



# GARDENING ON THE EDGE

NEWSLETTER OF THE MONTEREY BAY MASTER GARDENERS  
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## Middlebrook Gardens

by Cynthia Jordan, MG '94

It took only 3 seconds – the length of time to say “oh my goodness” – to realize what I was walking into as I approached Middlebrook Gardens in San Jose. In front of me was every gardener’s dream. Imagine combining your *plant knowledge*, your MG training on the *science* of gardening, your designer flare for *art* and *hardscape* in the garden, and your love for *mother earth*. Imagine an old, grandma-used-to-live-here bright blue house that is now office/laboratory/auditorium/demonstration garden/retail nursery on a big corner lot in a wonderfully eclectic San Jose neighborhood. And you have Middlebrook Gardens... and Alrie Middlebrook.

Alrie is an outstanding teacher and lecturer. Her laptop presentation fits right in with Silicon Valley and she uses it as an innovative tool in the art of garden design. Alrie constantly looks for cutting edge ideas in this high-tech center of the world that, a short 30 years ago, was

one massive orchard. Middlebrook Gardens is filled with innovative concepts. There’s the ten-inch square solar panel, attached to a trellis, that powers the solar water fountain. A driveway-size piece of “pervious concrete” shows how you can have that hard surface for parking while still allowing for water to flow through and recharge the water table. The “concrete” is made of pea gravel and cement and can be color stained.

Rick Driemeyer, owner of “Both Sides of the Door”, was building a demo “living roof” in the gardens the day we were there. A 25’ long by 5’ wide by 6’ tall, arched “roof” was built on a foundation strong enough to hold various layers of nylon cloth, soil and nutrients and lots of water (FYI: one gallon of water = 8 pounds). At both ends of this demo-roof the excess nylon cloth was rolled up like a sleeping bag. The roof would be planted and the “sleeping bags”, also planted with draping foliage, would catch excess water running off the

roof. “Living roofs” are fast becoming mainstream in architectural design. The US lags behind Europe in the use of this energy-saving concept but there are some

shoe grass”. When I first saw, then stepped on, this patch of “grass”, it looked and felt like the special golf course grass referred to as the “green”. Instead, this is



ground-up tennis shoe material laid down over a mixture of base rock and sand. Water flows right through it. It is meant to replace grass in areas where you might want it – children’s play area or an animal run. Clean-up is done with a high-pressure hose and a broom. Alrie has a *very* strong opinion about lawns ....don’t

striking examples of it in this country. Chicago City Hall has a “living” or “green roof”. The building has a 35%-40% energy savings in hot or cold weather.

For the anti-lawn gardener, there is “tennis

have one! Very prominently placed around Middlebrook Gardens are signs with the word “lawn” encircled in red with a slash through it – the international sign for “NO”. She startles us with the

(Continued on page 2)

**In This Issue**  
21st Century Viticulture  
Rose Pruning Workshop  
Propagation  
Garden Faire Update  
Euphorbia

**Middlebrook Gardens**

*(Continued from page 1)*

statistics on the amount of water needed to sustain a green 16' by 25' lawn over the summer - 56,000 gallons! The City of San Jose has a "turf buy-back program" that provides financial incentives to get rid of that water-hole called a lawn.

There is no doubt that Alrie is part plantswoman, part chemist, an ecological garden designer and a philosopher. She started gardening at 5 years old and never lost sight of her quest to reclaim the natural world in the home garden. She believes that as gardeners we must bring the wilderness to the urban garden. As global

citizens we must create sustainable native plant gardens.



She is intense about her garden mantra: return to the natives. Alrie *exclusively* designs and builds California

native gardens. In San Jose alone she has converted 100+ traditional gardens to "living laboratories" for the CA native plant. Since 1989 Alrie has used native plants in her garden design work. She is positively committed to ecology-based gardening. Alrie returns time and again to the themes of the oak woodland, the chaparral landscape, and art-mosaic pots planted with natives. Her objective: "Replicating a natural system, putting it back the way it was with an eye for design and layout".

Alrie buys most of her plants from Santa Cruz County-based Native Revival Nursery. Erin, proprietor of

Native Revival Nursery, delivered a truck-load of native plants and garden accessories for our purchasing pleasure. Note that I did not say "drought tolerant" plants, which would include hundreds of choices from the Mediterranean world. Such plants are referred to as "exotics" at Middlebrook Gardens and there are some "exotics" in large pots scattered about the demo gardens.

