

The Gardeners' Club

Santa Cruz County, California

February 2012, Part II

Writer/Editor: Lise Bixler

"Design Made at Airlie Gardens" by Minnie Evans, 1967



Black History Month

February is the month our nation pays tribute to the generations of African Americans who struggled with adversity to achieve full citizenship in American society. This year's theme, "Black Women in American Culture and History", honors African American women and the myriad of roles they have played in our nation and the world, and encourages us to reflect on their contributions. Let's consider Minnie Evans, who was inspired by her spirituality and a grand, historic garden to create incredible works of art.

Minnie Evans was born in 1890 in North Carolina, and is considered to be one of America's most important visionary

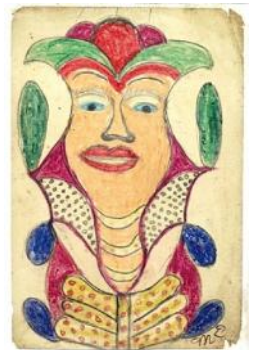
artists. Evans was married, the mother of three sons and employed as a domestic worker most of her adult life. She began drawing and painting seriously at the age of 43. Her vibrant, surrealistic paintings depicted lush images from gardens and nature and from her dream



life, and usually included female faces.

From 1948 to 1974 Evans served as gatekeeper at Airlie Gardens near Wilmington, where the lush landscape likely inspired her art practice, and she sold her small drawings and paintings to visitors to the Gardens, at first for as little as a quarter.

Initially using ink, graphite, and wax crayon, she'd draw on anything, including scraps of brown paper. She eventually began to work in oil paint, occasionally collaging her characteristically small-format pieces into larger compositions. In 1975 she had a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art and found her work the object of international praise and avid collection.



Airlie Gardens, where Evans worked and from which she drew inspiration, is a 67 acre is a public garden in Wilmington, North Carolina. It was created in 1901, originally at a private garden. It is a combination of formal and lush naturalistic gardens, wildlife, historic structures, walking trails, sculptures, views of Bradley Creek, 10-acres of freshwater lakes, and the grandeur of the 462-year-old Airlie Oak. The Gardens are known for a collection of over

100,000 azaleas and countless camellia cultivars, which bloom throughout the winter and early spring.

In 2004, the Minnie Evans Sculpture Garden and Bottle Chapel, created by eight artists, was dedicated at Airlie in honor of Minnie Evans. It includes a metal tree sculpture “growing” through the center of the chapel, with sculpted birds perched in its branches.



Eco-Lawn Grass Seed

This mixture of seven red and hard fescues is a low-maintenance alternative to traditional turf-grass. It needs less mowing and less water, and can be kept unmowed for a natural, pastoral look. It is drought-tolerant and grows in full sun to shade. It can be planted year-round in the Bay Area and Central Coast, and once established needs watering only every two weeks. Simple and informative seeding instructions are included. Great for garden paths and open seating areas. 5-pound bags cover 1000 sq. ft and are \$39.95.



Available at Sierra Azul Nursery and Gardens, 2660 East Lake Avenue, Watsonville.

Gardening is for the birds 🌿

Many gardeners fear chickens will peck away at their landscape, and chicken lovers often shy away from gardening for the same reason. But you can keep chickens and have a beautiful garden, too! Fresh eggs aren't the only benefit — chickens can actually help your garden grow and thrive, even as your garden does the same for your chickens. In this essential handbook, award-winning garden designer Jessi Bloom covers everything a gardener needs to know, including chicken-keeping basics, simple garden plans to get you started, tips on attractive fencing options, the best plants and plants to avoid, and step-by-step instructions for getting your chicken garden up and running. For anyone who wants a fabulous garden where colorful chickens happily roam,



Free-Range Chicken Gardens is the guide that will bring the dream home to roost.

— The contest —

Timber Press is having a contest to give away a complete chicken garden start-up kit! Go to www.timberpress.com/chickens to enter. **Contest ends February 17!** The lucky winner will get a \$50 gift card for chicken feed or supplies from McMurray Hatchery; one chicken coop plan from The Garden Coop (a \$20 value); 1 lb. of organic chicken forage blend and seeds for chicken-friendly plants from Peaceful Valley Farm & Garden Supply (a \$20 value); and a copy of Free-Range Chicken Gardens.

