

The Gardeners' Club

June 2011—Newsletter, Part II

"I wonder what it would be like to live in a world where it was always June."

- Lucy Maud Montgomery



As promised, here is Part II of the June newsletter.

Growing Wonder, Growing Stewardship: Watsonville Wetlands

"Want to go on a guided nature walk in the Watsonville wetlands next week?" asked Marcia Meyer. "But of course!" I answered. So on a fine spring day we joined Marcia's daughter, Rebecca, and her children Gavin and Danielle Bennett, for a guided tour of a wonderful protected habitat for hundreds of species of aquatic mammals, birds, fish, invertebrates, algae, bugs and plants.

We met at the Fitz Wetlands Educational Resource Center (WERC) in Watsonville. The Fitz WERC is an exciting joint venture of the Pajaro Valley Unified School District, the City of Watsonville and Watsonville Wetlands Watch. It consists of an indoor-outdoor wetlands learning center that includes a visitor center, classroom and wet lab, a greenhouse, and a demonstration native plant garden. WERC borders over 100 acres of protected wetland area, and implements the plans to preserve, restore and enhance the Hanson and West Struve Sloughs, part of the conditions for building Pajaro Valley High School on this site.

There was so much to look at in the visitor center, it was hard to start our walk. But a display of 14 freshly picked flowering plants and grasses collected by staff and volunteers whetted our appetites for plants, and we were promised plenty of time to explore the center later. Before we left for our walk on the trail, we were given the opportunity to take binoculars, if we didn't have our own, and field guides for plant and bird identification.



Gavin enjoys a new way of seeing the world, quickly learning how to use binoculars.



Danielle holds a copy of A Field Guide to the Common Plants of the Watsonville Wetlands.

You can read the guide at
www.watsonvillewetlandswatch.org/plants.htm.



Gavin inspects the drip irrigation system in the greenhouse.

We walked past a compost and vermiculture demonstration area on our way to see the native plant greenhouse. Here tens of thousands of native grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees have been propagated for use in habitat restoration.

Students of all ages in the Pajaro Valley School District are also

propagating plants at some of the schools. We learned we can volunteer to help with propagation.

We began our walk on the trail. There is nothing like being with children on a nature walk. Marcia said, "They see so much because they are lower to the ground!" We marveled how they used all of their senses, but especially touch, more than we grown-ups did. But more than that, their spirit of wonder and discovery was contagious. We adults were enjoying it all, but it was the children who uncovered mysteries and discovered amazing things—frogs, feathers, birds, seeds, bones, leaves, tracks.

Our guide encouraged us to taste some things. We know that the leaves of wild mustard are pungent greens, and that mustard seeds provide the familiar taste of the bright yellow stuff we put on our hotdogs. But have you ever tasted a mustard flower? Surprisingly mild.

While we were watching a Snowy egret, puzzling over some scat, discovering frogs in the grass, etc., I heard our guide exclaiming "Tarplant!" I don't know which kind he was showing the rest of the group,

but I hope it was the Santa Cruz Tarplant. Also known as the Santa Cruz Sunflower,
(continued)



Birdsong! Wildflowers! Marcia can't contain her excitement!



Black mustard
(*Brassica nigra*)



Holocarpha macradenia is an endangered species which was almost extinct in the 1960's. One of the projects the Watsonville Wetlands Watch has undertaken, with measurable success, has been to restore the population.

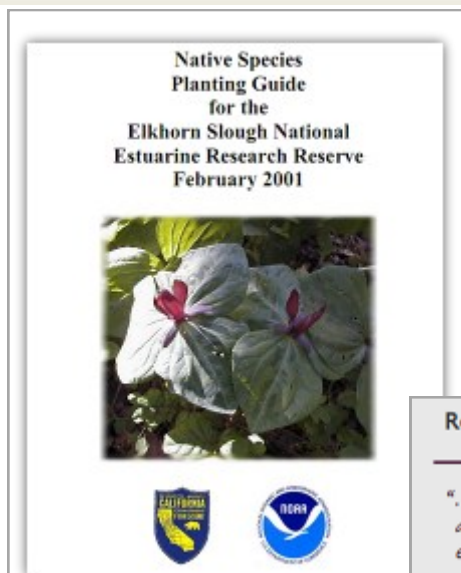
Back at the visitor center, we got to pet and hold snakes, examine the displays more closely, feel how soft the feathers of a hawk are, hold tiny eggs and imagine what bird laid them, and more. None of us wanted to leave.

