



Photo by Melinda Nestlerode

Seeds For Thought

A SNEAK PEEK AT 2020'S SUCCULENT EXTRAVAGANZA (SE2)

Launa Herrmann, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County



Echeveria
Photo by Tina Paris

Last spring Solano County Master Gardeners held its first Succulent Extravaganza volunteering in excess of 1500 hours. The event garnered over 130 attendees. Monies generated from this public educational event and plant sale were invested back into the community of Fairfield (i.e., creation of a public demonstration garden at Dunnell Nature Park and Education Center in Fairfield last October).

detail from venue setup and cleanup, registration and sales, to the silent auction, an advice table and educational workshops. Even event greeters are on hand to assist the public.

“Being a non-profit, Master Gardeners strive for perfection,” Tina says. “And by adhering to UC Davis guidelines for propagation and growth, we produce nursery quality plants.” No wonder SE2 is an event you don’t want to miss. Here’s just a glance of what to expect:

- Over 1200 nursery-quality plants in four-inch pots, numerous color bowls and dish gardens available for sale. This year’s auction items include a wooden handmade succulent-planted wheelbarrow and a planted birdcage.
- For the seasoned succulent collector, new this year is an “odd room” featuring unique and unusual varieties including highly sought after *Graptopetalum paraguayense* ‘Ghostie’ crested plants, *Senecio peregrines* ‘String of Dolphins’ and hard to find succulents such as *Echeveria* ‘Big Red’ which grows over 18" wide.
- Two educational workshops taught by Master Gardeners:
 - ⊖ “Easy” Succulent Propagation — making more from the plants you buy today
 - ⊖ Designing with Succulents 🌱

Behind the scenes and the success of this now annual fund-raising event are two masterminds — Tina Paris and Sherry Richards — along with over 50 Master Gardener volunteers who are already logging in hours for 2020’s SE2.

Planning and preparation for SE2 started almost a year ago, followed by months of propagation from leaves, pups and cuttings. Each succulent was then potted, identified, labeled and placed into flats. Since January, close to 40 “succulent sitters” have spent weeks providing TLC to over 1200 plants — watching daily weather reports, inspecting for insects or disease and rotating the pots to avoid “etiolation” so every single succulent on display for sale at the Extravaganza not only looks healthy but is healthy.

Unseen and ongoing are the hours spent on emailing and meetings as volunteers grapple over usual last minute changes and make unexpected split second decisions, especially evident this year with the arrival of garden party crasher: Coronavirus.

The day of the event volunteers organize and administer every

UCCE MASTER GARDENERS OF SOLANO COUNTY

SUCCULENT EXTRAVAGANZA 2020

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OUR PLENTIFUL PRETTY PLUMS

Pearl Eddy, U.C. Master Gardener and U.C. Master Food Preserver, Solano County

Fresh plums are available here from May through October. Pick plums as they ripen. A ripe plum gives slightly under your fingers. They can be further ripened on a counter for several days, if needed; store ripe fruit in the refrigerator for several days. Most plums have about 35 calories each and are high in dietary fiber and vitamins C and A.

Almost all of our nation's prunes are produced in California. Prunes are varieties of the European plum (*Prunus domestica*), but not all plums can be dried into prunes. In recent years, packaged prunes for sale have been labeled "dried plums" to get away from the idea of prunes being "medicinal."

I suggest that if you are interested in planting a plum tree in your yard, you sample assorted plums from the local farmers' markets this summer and make notes of the names of those you find especially tasty. You can then plan a good spot for planting and can shop for (or order) your choice. Plums are often grafted (or budded) on common purple-leafed plum rootstocks.

Pests of plums (prunes) include aphids, peach twig borers and San Jose scale. Spring diseases include blossom brown rot and russet scab. Both are commonly treated with fungicides during bloom. In most local soils, nitrogen is the only needed fertilizer (21-0-0). Adequate pruning will help improve fruit size and keep the tendency for alternate-bearing under control.