The day ended with a tour of two gardens designed by Alrie. If you'd like to see her work and learn more about Middlebrook Gardens, log on to [www.middlebrook-gardens.com](http://www.middlebrook-gardens.com). And watch out for Alrie Middlebrook. I'm sure we will be hearing much more about her and her quest to "go native". ■

**Book Review**

*by Mary Koch, MG '00*

The Edible Flower Garden by Rosalind Creasy

As the author of eight books on edible landscaping, Rosalind Creasy (a Los Altos landscape designer) is renowned for combining plant selection, cultivation advice, along with preparation and serving tips in an intriguing mix that will have you viewing your

garden's blooms in a new light. Rosalind includes photographs of her own edible garden and describes its evolution.

This book increases our awareness of tasty blooms beyond the conventional nasturtiums, squash blossoms, and pansies (although directions for preparing candied blossoms

are included). Imagine a "perfect MG" gastronomic event that started off with Edible Flower Canapés, Sage Tempura, and used begonia petals to scoop up a citrus dip before you sat down to enjoy a Flower Confetti Salad. For the main course, you could have a choice of Stir-Fried Beef with Anise Hyssop (or tulips stuffed with shrimp salad for those preferring seafood) with a side dish of green beans garnished with redbud flowers adding a flavor that "is a cross between green beans and a tart apple." Lavender or rose geranium shortbread cookies are but one flower-filled option with which to end your tasty meal. In addition to these recipes, Rosalind also describes those

blossoms and plant parts that are sweet or savory along with information on which menu course is most compatible with that plant's flavor.

As many blossoms have a light, sweet, delicate flavor, botanical desserts will find a special place in the heart of those with a sweet tooth. Who knew, for example, that Lavender Ice Cream and Rose Petal Sorbet existed? The thought of savoring a cream puff made with Japanese honeysuckle infused milk is enough to make me consider growing the often invasive vine.

Obviously, reading this book in the late winter may help you get your gardening juices flowing again and

*(Continued on page 3)*

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# Twenty First Century Viticulture

by Al Derrick, MG '95

The first one hundred years of grape culture in California saw very little change. The requirements for growing grapes was well known and easily satisfied in the Napa/Sonoma area. Well drained soil, warm sunny days and cool nights. Irrigation was not available or required. Pests were tolerated, as was yield of one or two tons per acre.

In the 1960s wine gradually became accepted as the "cool beverage of the boomer generation". With increased demand came a new appreciation for superior product. A willingness to pay the price provided an incentive for increased yield per acre as well as more emphasis on varietal selections. As the grower benefited from a better return on his investment, the push was for more and more acreage to be put into grapes. Almost all vineyards are now drip irrigated and cordon type trellis supports are universally used. The increased yield, sold at an ever-appreciating price, has justified the investment. To help insure four to eight tons per acre yield, an increased use of powerful chemicals and

growth regulators was the next step.

About the time of the new century some growers noticed a decline in yield and quality of the grapes. It has always been assumed that



*Cover crop planted between rows of grape vines*

any nutrient needed could be added to the soil with the drip water as long as the soil drained well. Now some looked at the soil to find why the plant was not taking up the nutrients it was being fed. When tested, the soil was found to be compacted and, as a result, was not able to contain the needed air the roots required to take up nutrients. Looking further for the cause of the compaction problem it was noted that the soil was lacking the bacteria and fungi that live in the soil. They help maintain good soil structure which provides the spaces for the air.

With their incomes at stake, growers have now begun a trend to organically growing the grapes. Great effort is being put into reviving the soil structure. My neighbor grows 360

acres of grapes divided among 5 vineyards.

Although he is converting all his vineyards, I will just discuss Miljenko Vineyard next door. This vineyard is 30 acres and the soil texture

with a machine called a French plough pulled by a tractor that "feels" the vine and pulls the top soil and the weeds away and into the row. In a few days another machine throws the soil and now dead weeds back into the vines.

When the rains start in the fall and the harvest is done, the soil in the rows is cultivated and a cover crop is planted. The cover crop is varied depending on what a lab test of the nutrient level in the petiole of the leaves indicates. With no fertilizer being used except organic in the compost, foliar feeding using compost tea, and the nutrients from decomposition of the cover crop, all slow acting, it is essential to continually test and adjust the soil to maintain optimum fruiting.