We're certainly planning to go back to the sloughs. Seeing the world through children's eyes, we realized that never has it been more important to provide opportunities to connect children with nature. Partnerships like this one, especially between schools and conservation groups, are fundamental to strengthening communities and ensuring the future of a healthy environment. As children and their families develop attachments to natural spaces and places, we will raise the next generation of stewards who will care for and protect our environment. But we need forward-thinking programs like

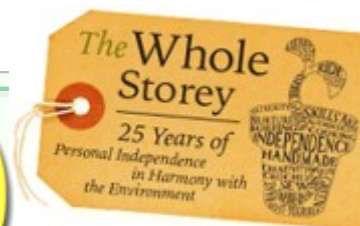


this one to cultivate such stewardship. I'm inspired to learn more about other such efforts, and to support the ones I can.

Take a walk on the wild side—you, too, can take a Watsonville Wetlands Alive! Tour. Bring your friends or family to explore untamed beauty. You don't have to take along a child; there will probably be plenty of them there to keep you company! The tours start at 10 a.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. Binoculars are provided, and tours last approximately one to two hours. Visitors should wear walking shoes and dress for an outdoor walk of one-quarter to one mile on uneven ground (mild grassy slopes). Non-walkers will be given a tour of the Resource Center (the WERC). Tours are free, but to ensure a space, please call Kathy at 345-1226 or email her at kathyfieb@yahoo.com. For more information or driving directions, go to www.watsonvillewetlandswatch.org/wetlands_alive.htm.



Want some tips on growing native species on your own? Get the Elkhorn Slough Reserve's Native Species Planting Guide. It outlines seed collection and planting suggestions for over 100 native plants found in the Elkhorn Slough watershed. Download at www.elkhornslough.org/plants/native_plants.PDF.



Storey Publishing has some excellent gardening books. While perusing the possibilities at www.storey.com, I came across a great resource: free naturalist worksheets for children (or childish adults). You can download these free at www.storey.com/the_nature_connection.php :

Nature Around Me, My Nature Notes, My Nature Surprise List, Naturalist's Interview, My Color Wheel of the Seasons, Naturalist's Sounds and Clues, My Weather Watch Worksheet, Tracking the Daylight, Moon Journal and more.

Make sure and check out Storey's book selection, too. This is the book I found most tempting, by Edward C. Smith:



Restoration is...

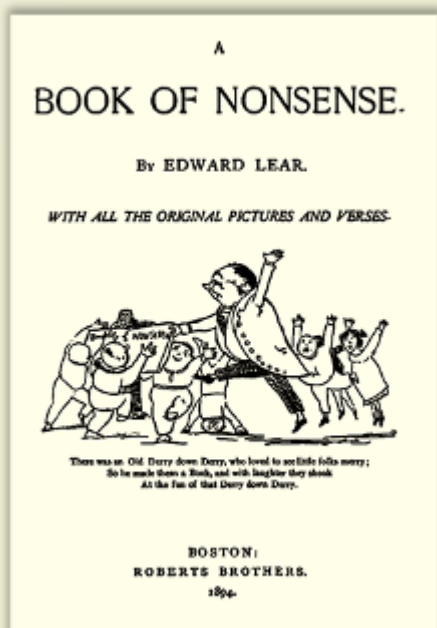
"... turning back the clock to a time of pre-disturbance ecology." —JOY ZEDLER

"... raising the ecological function of a degraded site." —DANIEL JANZEN

"... assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been damaged." —SOCIETY FOR ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

Digging In, published by the California Coastal Commission in 2008, is available as a PDF at www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/UNBweb/digginin.html. This 164 page guide describes how individuals and organizations can become involved in

helping to improve and restore coastal wetlands and other coastal habitat in their communities. The Guide explains the basic steps of information gathering, site selection, project implementation, monitoring, maintenance and working with volunteers. It includes tips on battling non-natives, as well as propagating and installing native plants.