We planted several varieties of plums in our orchard many years ago, and most are still struggling along after fights with assorted borers. My favorites include the 'Elephant Heart' which is very large with dark red skin and a sweet red flesh. We also like the 'Santa Rosa' which when ripe is purplish-red and juicy which makes it a favorite for making jelly. The 'Green Gage' is small to medium size with greenish-yellow skin and very sweet amber flesh. We also like the 'Italian Prune' which ripens in late mid-season. It is sweet with purple-black skin and sweet yellow-green flesh. It is excellent fresh, canned and dried.

Preserving plums in jars is a colorful and easy way to enjoy them throughout the year. I prick the skin on two sides of whole fruit with a fork to prevent splitting. Freestone varieties are easy to pit after being cut in half, but I often can them whole. Place them in jars, covered with either water or syrup. (A light syrup is one cup of sugar per one quart of water.) Process them in a boiling water canner as described in reliable canning books such as those by Ball or the [USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning](http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/publications_usda.html), 2015 edition: http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/publications_usda.html. The processing times have been changed in recent years, so it is important to use up-to-date information.

Plums make colorful and tasty jams and jellies, and dependable recipes can be found in packages of pectin, Ball preserving books and at my favorite preservation site: <https://nchfp.uga.edu>. Some people like to make a freezer jam which is stored in a freezer, not on shelves. The following recipe makes about 5 half-pint jars:

Plum Freezer Jam

10 medium blue plums, halved and pitted
 ½ cup water
 1 small orange
 1 ½ cups granulated sugar
 ½ tsp. ground mace or nutmeg
 5 Tbsp. freezer jam pectin

In a medium saucepan combine plums and water; boil gently until plums are softened and most of the liquid is evaporated, about 5 minutes. Measure 3 ¾ cups cooked plums and liquid.

Grate 1 tsp. zest from orange and cut orange in half. Using a spoon, scoop out ¼ cup of orange pulp and chop finely. Add orange zest and pulp to plums.

In a medium bowl, combine sugar, mace and pectin, stirring until well blended. Add fruit mixture and stir for 3 minutes.

Ladle jam into thoroughly washed plastic or glass freezer jars, leaving ½ inch headspace. Apply clean lids. Let jam stand at room temperature until thickened, about 30 minutes. Serve immediately, if desired, or store in refrigerator for up to 3 weeks, or freeze for up to 1 year. Thaw to use. 🍷

CLIMATES AND MICROCLIMATES

Sherry Richards, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County



All photos in this article by Sherry Richards

Most gardening books, magazines, catalogs and seed packages refer to “climate”, “hardiness” or “growing zones”. This information helps you choose plants that should grow well in your garden. In microclimates you may be able to grow plants that would not do well in other areas of your garden.

Choosing the right plant and the right place is important. You save money by not purchasing plants that won’t grow well in your garden, and, placing a plant in the best location in your garden helps to ensure it will thrive. Besides the climate or microclimate, the soil type, rain fall, day length, wind, humidity and heat all need to be considered when choosing plants.

Information about the three common climate zone maps used by gardeners when selecting plants, is provided below:

- **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Plant Hardiness Zones** - USDA zones were developed in 1960. They are based on average minimum temperatures over a large period of time. They are the most common climate zone information seen on plant tags, in nurseries, gardening books, magazines, catalogs and seed packages.
- **Sunset Climate Zones** in the Sunset Western Garden Book, and developed by Sunset Magazine, factor in winter low and summer high temperatures, length of growing season, aridity and humidity, elevation, latitude, rainfall and proximity to oceans and mountain influences.
- **American Horticultural Society Heat Zone Map** was developed for selection of plants that will survive the hottest temperature in an area. It uses average day temperatures above 86 degrees.

The north, south, east and west locations in a garden are important to know when selecting plants. **Southside** facing areas of your house will be warmer since they usually get sun all day. The **east side** generally warms up in the morning, staying cooler in the afternoon. The **west side** is warm and sunny in the afternoon. **North side** areas generally have more shade and likely the coldest in your garden.