The next move toward growing grapes sustainably being embraced by some growers is biodynamic farming developed by the Austrian scientist Rudolf Steiner in 1924. His system becomes very mystical and I have not been able to study the concept and so will not try to explain it here. ■

is the same as mine. Every year he orders 240 cubic yards of compost, which is prepared to his specifications and piled up as you would silage. For the next year he turns the pile several times as it ages before it is spread on the vineyard. Because organic growing forbids herbicide use, all the weeding between the vines is now done mechanically

## Book Review

*(Continued from page 2)*

perhaps to consider growing some of the seeds and plants available from the recommended source list. Beautifully photographed, the book also includes an interview with Alice Waters, along with information on poisonous plants, insects (pests and beneficials), and plant diseases. ■

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# Rose Pruning Workshop

by Leora Worthington, MG '03

On December 8, Paul McCollum invited the Master Gardeners to join his rose class to learn rose pruning technique and to take cuttings. The standard time to prune is late January to early Spring but Pearl Harbor Day is being popularized as a good starting time since it is easy to remember.



field - Paul's collection of over 200 roses. He indicated we are pruning to cause basal growth and are pruning back to 3 main branches for a more robust plant. Usually pruning is done to the same height on each branch but, of course, you can alter that for the effect you want. Making a short cut down a branch

Paul started by recommending the best tools, gloves, and book as follows:

- "A Rose Primer" by Orin Martin, written for our Central Coast.

- Goatskin gloves because rose thorns do not grab on and they allow the wearer to feel the plant.

- A spade from Gempler's - expensive but long lasting quality.

- A 6" trowel from Garden-Trowel.com.

- And one more thing, wear a long sleeved shirt! We proceeded into the



yields weaker growth while making a long cut yields a longer budding time. After pruning, strip the leaves.

Paul made some cuttings below a node on a pencil-sized stalk, leaving 3 nodes above the cut. He then

scraped off cambium at the bottom, trimmed off the leaves and thorns, and then placed the "stick" into the ground. He suggested putting the starts in a

select a location with predominantly morning sun and a minimum of 6 hours of sun per day. In February treat each of your roses to a handful of Epson salts and alfalfa meal (not rabbit pellets) which is available inexpensively at feed stores. A handful will do it - more is not better. If you want to create a



planting mix that includes 15% worm castings, some Honduran coir, vermiculite, and peat moss and then adding this to a store bought planting mix or compost. He just places his starts into the soil near the

security fence, plant a Mermaid rose. It's a "man-



rose. However, his soil has been well amended over the years and is quite rich. A cloche may be made by cutting off the bottom of a 2-liter water or soft drink bottle. Place it over the stick and leave the cap off.

eater" with long thorns pointing down the branch.

At the end of the lecture and tour we were able to

The patent expires on roses after 20 years so these plants may be propagated and sold legally. Bonnie Pond and Tom Karwin were taking cuttings for the Garden Faire in June.



purchase compost tea that Paul produces year round. Just give him a call or email to order it. Many thanks to Paul for

When planting roses

including the MBMG's in his annual pruning class. ■



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# Propagation, Then and Now

by Robin Hazard, MG '98

In 1997 a group of Master Gardeners came together to answer the request from the staff of a woman's safe house, Defensa de Mujeres, located in Watsonville. The staff of Defensa asked for help from the Master Gardeners to establish a garden in connection with the safe house so the women and children residing there could experience gardening on a first hand basis, for as we all know and have experienced, gardening can be very healing.

The original members, Kristen Thompson (96), Cathy Baker (96), Karla Knapp (96), Jeane Collins (95) and Robin Sanders (95), along with help from Al Derrick (95), Jeane's partner, and Robin's husband Jim, set out to build raised beds for vegetables and flowers that the women could grow themselves. Upon graduation, Carole Bragg (98), Judi Taylor (98), Johnny Van Dyke (98) and a few other MGs joined the group in converting an old shed into a grow house and working to get the landscaping to a point that was manageable for the residents. Over the years other MGs have volunteered at the safe house as well.

However, by 2000 Defensa had merged with a Santa Cruz Domestic Violence Group and the decision was made to move the women and use the Watsonville location as an office. It was at this time that the "Propagation Group" came into being as a way for the MGs to stay together on a project and to help out the recently started Masters Tour

with plants for the plant sale.

The "PG", with anywhere from 4 to 7 MGs at any one time, get together to do just that...propagate. As well as propagating, we transplant, fertilize and/or label plants that have been started from cuttings taken from gardens of other MGs.

It all starts in October. By then we usually know the participants of the following year's tour, and we go to each garden owner's home and take cuttings from plants that we think will propagate well and will be good sellers. Judi Taylor and Robin Sanders bring flats of starting medium that we set out in one central location and then fan out over the owners' property looking for good specimens. It's a great time for sharing propagation tidbits (should we use Rootone or not?), and we usually come away with 2 to 3 flats of cuttings. Judi and Robin take the flats home with them. Judi stores her batch of cuttings in her greenhouse, while Robin leaves hers outside, where they're watched over until the time is right to transplant them into one gallon containers. Then the call will go out for us to all meet at Robin's, because she has the largest area free to store the myriad of one gallon plants that are transplanted.

