

GROWING PAINS



Newsletter for the MiraCosta Horticulture Club of Oceanside

September 2018

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Announcements

Club meeting on Saturday, September 8th at 12:30 p.m., MiraCosta College, 1 Barnard Dr., Oceanside, CA 92056

Workshop: Round table discussion on growing bulbs in SoCal. Host Tandy Pfost.

Program: Dave and Amber Newman, owners, "A Soothing Seed", an Oceanside cannabis nursery designed to fill an underserved market in the cannabis industry. They provide quality clone cannabis plants and seed stock to patients with valid 215 recommendations. This year they became the first cannabis-related business to join the San Diego Farm Bureau. Their subject is "Personal Cannabis Cultivation". dave@thenewman.ocks

President's Message for September 2018 Newsletter

By Tandy Pfost

What have we all done this summer?? I would love to hear about it at our September meeting. For me, it has been a little hot and humid, but it can always be a lot worse. After all, it IS summer. Working at a nursery in Encinitas was and still is sticky and dirty.

In my own garden with every small amount of free time, I have been purging plants for months and still working on it. I have picked up loads of compost from El Corazon. For a small yard, there should be no jungles, so out goes everything that has no real

value. That includes an under-producing fig tree and an apricot tree. The fig just grows big, green branches with few figs, and the apricot has a huge trunk but never produced fruit. I even grafted other varieties to it, but that did not help either. Generally, the stone fruits did rather poorly this year as was the experience of many others. The pear and peach had coddling moth which means I have to spray for that next year.

All the citrus trees have done fine although the tangerine keeps wanting to kick the bucket. It constantly over-produces. This year will be an off year for persimmons since last year was huge. The cocktail grapefruit will have a big season after an off one last season. The Valencia, lime, lemon and tangelo are steady year over year. Who wants passion fruit? I have tons. Yesterday I made curd with them to freeze next to the lemon curd in small containers. Yum! I will dump the mango I have after its two fruit are ready. It never did well after it got dropped when taking it out of the sleeve (the root ball broke up, not by me). So, I will look for another mango to go with the new dwarf fig and red guava. Who wants a 15g pink pomegranate? The fruit is great, but I don't have room to put it in the ground. The veggies are giving up. It is hard to keep the soil moist at this time of the season, and I am tired of feeding.

After this round of purging, the next is trimming fruit trees and updating pots. Potted plants have to be specimen if they are going to have a chance of staying. What has kept going and going effortlessly? Star jasmine, bottle brush, a rose,

hydrangea, clivia, pin cushion, cuphia, penta, abutilon, to name a few.

With easy access to plants, I test grow them to see how they behave, so out with the old and in with the new. Maybe...someday it will be finished.

WELCOME BACK MCHC MEMBERS

Pots Full of Pansies

Barbara Martin/National Gardening Association

In early spring, and again in fall, I pot up bright cheerful pansies and violas in containers of all kinds. The potting soil in containers is warm enough for the plants to thrive, and it adds a bright spot in the landscape. You can plant these beauties in almost anything that holds a smidgen of soil, and they look great. I usually plant mixed violas in an old-fashioned metal laundry tub by my kitchen door. The mass of flowers makes the old utilitarian tub look almost respectable and the waist-high container brings the flowers up where I can really enjoy them.

Microclimate Effects. These cool-season bloomers thrive on my sheltered, south-facing patio, where the microclimate offers protection against cold nights and raw wind. But when temperatures start to rise, this area becomes almost Mediterranean in climate, baking in reflected heat from the brick and rock. Then the cool-season flowers—pansies, violas, primroses, trailing lobelia, and sweet alyssum—will collapse in protest, and I'll refresh the tub with heat loving verbena and nicotiana.

A Cooler Exposure. This year, I've decided to be smart and plant the violas in portable containers (12 inches or less in diameter) so I can lift and move them off the hot patio when they begin to suffer. Then I'll put them on the east side of the house, where the morning sun provides just enough light and the afternoon shade keeps them cool. In that kinder, gentler location, they may even survive until fall (as long as I remember to water them!). As cool temperatures return in the fall, the violas will begin blooming again, and I can move them back to the patio for a fall color show or replant more pansies.

Best Portable Pots. As I searched for containers, I was reminded how pansies lend themselves to a romantic Victorian look, while the simpler violas are versatile and brighten up any setting. By mixing colors or following a monochrome scheme, you can arrange them to suit almost any style or taste. My smaller, portable containers would also make excellent "Happy Spring" gifts, but that's only if I can bear to part with them.