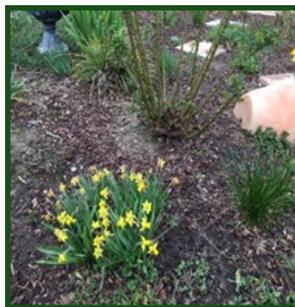
When choosing plants its also helpful to know four common microclimates in most gardens: dry soil in sun; dry soil in shade; moist soil in sun, and moist soil in shade. You can use a plant tag or other information to help choose a plant for one of these specific areas.

Garden microclimates can be small or large areas.

Microclimates can be created by natural areas like hills and mountains. or man-made structures like houses or fences. You can also create microclimates.

Here are a few plant microclimates – bet you know many more!

- **Raised beds:** They warm up earlier in the spring - a jump on planting veggies since the ground usually stays colder longer than raised beds. Raised beds also drain faster.
- Next to or underneath trees, shrubs and other plants – shady spots
- Greenhouses, hoop row coverings and garden shade cloth – sun, cold and wind protection.
- Espaliering or trellising plants on fences or walls on the south side to so a plant can take benefit of the radiated heat.
- Walls, houses, sheds and other structures may absorb warmth during the day and then radiate needed heat to plants near them during cooler nights. *Note: If you place plants in the ground or containers next to a wall or other structures reflecting heat it can create a very hot area for a heat sensitive plant. Pots placed on pavers, concrete or rocks can absorb heat on the bottom, keeping plant roots too warm – the use of “pot feet” or lifters of some kind will help.*
- Patios, pergolas or terraces with shade or filtered shade.
- Hills and slopes influence temperatures – colder at the top with more wind but warmer at the bottom and less wind.
- Large rocks, boulders, stacked bricks, and rock gardens affect temperature and help deflect wind.
- Groupings of other plants around a plant can affect temperature/wind.
- Swales, ponds, and rain gardens for moisture -loving plants.
- Deciduous trees or shrubs, before “leafing-out” for the season, can provide a sunny spot for spring bulbs to bloom.
- Sunny balconies for sun loving plants or shady balconies for shade-loving plants.



In the photo to the left, a sunny area for early spring-blooming miniature daffodils in my garden is provided until the nearby rose bushes “leaf-out.” Imagine the huge number of microclimate possibilities in the picture from Nevada, shown above!

For more information about climate zones and microclimates, check with your local nursery or Google: “Climate Zones and Microclimates Master Gardeners.” 🌱

WINDBREAKS

Michelle Davis, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County



Photo by Francois Noel www.flickr.com

Have you ever looked up the definition of “Solano”? According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary it is “a hot oppressive east wind of the Mediterranean region and especially of the eastern coast of Spain”. We aren’t in Spain, and the wind doesn’t usually come from the east, but we definitely get wind-blasted. The urge may be to buy the fastest-growing, tallest trees immediately available and plant them really close to each other to block the wind and all it carries. Here are some considerations for that windbreak, before seeing your cash get blown away.

Windbreaks are trees and shrubs planted as a hedge to block the prevailing wind. The goal is to reduce the wind’s speed hitting your home. A good windbreak protects a distance of about ten times the height of the tallest trees. Windbreaks can reduce utility costs and help keep your home’s temperature comfortable year-round. They can provide privacy or a visual screen, and they can attract birds and other small animals providing them cover and food.

Windbreaks are often planted as a single line of one type of tree or shrub. A better plan is two legs, one blocking the north wind and a second attached leg blocking the west wind. Plant taller trees at least 15 feet apart and shorter trees at least 10 feet apart. As the trees mature, they will fill in the gap. The wider tree spacing increases the longevity of the windbreak. When trees are planted too close to each other, lower branches and interior portions of the trees lose light due to shading and die.

Competition for water between trees occurs. Overcrowding also increases the risk for insect invasion and disease.