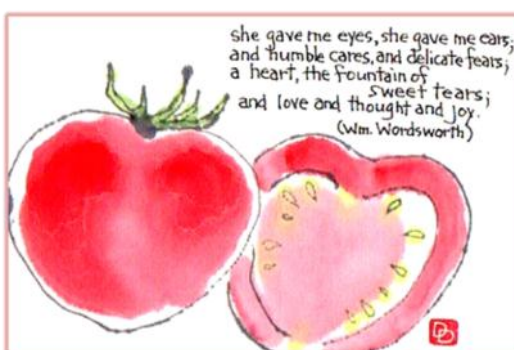
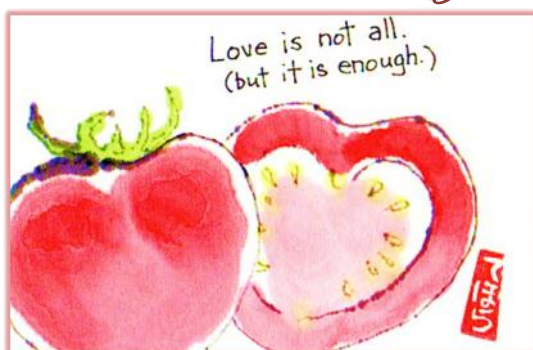


2012 OPENING CELEBRATION — DAFFODIL DAYDREAMS

Filoli of Woodside is hosting Daffodil Daydreams, a three-day tribute to the flower, Friday, Feb. 24, through Sunday, Feb. 26. The event includes talks by botanical experts, activities for all ages and a display of nearly a million daffodils in bloom.

Filoli is at 86 Cañada Road, Woodside. The event will run 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Sunday. The event costs \$15 for adults, \$12 for seniors age 65 and older, \$5 for students ages 5 through 17. Call 650-364-8300, ext. 508, or visit www.filoli.org.

Dreaming about Tomatoes



Tomato hearts by dosankodebbi (used by permission).

"Many fruits and vegetables, when cut in half, display an inner heart-shape. This has always fascinated me," says Deborah Davidson of Sapporo, Japan on her etegami notebook blog (read more at <http://etegamibyosankodebbie.blogspot.com/>). Etegami is a traditional Japanese folk art that combines simple images with thoughtful words or poetry. See more elegant and moving dosankodebbi art at www.redbubble.com/people/dosankodebbie/works.

The last couple of summers have been very disappointing in my garden, tomato-wise. I've decided to let go of some of my tomato dreams—the ones where impossibly humungous beefsteak tomatoes ripen in the hot sun by midsummer. The reality is, at least in my part of Santa Cruz, the cooler coastal climate means no ripe tomatoes until almost fall, if they aren't hit by one form of pestilence or another.

Earlier this year I got an e-mail from TomatoFest, Gary Ibsen's seed company which offers over 600 varieties of heirloom tomato seeds. The e-mail was all about how to grow tomatoes in the winter and indoors, and when I went to the website (www.tomatofest.com), I was quite amazed to find complete downloadable plans for building self-watering indoor tomato growing systems ("EarthTainers") out of Rubbermaid storage containers. I was also amazed by how this chockfull-o'-resources website is organized—the tomato varieties are recommended in categories, such as "Small Garden Easy Picks", "Indoor Container Tomato Seeds" and, just what I needed, "Tomatoes for Cooler Climates".

Many of the tomatoes recommended originate from cooler growing areas in Russia and other northern climates. Many of these tomato varieties can flourish within these cooler weather conditions regardless of whether they are early, mid-season or late maturing varieties, but most are early maturing tomato varieties suited for shorter growing seasons.

Gary tossed an extra packet into my order, "Sasha's Altai". You can read the exciting story of how these seeds made it from Siberia to here by going to High Altitudes Gardening (www.seedstrust.com/st/sasha.html). We aren't exactly gardening at high altitudes here, but this seed company has recommended varieties for shorter

colder growing seasons, and not just tomatoes.