We never go empty handed to Robin's though! Besides shovels, trowels and gloves, high on the "to bring" list is potting soil, so that we can pot up those cuttings and get them on their way to becoming lush young plants to sell at the

Tour.

In the Spring we usually meet once a month but as the summer months start to roll around we try to meet at Robin's twice a month to fertilize, cut back and generally groom the plants. Robin has a watering system set up on a timer and the plants are lined up as to their watering needs. By the end of summer we're back to label the plants, which is always interesting, as the opinions on whether or not that is really this plant or that gets exciting and confusing, especially when trying to identify the many varieties of salvias!

Then it's two weeks before the tour and we're back at Robin's cleaning and sprucing up the plants, double checking the labels and deciding which plants will go to which garden that has been designated to sell plants. The week of the tour finds us loading up our cars, trucks and, in the past, a trailer (that was the year of 600 plants propagated!) and we're off to deliver them. Once that is done we usually head off to a favorite restaurant to eat, our other main reason for getting

together! Oh yes, I forgot to mention the best part of our propagation group (in my opinion), our potluck!! Each time we meet at Robin's to have a work session we all bring along something for lunch once we're finished with our chores. To me this is the best part of the day as I love to eat but I also love the camaraderie of my fellow Master Gardeners and the various topics of conversation in which we partake.

As with everything in life, things change. Some of the original members have moved onto other things and new members have joined us. In recent years Karen (Allen) Walters (97), Linda Caruthers (99), Claudia Sammis (99) and Jane Adams (99) have joined the group and brought with them new energy, information and tasty dishes.

So, if you have a few friends from the Master Gardeners that you enjoy spending time with, I highly recommend starting your own propagation group! You will learn something new, be of service to a great organization, get new plants for your garden and, if you're as lucky as we are, eat really well while doing it! ■



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## Gardening Faire Update

by Tom Karwin, MG '99 and Sheryl McEwan, MG '03

The Gardening Faire Committee focused on planning during the Fall months and began activating its plans early in the Winter quarter. With continued positive responses from the local gardening community, the project made significant advances by the first of the year.

The most dramatic progress took the form of in-kind contributions to the Faire's operating budget. We can't be specific about these contributions until they have been made "official," but we're comfortable in reporting that they total well over \$5,000. Those contributions mean that we

won't have to raise that much cash, and we can already match the funds provided by the MBMG.

Early in January we will invite local gardening groups to participate at the Faire as exhibitors. Our invitations and our mailing list have been ready to go, just waiting until after the holidays.

We also will be confirming speakers and signing up sponsors. It's a busy time.

Meanwhile, we're looking for a few more Master

Gardeners to participate in key leadership positions. As we approach the date of the Faire (June 24<sup>th</sup>), we'll need



to line up vendors of healthy food and performers of Faire-friendly music. Other key positions include signage and

coordinating set-up/strike. Let us know if you'd like to join in.

Contact any of the members of the Faire Planning Committee:

Cynthia Jordan: Speakers, Master Gardener Artists, Sponsorships

Tom Karwin: Co-chair, Treasurer, Sponsorships

Paul McCollum: Exhibitors

Sheryl McEwan: Co-chair  
Bonnie Pond: Fundraising  
Betsy Shea: Publicity/Marketing, Sponsorships

Watch for future progress reports via e-mail and *Gardening on the Edge*. ■

## Euphorbia – A Variety for Every Garden

by Bonnie Pond, MG '00

Euphorbia (Euphorbiaceae) is a large genus containing about 2000 species of plants that share a common trait of toxicity. The toxicity ranges from mildly irritating to extreme. Most of the plants have a milky white toxic sap that on exposure can cause an irritating rash. Care should be taken and the best antidote to exposure is rubbing alcohol, not soap and water. These

plants come in all shapes and sizes; some are leafless, spiny cacti; some are trees; and some are leafy and low while others are upright. Most have fused bracts (a cyathium) instead of flowers.

Euphorbia can be perennials, annuals, or biennials, but they can also be evergreens or deciduous shrubs or trees. Water needs are generally moderate to regular and exposure ranges

from full sun to full shade. Every garden needs one or more of these varied and interesting plants, either as a stand alone or planted in combination with other plants. The following are suitable for our zone:

**Succulents or mini cacti in appearance:**

*E. tirucalli*, pencil tree, from tropical Eastern Africa. It has treelike growth from single or multi trunks with

small leaves only on new growth. Unusual colors occur in partial sun. It is tolerant of seaside conditions.