Often the same kind of tree is planted in a straight line equidistant from the next. There are several problems with this design. One or more trees can die, again due to pest or disease, or even more commonly, poor planting practices, leaving gaps in the row. Trying to replace these trees is a problem. Replacements will not be the same height as the surrounding trees and planting a new tree through the competing roots of the surrounding trees can be really difficult. Gaps in the row actually funnel and increase the wind’s speed. An answer to this dilemma is to plant a mix of different trees and shrubs in odd-numbered clusters. Other advantages of this type of planting include increasing insect and disease resistance and bettering the habitat for pollinators, birds and animals.

Do you or someone in your home have allergies? Consider if the tree or shrub you plant will aggravate those allergies. Choose insect-only pollinated trees and shrubs. Their heavier pollen won’t get blown easily. Female plants are also better options, because they don’t shed pollen (pollen is male.) The Ogren Plant Allergy Scales System (OPALS) rates plants for allergies on a scale of 0 – 10. The closer to zero, the better. Some plants that meet the OPALS standard include the following trees: female African fern pine, magnolia, and female English holly; and the following shrubs: azalea, female English yew, female pittosporum, hydrangea and viburnum. Some plants to avoid include the following trees: cedar, male cottonwood, fruitless olive, and male willows; and the following shrubs: cypress and male juniper. Remember, fish aren’t the only things that get caught and released. A hedge catches pollen, dust and mold, but it can also release them with strong wind.

In addition to the allergen load, check the flammability of the tree or shrub. Hedges can also catch flying embers. This is good if a fire-resistant plant/tree has been: 1) planted properly at a safe and defensible distance from the home, AND, 2) has been well-cared for. It might help slow the fire’s spread, but no tree or shrub is



Photo by USDA National Agroforestry Center

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fireproof. An excellent website regarding this potential problem is <https://www.firesafemarin.org/plants/fire-prone>. Plants on this site are split into preferred plants and fire-hazardous plants and then further divided into tree, hedge/screen, shrub, grass, herb and groundcover. General characteristics of both preferred and fire-hazardous trees/shrubs/plants are also listed. Fire-hazardous plants characteristics include those with volatile oils or resins (pines), those that accumulate dead matter (eucalyptus), and those with fine needles.

Drought-tolerant plants are not drought-proof and are not necessarily fire-resistant especially in a drought. Another very real problem is rapid loss of plant moisture in one single windy, hot, dry day. The Thomas Fire in Montecito, in 2017, caused many homes and thousands of acres to burn, but some survivors owe their current existence to nearby, dense avocado orchards

that had been well-irrigated before the fire started. The orchards and nearby homes did not burn.

For fire-resistance, keep trees pruned six feet up from the bottom. On level ground, space shrubs beneath the trees at least 2 times their mature height from the next shrub or tree. Also consider the mature height of the desired tree or shrub in regard to nearby powerlines. SelecTree, <https://selecttree.calpoly.edu/search-help> has a webpage on utility precautions and can help in researching trees by desired characteristics.

Finally, think about who is going to maintain the windbreak. One local pest control professional referred to an Italian cypress hedge as a “rat condo”. Regular pruning, clearing plant debris and checking the irrigation require a maintenance schedule and an able-bodied gardener and/or arborist. It may also require pest control. 🌿



Photo by Alex I www.flickr.com

A MESSAGE FROM THE UCCE STATEWIDE MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM
Covid-19 Impact

To reduce the rate and risk of community spread of COVID-19, the UC Master Gardener Program, UC ANR, and UC Cooperative Extension locations are closed.

In most counties, UC Master Gardener volunteers are still available to support your home gardening questions by e-mail, telephone, or ZOOM. Please note that many UC Master Gardener Program public education events statewide are being rescheduled, postponed or moved to an online through April 30, 2020.



Click <http://mg.ucanr.edu/FindUs/> to 'Find a Program' and be directed to your local county based program. You will be redirected to your local county website and contact information. The health and safety of UC Master Gardener volunteers, staff and our extended community is our number one priority. Thank you for your understanding.