Garden Mums

Julie Martens Forney

Light up autumn scenery with the floral fireworks of garden mums. These fall favorites ignite a landscape with blazing color. Many gardeners treat garden mums like annuals, using them to decorate porches and planting beds for a short growing season. Few plants bring on the autumn color like these pretty bloomers.

What garden mums often fail to deliver is winter survival. If you're a gardener who's tucked fall garden mums into planting beds only to have them die, you're not alone. Armed with a few tips, you can improve your odds of making garden mums a perennial part of your landscape.

Buying Mums. The first step is to buy the right kind of mums. Not all garden mums are created equal in terms of surviving winter cold. Prior to the 1960s, most garden mums were perennial and easily survived winter in Zones 5 and 6. Intense breeding efforts since then have created a wonderful selection of flower colors and forms, but the eye candy often occurs at the expense of a hearty constitution.

When buying garden mums, look for tags that say hardy mums or garden mums, as opposed to the less hardy florist mums or cutting mums.

Planting Mums. Once you have the right kind of garden mums, planting at the right time is the other crucial step to helping them survive winter. If you typically plant garden mums when you clean out your containers after frost, you might as well toss them on the compost pile. In cold regions, this is too late to plant mums and expect them to survive winter.

The best time to plant fall purchased garden mums is the minute you buy them, which should be as soon as you see them for sale. Early planting—even as early as late August—helps plants develop a strong root system. Plant garden mums too late,

and winter freeze-thaw cycles can shove plants out of soil, a condition known as frost heave. Without early planting to permit strong root growth, shallow rooted garden mums don't really stand a chance.

After planting garden mums, don't forget to water throughout fall. It's also wise to add mulch at planting time over plant roots. Once soil freezes, add another mulch layer around the base of garden mums to help insulate soil and prevent frost heave. Chopped autumn leaves form a good mulch, as does shredded bark. Don't clip dead stems until spring.

Plant Right for Longest Season. To get the most out of chrysanthemums once they are planted in the garden, they need at least six or eight weeks in the ground to get established before flowering. Plant them in well-drained prepared soil, feed lightly once a month through mid-summer with an all-purpose flowering plant fertilizer, and provide ample moisture without rotting them. Air circulation is important in keeping down foliage diseases. And apply a nice thick mulch to help keep soil cool and moist and to keep weed seedlings down. Hardy garden mums also need mulch to help them through harsh winters.

Once the plants start sending out nice new shoots, pinch or snip off the growing tips to make the plants bush out with more flowering stems. This can be done up until early July, after which the new growth should be left along to form flower buds in the fall.

Chrysanthemums are "short-day" plants, meaning they start setting flower buds when days start to get shorter. In some cases, those grown in mild climates can get enough head start on growing, they may bloom in the spring. Because of this, avoid planting chrysanthemums near bright night lights, which can throw off their blooming cycle.

If stuck in moist, well-drained potting soil, placed in bright indirect light, and kept humid with a greenhouse-like plastic tent, short tip cuttings of chrysanthemums will root very readily from late spring through mid-summer. Mature plants can also be divided in the fall or spring.

Chrysanthemums, nicknamed "mums," rate as one of fall's quintessential flowers. Available in a dizzying array of colors, shapes and sizes, showy mums can bring plenty of autumn flavor to your garden or home and coordinate with any color scheme.

A Small Story of Monarch Motherhood

Sally G. Miller

What difference can one person make to the numbers of monarch butterflies in the world? The monarch world may never realize what difference we made. But the gardener will know. This story begins with a small effort by one gentle gardener. I will call her Miss M...

Last year was Miss M's first foray into monarch mothering. Alarmed by reports of monarch decline, she wanted to take action. It wasn't a big production, really. She found a local stand of native milkweed, already populated with monarch caterpillars. She brought home both "cats" and plants, proceeding to rear a tiny herd. If all went well, the tiny striped caterpillars on the milkweed would become monarch butterflies in a few weeks. And well it went. Like a proud mama, Miss M showed her little flock to a group of gardening pals. Then the butterflies were released, to propagate and to migrate.