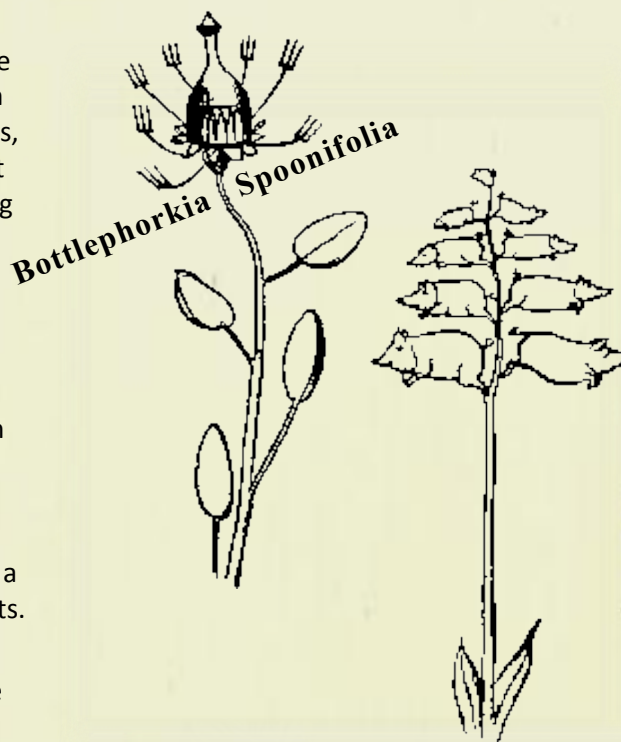
Flora Nonsensica



Manypeeplia Upsidownia



Shoebootia Utilis



Bottlephorkia Spoonifolia



Piggiawiggia Pyramidalis

Articles on “no-nonsense” gardening have no appeal to me. After all, I was raised on nonsense. My father loved limericks, puns, word play and off-beat humor, so it is not surprising the first book I remember being given is Edward Lear’s Book of Nonsense. I have been laughing at Mr. Lear’s oddities since the age of three.

Mr. Lear was a Victorian gentleman who was an accomplished landscape and ornithological painter, but his fame lies in the “nonsense and bosh” he left us in his limericks, poems like “The Owl and the Pussycat”, nonsensical words such as “runcible”, ridiculous alphabets and, yes, a fantastical botany of absolutely daft plants.

I could write extensively on the life and times of Mr. Lear, but instead I’ll just give you a few examples of his work. Expect more to be sprinkled throughout the next few issues of the newsletter! -Lise Bixler



There was an old person of Wilts,
Who constantly walked upon stilts;
He wreathed them with lilies,
And daffy-down-lilies,
That elegant person of Wilts.

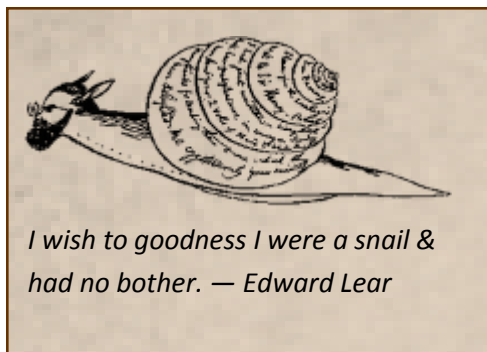


There was an old man whose Giardino
Produced only one little bean o!
When he said — “That’s enough!” —They
answered “What stuff!
You never can live on one bean O!”



Nasticreechia Krorluppia

Ugh-Slugs!