My friends Paul and Patty were puzzled when I moaned about my tomato disappointments last summer. They live in Ben Lomond, and said, "We planted ours in March, with some Walls O' Water, and we had lots of tomatoes. Early Girls—they work every time". Early Girls! The first tomatoes I ever grew, and long abandoned because of heirloom bias. I apologize to you readers for never writing about hybrids. Not everyone loves heirlooms—read a different point of view on the next page.

But if you still want to grow heirlooms, Love Apple Farms will hold a \$55 class on sowing tomato seeds 9 a.m. to noon Sunday, Feb. 19. After selecting seeds from their seed bank, participants will learn how to care for them, and will take home several flats of sown seeds. Love Apple Farms is at 2317 Vine Hill Road, Santa Cruz.. Call 588-3801 or visit www.growbetterveggies.com.

Sick of tomatoes? Learn how to grow blueberries!

Growing Blueberries in the Home Garden

Sunday, Feb 19 10:00a to 1:00pm

[Louise Cain Gatehouse, UCSC Farm](#)

Santa Cruz

Learn about the best-performing varieties, soil preparation, ongoing care, and pruning techniques you'll need to successfully grow blueberries in your home garden. This workshop will be led by Christof Bernau and Liz Milazzo of the UCSC Farm staff. No pre-registration necessary.

The Politically Correct Tomato Sandwich

by George Ball

Last summer I became sandwiched between two political issues that appear sympathetic, but on close scrutiny show a profound and dissonant contradiction deep in the fertile soil of community gardening.

First Lady Michelle Obama boldly proclaimed that the urban poor were at serious risk of deprivation of fresh produce. The so called “food deserts” stretch from border to border in the poor and underprivileged sections of every major American city. One of the ways the First Lady proposed to solve this problem is to expand the size and number of community gardens.

However, there is also a trendy, stylish and even sexy movement in contemporary gardening that preaches the use of old fashioned or “heirloom” vegetables that were popular in our grandparents’ day. In community gardens everywhere, I see tall, rangy, low-yielding and romantically named heirloom varieties made popular by environmental activists over the last twenty years.

But there is trouble in this garden paradise. While the often lovely and uniquely flavored heirloom vegetables befit an upper middle class suburban vegetable plot, they fail to meet the urgent nutritional needs of the urban poor. In fact, old fashioned varieties, with their poor yields, late harvests and floppy plants, present logistical challenges that most community gardeners cannot meet. In contrast, modern hybrids—looked down on by today’s gardening elite—supply not only the requisite large quantity of vegetables that the poor need but also a nutritionally high quality of fruit, since they are loaded with greater amounts of vitamins and minerals than their distant ancestors.

Over the past several years, contemporary plant breeders have introduced nearly a dozen new cultivars of tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and lettuce that record up to twice the amount of nutrients than ordinary store bought vegetables. While they don’t have the romantic or

seductive names and stories behind them, such as “Mortgage Lifter” tomato, these new hybrids deliver vastly more antioxidants and vitamins C and D.

Further ironies abound. According to their zealous advocates, heirloom vegetables have the virtue of being able to be self-propagated, via do-it-yourself seed-saving techniques. The argument goes that self-perpetuating heirlooms provide low income families with an inexpensive means of sustaining themselves.

However, this virtue is not what it seems. Saving seeds can be just as tricky and time consuming as growing the vegetable garden itself. Seed must be collected, extracted, cleaned and put into dry storage. Paradoxically, the purveyors of heirloom seeds are at the elbow of community gardeners every year with new seeds to sell them.

Therefore, the poor and unemployed in the underprivileged communities of America are expected to spend more than twice the time and effort for less than half the benefits compared to hybrid seeds—especially the newest, nutrient rich varieties. But no one should underestimate the poor and unemployed—they know value when they harvest it. Give them more!

In addition, the swelling ranks of our nation’s unemployed include many potential gardeners. Recent news of the challenges facing food banks across the country suggests that community gardens are coming soon to many middle class neighborhoods. Perhaps we are not all out of work, or living in a food desert, but we should be mindful of those who are.