Since 1980, the University of California Master Gardener Program has been extending UC research-based information about home horticulture and pest management to the public. The UC Master Gardener Program is a public service and outreach program under the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, administered locally by participating UC Cooperative Extension county offices.

The UC Master Gardener Program is an example of an effective partnership between the University of California and passionate volunteers. In exchange for training from the University, UC Master Gardeners offer volunteer services and outreach to the general public in more than 1,286 demonstration, community and school gardens across 52 California counties. Last year 6,154 active UC Master Gardener volunteers donated 446,237 hours, and 6.8+ million hours have been donated since the program's inception.

ANZA-BOREGO DESERT STATE PARK: DATE PALMS

Jenni Dodini, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County



Photo by Jenni Dodini

During our recent trip south to the Palm Springs area, Steve and I decided to do a little sight seeing. I had never seen the Salton Sea, and since it was my turn to pick, that's where we went. It was very interesting, history wise, but overall, there was practically nothing going on in the

area. I must say the Park Rangers were very attentive to our questions, and the video history was very well done and informative. We walked around a little bit while we decided what to do with the rest of the day.

Off we went to Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. We have friends who go there every winter and rave about it. The drive is long, because the road from the freeway is unpaved. However, the scenery makes up for the rough road. I think that next year we will be staying there instead of in the Palm Springs area.

On the way down the freeway I noticed many date palm...orchards?...plantations?...groves? There were workers on scaffolds doing something to the fruit. Harvesting? No, it seemed too early in the season, but since my knowledge of the topic was essentially zero, I just kept watching and pondering the activity. It turns out that they were netting the fruit and tying it to leaf fronds to protect it from the winds.

Once we got to Anza-Borrego, we decided to go for a hike in the state park. The weather in February is excellent for hiking, even in the afternoon. So off we went, trail map in hand. One of the rangers suggested a short hike up "the hill trail where one can see the entire valley floor". We didn't go up to the ridgeline trail, but followed the trail that went around the foot of the hills. It was very pretty; the desert was just beginning to bloom. We actually saw a road runner among the creatures that were out at the time. I was surprised to see that a road runner is actually not a large bird like the one who tormented Wiley Coyote during my cartoon watching youth! On the way back, we passed a ranger leading a group of school kids through the gardens and explaining the plants. I paused to listen when I heard her say, "If you get lost in the desert and can see palm trees, head to them as there will be water nearby. Palms use a lot of water." I was intrigued.

After we got home, this stuck in my mind until I couldn't stand it anymore. I had to research date palms. I looked all over the internet and got distracted by places that caught my interest, like medicinal value and dietary considerations. I almost forgot why I started searching. Here's what I found:

Name: *Phoenix dactylifera*

Family: *Arecaceae*

Date palms are thought to have originated in the area that is now known as Iraq. They grow, and are a food staple, in North Africa and the Middle East, and were brought to Pakistan, India, Mexico and Southern California by Spanish missionaries. Most of the US production takes place in Southern California and Arizona. Their growing requirements are pretty much as expected; HOT weather with night time temperatures around 95 degrees F for pollination to occur, and greater than 20 degrees F during the winter months. Date palms are drought tolerant, but need plenty of water when flowering. There are both male and female trees, which can live up to 150 years. Although as the trees age, fruit production decreases. They grow pups at the base of the tree, which are cut off after a few years to aid in propagation. If cut off too soon the balance of the parent tree is affected.

Their root system is pretty shallow, with 40 percent in the top meter of depth. They also need more water when young and do not reach fruit producing maturity until about age 12. Clearly, sandy and fast draining soil is needed. However, soil salinity is a consideration and leaching is needed for optimal fruit production, thus requiring more water. I read several studies about calculating water needs and the conclusion was that in most growing areas, the trees get overwatered and therefore, water is wasted. The recommended watering method is now drip irrigation and the amount of water needed depends on the time of year, heat, low humidity and winds in the area. I can attest to the fact that winds are a significant factor, especially in the fruiting season because there were winds at the park that made our winds seem like a gentle breeze! Winter rainfall is also a consideration when it comes to water needs, and as we know, the rainfall is pretty low in the deserts. In drought years, leaching due to rainfall is decreased and more irrigation is required.

