placing a loose, transparent netting over my clematis has kept their petals un-munched.

Furry creatures aren't the only garden foragers. Feathered pests also attack my fruit trees. The birds seem to know instinctively when fruit is at its "not-a-second-too-soon" peak. Too often when I pick a perfectly ripened peach or apple, I find I'm the second one to enjoy it. Next year I plan to prune the trees and cover them with netting.



Although we Tahoe gardeners suffer mightily when we lose our plants, I've adopted the attitude of George LeBar who maintains vegetable gardens for Project Mana in Truckee, Kings Beach, and the new one at our Demo Garden in Incline Village. As he laughingly points out, he enjoys gardening up here in part, "because of the unique challenge presented by trying to outsmart the critters." And when they outsmart us, well, it's just one for their side.

A reality of Tahoe gardening is that you will have wild pets (er... pests) in your yard, and the only question is what kind of truce you can make. You can fight Mother Nature, but her furry and fine-feathered emissaries will put up a clever, unceasing, and impressive battle. Tahoe gardening contains—like it or not—the fauna as well as the flora. In this newsletter issue, long-time Tahoe gardeners Candy Dowdle and Ronda Tycer share their hard-won wisdom in managing garden wildlife.

The Banquet May Change, but The Critters Dine On

By Candy Dowdle

The first year I moved here, I planted 100 tiger lily bulbs. For 5 years they bloomed and multiplied in magnificent apricot and dark orange. The 6th summer, every one of the lilies disappeared within a week. One day I noticed the lily blossoms were gone. A few days later I saw bare lily stems gnawed and strewn on the ground. The following day upon close inspection I found the bulbs had been uprooted and eaten. Although I couldn't prove it, I suspected the California ground squirrels, but they may have had help.

For the first 6 years, we had fish in our lily pond. Then one year we had bears who completely polished off the fish. But after replacing the fish 5 years ago, they've thrived. Also, for 10 years, some unknown pest was ravaging the pond plants. This summer, for the first time, the water lilies and hyacinths are beautiful. Don't ask me. I haven't a clue.





GARDEN

HOW TO FEED YOUR GARDEN PE(S)TS

By Ronda Tycer

A highlight of my four young Florida nieces' visit to Tahoe was the bounty of cute bunnies in our back yard. They were thrilled when we caught one in our Hav-a-hart trap and took it to Tahoe Meadow for release. They helped reset the trap and camouflaged the cage with dried grass and twigs to make it more inviting. Because of—or perhaps despite—their efforts, another bunny hopped in to eat the cut carrot we'd placed on the steel trip-plate, and again we were off to the meadow on another bunny-release expedition.

This past year, however, we noticed one lone yard bunny in June and by September we had three big resident rabbits. Their favorite meal was grass, of which we have plenty both front and back. We wouldn't have minded if they chomped the lawn evenly, but instead they munched blades right down to the soil, leaving bare spots, which quickly turned brown and were liberally salted with rabbit droppings. We set Hav-a-hart traps repeatedly. But this generation of trap-savvy hares ignored them. We sprayed the edge of the lawn with Liquid Fence, but they hopped over the foul-smelling areas. We couldn't find Hare-Less (another product touted to repel rabbits, squirrels, and raccoons), but because its active ingredient is capsaicin, which supplies the heat in hot chile pepper, we tried spraying cayenne solution over the lawn. Not only did the bunnies dine undeterred, but my husband swears he heard one say to the other, "Esta una ensalada rica!" My husband tried squirting them with the hose, assuming they wouldn't like getting wet. But either they worked the shower into their daily routine, or they figured it was just the cost of the salad bar. In frustration I bombed them with half-filled plastic water bottles, hoping they'd feel unwelcome. They hopped away when a bottle landed near by, but returned when the raid was over.

We also failed to trap California ground squirrels with Hav-a-hart traps. Two years ago, using peanut butter we caught several of these squirrels. But last summer the chipmunks perfected raking the peanut butter off the metal trip-plate and eating it before the squirrels had a chance. The chipmunks themselves evolved in the past 2 years. Now we have a larger, rust-headed variety almost-but-not-quite big enough to spring the squirrel traps.

Of all our summer garden pets, raccoons are the most destructive. They love our lawn, which was laid down in strips of sod. The raccoons learned how to peel back the new sod to find a delectable meal of slugs underneath (see

photo). And so every few nights they arrived for dinner, and the next morning, my husband re-laid the strips and stomped them back into place. Lord only knows what the neighbors thought he was doing out there in his pajamas and boots every morning. He came up with a strategy that briefly deterred the raccoons—covering the lawn with pre-cut sections of green plastic-covered chicken wire. It took the raccoons a few days to figure out how to roll up the wire before they rolled up the sod.



After trying these eco-friendly, low-tech solutions with modest success, we finally purchased a motion activated sprinkler for the back lawn and an electrified fence for the front. Since installing them 2 weeks ago, we've watched the squirrels learn to make a careful circuit just out of range of the motion-activated system, dashing across the lawn right behind it. Thus, we realize our solution is no doubt temporary as the garden pest gene-pool evolves.

Many mountain gardeners might side with Mother Nature's pets by adopting a "backyard habitat plan" to protect neighborhood wildlife. If this is your approach you can benefit from our experience. To feed rabbits, you need only provide grass and a bed of flowers including alyssum, pansies, and marigolds. (We're currently trying to get our neighbors to plant all these lovely flowers.) Spread peanut butter on crackers for chipmunks and ground squirrels. Sod the lawn for the raccoons. Voila!!! You'll have a yard full of entertaining pets 24/7. You may, however, not have much left of your garden.





Flower Power: Geraniums

continued from page 1

us think of as a geranium is actually a pelargonium; whereas, the small-blossomed ivy geranium, and the stringy Cranebill and Johnson groundcovers are true geraniums. No matter what their species, all geraniums have superb characteristics for Tahoe gardens. They do well in untreated soil, they don't mind the dry air, and they need almost no special care.

Two of my more patriotic neighbors bordered both sides of their driveway with red Martha Washington geraniums interspersed with blue lobelia and white dianthus—a long-lasting summer-through-fall display. Other neighbors planted blue Johnson and pink Cranebill geraniums in their garden terraces, but warned me these invaded much of their back yard. My own preference is to grow white and pink Martha Washingtons in large pots close to the house. Right now in mid-September my potted geraniums are at their most glorious, just when the rest of the garden is waning.

One drawback of Martha Washington geraniums is that some of the varieties grow leggy and need to be regularly pruned. Another complaint of the truly lazy (a group which I head) is that some varieties shed bud coverings. I've learned to buy only the varieties that grow slowly and don't shed so that I can bring the potted geraniums inside for the winter without creating a mess on my floors.

For those of us who carefully nurture our specimen flowers—roses, dahlias, delphiniums, gladiolas, lilies, peonies, etc.—while fending off constant marauders during the blooming season—growing lavish geraniums that require practically no care whatsoever is a welcome relief. You might not think of the ubiquitous geranium as a favorite flower, unless you, like I, admire pure flower power.

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 Garden is a nonprofit organization and your donations are tax-deductible. A donation of \$20, or more, will make you a Friend of the Garden and will help maintain the 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: \$20 \$30 \$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.