*E. horrida* and *E. gorgonis* (named after Medusa) are heat loving, frost tender plants from South Africa. *E. gorgonis* has a main head with multi stems and beautiful folded flowers in speckled brown and cream. Grown from seed.

(Continued on page 7)

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**Euphorbia**

(Continued from page 6)

*E. aeruginosa*, a pleasing clumping species; *E. cap-saintmartiensis*, has a smooth white trunk and a canopy of leaves making it good for bonsai; *E. bubleuifolia*, looks like a pineapple with long green leaves. The list is long, varied and interesting. Make time to look up some of these Euphorbia.

**Perennials**

*E. myrsinites*, from southern Europe has low spreading growth (6 in x 2 ft). Stiff stems with bluish-grey, close-set spiraling leaves, grow from a central crown



*Euphorbia myrsinites*

leaves. In the early Spring, clusters of yellow chartreuse lime flowers with red centers

second year, produces great seed pods and reproduces itself.

**Evergreens**

*Rincinis communis*, castor bean has seeds that are poisonous if ingested or beneficial if used correctly. The Castor Bean should not be planted where there are small children. This shrub is from Africa

**Euphorbia hints and facts**

In my garden, I have found that most Euphorbia in the right location can be VERY invasive. When using Euphorbia in flower arrangements either dip their stems in boiling water or sear over open flame to prevent the sap from leaking and irritating your skin.

The Euphorbia can be propagated in several ways, from seed, cuttings, rhizomes or sometimes from leaves or grafting. Check out more of these fascinating and varied

form and stay until late summer. When flowers fade, cut at its base. This plant is very showy and drought resistant.

*E. cyparissias*., cypress spurge, is a European native. With 8-12 inch clumps of

feathery, needlelike foliage, this is a very pleasant plant to look at. It spreads by rhizomes, but is not aggressive in my garden. Other perennials are *E. griffithii* and *E. martini*.

**Biennials**  
*E.*

*Lathyris*, gopher plant, is an upright plant that can be aggressive but is easy to pull where unwanted. I had one grow 6 feet tall in my garden this year. Single stems have dense leaves, which grow at right angles to the stem. The gopher plant flowers in its

and Asia and grows fast to 6-15 feet. Reddish green leaves can be 12 to 30 inches across and make a good screen.

*E. pulcherrima*, poinsettia, is native to Mexico and is the most commonly known euphorbia. Grown in the wild, it is a tall leggy plant with coarse leaves on stiff upright canes. "Flowers" are showy bracts with a yellow center. It can be forced in October for Christmas bloom.



*E. pulcherrima*

plants and enjoy their diversity in your garden. ■



*Rincinis communis* - Castor Bean

and form a circle. Yellow flowers form a cluster in late winter. It thrives in my garden.

*E. characias wulfenii*, from the Mediterranean is an upright plant which can grow 1 to 4 feet tall. The stems have narrow blue green

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## Advanced Training Opportunities

by Sharon Ettinger, MG '00 and Sharon Tyler, MG '04

**Sat., Feb. 4, 8:45-4:14, *Propagation***, Al Derrick, UCCE classroom, Watsonville.

**Sun., Feb. 5, 1:30 pm, *Cacti, Succulents, and Bromeliads in the Argentine***, UCSC Arboretum. Naomi Bloss, owner of California Succulents Nursery, will give an illustrated talk on her recent travels in South America. \$15 general public, \$10 for Arboretum members.

**Sat., Feb. 11, 8:45-noon, *Hotline Training***, UCCE classroom, Watsonville.

**Thurs., Feb. 16, 7 pm, *Restios and Woody Irids of South Africa***. Martin Grantham will give a slide lecture on two of his specialities. Pot Luck Supper precedes the lecture at 6 pm. FREE! UCSC Arboretum.

**Mon. Feb. 27, 9:45-3:00, *Lawns***, Dr. Harivandi, UCCE classroom, Watsonville.

## Other Garden Events

**Sat. Feb 4, 10-noon, *Beach Garden Project planting*** at Monterey State Beach, contact Joey Dorrell-Canepa 623-9048.

**Sat. Feb. 11, 10-noon, *Beach Garden Project planting*** at Fort Ord Dunes State Park, 623-9048.

**Sat., Feb. 18 & 25, 10-noon, *Beach Garden Project planting*** at Marina State Beach, 623-9048.

**Sun., Feb. 19, 2-5 pm, *Tour of blooming magnolias***. Strybing Arboretum, 415-661-1316, free <http://www.sfbotanicalgarden.org/>

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GARDENING ON THE EDGE  
NEWSLETTER OF THE MONTEREY BAY MASTER GARDENERS

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