It's impossible to summarize all the advice there is out there on how to keep slugs and snail from devouring your garden, but here are some tips. The first is from the newsletter of The Garden Company:

"There are some plants in the garden that snails find so irresistible, that no matter how many Sluggo



granules you spread around, they still find a way to get through. Well there is now hope for your hostas, dahlias, basil and citrus trees. Pure & Natural Snail & Slug Away from Gro Power is a liquid plant-based product in a convenient, ready to use spray bottle that acts like a Star Trek force field to repel marauding snails and slugs. The active ingredient is Cinnamon Oil, which is combined with soapbark, water, soybean oil and sunflower oil. That's it, 100% natural with no mysterious undefined inert ingredients. It is the only on-plant spray product on the market today that is safe around humans, pets, wildlife, and the soil environment. It won't even harm earthworms. Of course it will probably burn like heck if you spray it in your eyes, so be sure to remove all snails from your face before spraying them. Snail & Slug Away kills snails, slugs and their eggs on contact and continues to act as a repellent for up to a week. To use, simply shake the product gently to blend all of the oils before spraying the surface of the soil around the base of plants to be protected. Next, spray the base of the plant first, then spray the foliage. The ready-to-use spray can be safely applied directly to all food crops. Simply rinse harvested fruits and vegetables gently with lukewarm water to remove any cinnamon residue. Lance has been testing the product at home on some of his cherished variegated hostas and farfugiums (gulp) and has reported excellent results with no adverse effects on the fine foliage of his gorgeous shade perennials that are often ravaged by snails. It is an easy, natural and effective way for you to protect the snail magnets in your yard."

The Dirt Doctor (DirtDoctor.com) Howard Garrett says to use your coffee grounds twice, not only for your morning wake-me-up, but as a repellent. He says, "I have used and recommended coffee grounds as an organic fertilizer for years, but they have another important use. To control slugs, snails and pillbugs, broadcast coffee grounds around plants troubled by the little beasts. To run pests off effectively, use anywhere from 2 – 5 lbs of coffee grounds per 100 square feet. Slugs in most cases come right up to coffee grounds but wouldn't cross over."

Some people say that you can use wood ashes with the same success. Golden Harvest Organics (www.ghorganics.com/page13.html) has one of the most comprehensive summaries of slug and snail control methods and their effectiveness available. They give results of their own trials, which is useful information.

But the last word goes to Edward Lear, of course. He came to gardening very late in life, but learned to love it tremendously. Here's the method he used to cope with slugs and snails, described in a letter to a friend:

...my garden is now admirably beautiful, & were it not for the Slugs & Snails would be inimitable. But those melancholy mucilaginous Molluscs have eaten up all my Higher=cynths & also my Lower=cynths & I have only just now found a mode of getting rid of these enemies: - which is by flattering their vanity in taking them friendly walks up & down the garden, - an inganno which blinds them to ulterior consequences. And thus, (they being of a monstrous size as you may see by the sketch below,) when I get them near the cistern, I pitch them into the water, where they justly expiate their unpleasant & greedy sins.





We've been patiently nurturing our pepper plants and they finally have flowers—and now Organic Gardening tells us to pinch them off! In the article “6 Steps To Productive Peppers” (www.organicgardening.com/learn-and-grow/6-steps-productive-peppers), they say, “As difficult as it might be for you, pinch off any early blossoms that appear on your pepper plants. This won't harm the plants. In fact, it helps them direct their energy into growing, so you get lots of large fruits later in the season (and a higher overall yield) instead of just a few small fruits early on.”

Basil needs pinching, too, says Bonnie Plants in their newsletter: “If you let the plant flower, it tells itself, ‘I've fulfilled my life's purpose by making seed so I can just stop growing.’ So to continue a nice harvest until cold weather arrives—pinch, pinch, pinch! Put a few sprigs in a small vase to perfume the kitchen.” At the Bonnie Plants informative website (www.bonnieplants.com), you'll find a link to subscribe to their newsletter, and great tips and recipes, like this one for Herb Hummus. It is delicious and uses a variety of herbs from your garden: basil, chives, mint, and cilantro. It's quick and easy, but if you want it even easier, scoop store-bought hummus into a bowl and add the herbs.