What seemed a lark was merely a spark. Soon after releasing the butterflies, Miss M was researching host plants for monarchs. She learned about the kinds of milkweeds that would grow well in her area, while still being suitable for the local monarchs. Her goal was to encourage friends to plant these milkweeds. Each new stand of some kind of milkweed in spring might just become a caterpillar condo by late summer. Miss M considered the need for specific food sources for these cats and their picky tastes. And she also knew she'd have to provide bounteous nectar sources, both to draw the adults near before they laid eggs and supply the newly hatched butterflies for their journey. She learned that monarchs and other insects may have very specific preferences for their nectar plants. And that many commercially produced plants may be treated with insecticides. Those chemicals can linger in the plants and might be harmful to the good insects.

By February, Miss M had assembled a list of appropriate plants and prepared for a large group order from a wholesale grower. She chose North Creek Nursery as her supplier, a local grower that does not chemically treat its plants. Ready to order, Miss M guessed that some of her gardening friends could be persuaded to join her monarch mission. Plants were distributed in spring and planted across a dozen gardens in a four-state area. And Miss M herself created waystations, mini

nature preserves where monarchs would find shelter and habitat.

And then came the cats. Busy butterflies began laying eggs on the assembled masses of milkweed sometimes in August. By the middle of the month, Miss M had found her first three dozen eggs or miniscule "newborn" cats. With a couple warm months to go, those babies had the potential to create thousands of offspring for migration. This humble project suddenly sounded impressive indeed. Miss M and her monarch midwife friends began to raise some of the caterpillars inside their homes. Sheltering the tiny cats and providing food helped ensure a better survival rate among the vulnerable infant insects.

These humble, but not meager, efforts are being multiplied across the United States. There are hundreds or thousands of humble efforts like these taking place across the United States. Monarch Watch, based at the University of Kansas, is just one of many organizations supporting monarch enthusiasts. Its website, monarchwatch.org, is loaded with everything you could want to know about monarchs. It is also a source of supplies and plants, and a facilitator of the sharing of information and milkweed seeds. Links within the text above go to Monarch Watch website.

Caterpillar season is winding down for Miss M, at time of publication. She cheerfully continues her monarch ambassadorship, offering her babies to foster homes in a growing network. Her latest inspiration was to take chrysalises to organic growers at the Farmers Market. Several like-minded farmers accepted them, hoping to boost butterfly population in their own stands of milkweed and native plants. Nearly a hundred more chrysalis await transformation at this time. And Miss M can at least honestly tell her grandson that she has personally helped over 400 monarch eggs reach adulthood. Maybe that's all the difference she needs.

Autumn Asters

Gwen Bruno

Many gardeners expend all their energy on their spring- and summer-blooming garden, then feel as exhausted as their plants by September. You can overcome these autumn blahs by adding one of the many fall-blooming asters. Not only will you energize this season's flower garden, you'll enjoy the aster's sparkling blossoms for years to come with a small amount of care.

Introducing the Aster. Asters have a daisy-like flower, and in fact are often mistaken for daisies. Like other daisy types, the aster bloom is actually several flowers which together form a flower-like structure. What we think of as the aster's petals are actually ray flowers, which radiate from a tight central button of disk flowers.

Aster Culture. Aster cultivars do require a little care to look their best. Powdery mildew is a problem for some asters, though newer varieties have been bred to be mildew-resistant. Asters like a well-drained soil rich in organic matter, and do best with full sun or only light shade. During their long growing season, their soil should not be allowed to become overly dry. It seems counterintuitive, but dry conditions actually encourage powdery mildew to attack the plant. Avoid overhead watering and use drip irrigation to help keep the foliage dry and disease-free. The aster evolved in sunny, exposed spots, so good air circulation is important. The tallest asters require staking, otherwise once they come into bloom they are likely to flop over their garden neighbors. You can avoid the need for staking by pinching back asters in the same way you would mums. Pinching back once when plants are about 6 inches high, then again about a month later (but no later than early summer) will yield shorter and more compact plants. Although asters can be prodigious self-seeders, the hybrids do not breed true to type.

If asters have a fault, it is their sheer exuberance. Left to themselves, asters tend to spread and die in the center. You can replant the vigorous shoots from the outside of the clumps, discarding the center. The best time to divide fall-blooming asters is in the spring. Plan to divide your fast-growing asters every other year. It's a small price to pay for a bounty of blooms at the end of the gardening season.

Asters are a must for any Butterfly Garden, as they are a favorite source of nectar for the Painted Lady, Monarch, and other butterflies.



PENNIES for PINES



Donate your spare change

Stumped by a plant issue? Call the San Diego Master Garden Hotline 1-858-822-7711 for all your garden issues.