My internet wanderings took me to dietary considerations of dates. I'm not a big fan because they are too sweet for me, but what I found was pretty amazing, both nutritionally and medicinally. Since there is no space for expanding on that here, I think that another article is in my future....🌿



SPRING GARDENING GUIDE



	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
P L A N T I N G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Edibles: Loose-leaf lettuce, culinary herbs, chard, carrots, radishes, spinach, sorrel ◇ Warm-season annuals: Ageratum, Alyssum, bedding dahlias, impatiens, lobelia, petunia, phlox, portulaca, salvia, sunflower, zinnia ◇ Perennials: Ceanothus, lavender, coreopsis, penstemon, rudbeckia, dwarf plumbago, scabiosa, verbenas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Edibles: Beans, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, melons, okra, peppers, pumpkins, squash, tomatoes, watermelon ◇ Butterfly, bee and hummingbird attractions: agastache, alstroemeria, bee balm, coneflower, coral bells, fuchsia, honeysuckle, penstemon, salvia ◇ Plant chrysanthemums for fall color ◇ Perennial shrubs, trees or vines ◇ Loose roots of pot bound nursery plants before planting in the garden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Edibles: Melon, beans and corn from seed; tomato, squash and cucumber seedlings ◇ Successive plantings of basil and cilantro ◇ Summer annuals: Cosmos, marigolds, portulaca, sunflowers, zinnias ◇ Summer-blooming perennials: Daylilies, gloriosa daisy, Russian sage, salvia, yarrow
M A I N T E N A N C E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Control weeds—pull or hoe them as soon as they appear ◇ Fertilize and clean up around azaleas, camellias, and rhododendrons ◇ Fertilize citrus ◇ Tune up motor, and sharpen blades on lawn mower. Mow often enough that you cut no more than 1/3 the length of the grass blade in any one session ◇ Spray olives, liquidambar, and other messy trees with fruit control hormone or blast with hose to curb fruit production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Aerate and fertilize lawns ◇ Fertilize citrus and established perennials and vegetables ◇ Deadhead spent flowers to encourage new bloom; pinch back petunias and fuchsia ◇ Allow spring bulb foliage to yellow and dry out before removing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Roses: Cut back faded blooms to 1/4" above first five leaflet that faces outside bush ◇ Fruit trees: Thin apples, pears, peaches, and nectarines, leaving about 6" between fruit ◇ Sprinklers: Summer heat increases water needs by 2" per week. Adjust sprinklers for adequate coverage and irrigation ◇ Fertilize annual flowers, vegetables, lawns and roses ◇ Dig and divide crowded bulbs; allow to dry before replanting
P R E V E N T I O N	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Bait for snails and slugs, following all product instructions ◇ Rid new growth of aphids with a blast from the hose every few days ◇ Dump standing water to slow mosquito breeding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Tune up drip irrigation systems ◇ Build basins around the bases of shrubs and trees; mulch those and garden plants to conserve moisture and reduce weeds, leaving a mulch-free margin around plant crowns and stems ◇ Stake tomatoes and perennials ◇ Remain vigilant against snails, slugs and aphids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Mulch to keep roots cool and to retain moisture ◇ Check underside of tomato leaves for hornworms ◇ Spray roses with Neem oil to help control aphids, black spot, whiteflies, and powdery mildew ◇ Inspect garden for earwigs ◇ Remain vigilant against snails and slugs



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It is available through the internet for free download:

<http://cesolano.ucdavis.edu/newsletterfiles/newsletter130.htm>

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SEEDS FOR THOUGHT



**SPRING
2020**