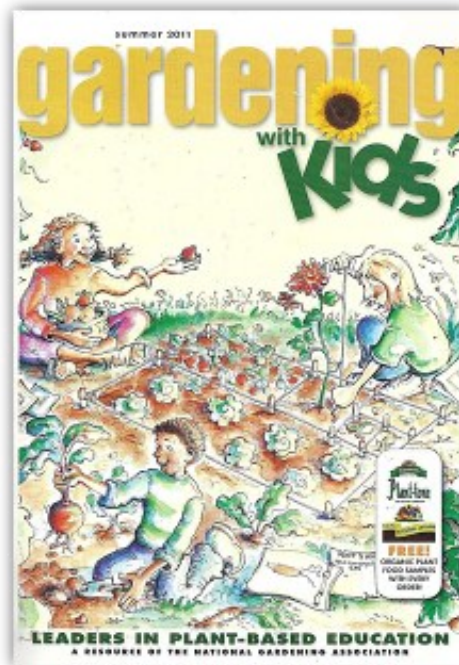


Herb Hummus

- 3 (15-ounce) cans chickpeas
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 3/4 cup tahini
- 3/4 cup olive oil
- 4 garlic cloves
- Juice of 1 lime
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1/4 cup each chopped fresh basil, chives, and mint, or some other mixture of these herbs depending on your taste
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon ground red pepper



Combine all the ingredients in a food processor and process until smooth. Add more lime juice and salt, if desired. May make ahead and refrigerate overnight before serving.



Do check out the Gardening with Kids catalog—it's not just for kids. They have rugged lightweight garden tools that are mid-sized—perfect for smaller adults. www.gardeningwithkids.org



Thanks to Pamela Mason of Cole Canyon Farm (www.colecanyonfarm.com) for telling us about a relatively new, all organic seed company, High Mowing Organic Seed (www.highmowingseeds.com/) in her latest newsletter. They are a growing operation, family owned, and committed to developing a broad base of organic seed varieties. Cole Canyon recommends them highly.



Magentasreen



Yellow Nigella



Rosie Basil



Our next Board meeting will be on Monday, June 27th, and will be hosted by Elliot Dumbner at his home at 104 Zinfandel Circle, Scotts Valley. We'll meet at 6 p.m. for a tour of the garden, and 6:30 for the business meeting. Elliot plans on providing food. As usual, all members are welcome to attend; you don't have to be on the Board.

When asked to describe his place (can't wait to see it!), this is what Elliot said: "To call it a garden, a design, a landscaped plot, would be a misnomer, since I believe in SQUARE INCH GARDENING, and I have not yet met a plant that I can live without. Other descriptive words are required, such as Darwinian jungle

and bird sanctuary. It is also a plant collection, especially due to the numerous container plantings lining the patio and walkways, making single file walking mandatory, as i have run out of earth, in the ground, square inches and am now heavily into gardening vertically. I have over 50 rose bushes, lots of bulbs and fruit trees. Oh, you might call mine a 'Sardine Garden' – but like a parent with children, I just love my green things, whatever they are called. I live in a place called The Vineyard, which is not an indication of sobriety or lack thereof of the inhabitants. All streets have wine names, and front yards are maintained by the association of home owners. I have pushed the limits in planting, containerizing, vining my front yard. One look at the other houses' front yards will reveal the difference." See you there!

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It's easy-peasy to join our club!

Dues are \$12 per calendar year. Make check to "The Gardeners' Club" and mail to 1633 Quail Hollow Rd., Ben Lomond, CA 95005. Meetings are held at 7:00 p.m. on the 2nd Thursday of each month at the Aptos Grange Hall, 2555 Mar Vista Dr., Aptos.

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