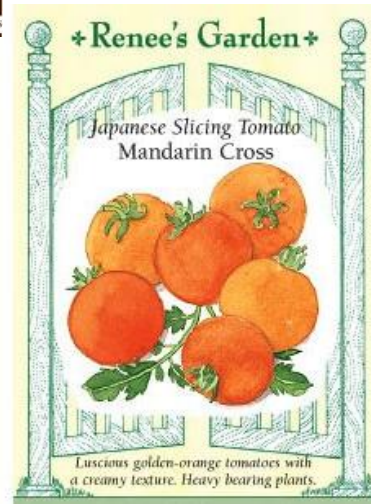
Although today’s hybrid vegetables, loaded with delicious fruit, are not today’s “flavor of the week” among gardening pundits, they address the food security needs of the urban poor more effectively than any hundred-year-old variety ever could.

George Ball is the owner of Burpee Seeds, The Cooks Garden and Heronswood Nursery. This piece is from his thoughtful and sometimes provocative blog Heronswood Voice (subtitled Silva Rerum, Latin for “forest of things”, meaning a family chronicle or journal). One of the things I like about his blog is that he answers all the comments in response to his posts, which makes for an interesting dialog between writer and readers.



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Renee Shepherd has written a clear and detailed article explaining the differences between, and the advantages and disadvantages of, heirloom and hybrid vegetables. Read it at www.reneesgarden.com/articles/heirlooms.html. She says, “I think that both hybrid and open pollinated/heirloom varieties deserve a legitimate place in any home garden”. While you are at her website, browse not only her articles and forums and blogs (you can subscribe!), but also her exciting new seed selections, such as the Japanese Slicing Tomato “Mandarin Cross”, landscaping lettuces (who knew?) “Stardom Mix”, zucchini “Astia” (you can grow this compact version in a container) and, let’s not forget something for our hummingbird friends, Salvia “Coral Nymph”.



Danny Harris is on my list of people I want to be when I grow up; he knows how to get people to tell stories, and he knows how to listen. He runs People's District, a blog which is far more than he describes it, "a collection of stories from everyday people". In 2009, feeling disconnected from the people surrounding him where he lives in Washington, D.C, he needed to prove the powers of conversation. He decided to talk to a stranger every day. His goal was to invite stories that connect people with the places they inhabit and the other people they meet there. With his camera and tape recorder, Danny has built a remarkable collection of stories affirming the importance of storytelling in our lives, and inspires us to share our own stories.



<http://peoplesdistrict.com/>



In November, People's District shared three stories about and recipes from City Blossoms, a non-profit committed to kid-driven, community engaging creative green spaces. In this story, written by Danny Harris and graciously shared with us, we hear from five-year-old Lorenzo, the garden's master waterer. Maybe Lorenzo will inspire you to have a conversation with a stranger tomorrow.



"Hi, my name is Lorenzo and I live on Girard St. in North America. I am five-years-old, and I *loooove* gardening. I like to plant plants so that other people can have plants. Did you know that plants need water? It's true, they get real thirsty just like people."

"I am a great waterer and I just got an award for watering the plants so good. I want to make sure that they have what they need, so they can grow up big and tall. When the plants grow, we can have more to eat, and share our plants with all the people who come to the garden."

"If you come here, you can see all of the plants that I done watered, like the eggplant and the grapes. I like to cook that stuff, but I love to cook big, giant steaks and popcorn. We don't grow any steaks or popcorn at the garden yet."

I asked Lorenzo to share a recipe from the garden.

I love to cook big, giant steaks and popcorn. We don't grow any steaks or popcorn at the garden yet.



One of Lorenzo's award-winning paintings.

Lorenzo's Anchovies, Eggplant and Sweet Leaves Popcorn

- "Get some anchovies, you know them fishy things from a can"
- "Pick some sweet leaves from the garden, like mint or other sweet stuff"
- "Take an eggplant from the garden when it is purple and cook it up"
- "Pop some popcorn"

"Mix everything together in a big bowl until you make it taste real good. It is the best, and everyone is going to like my recipe."



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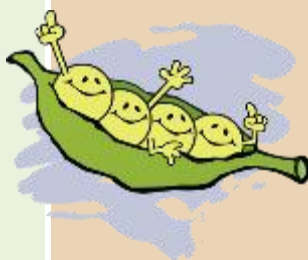
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It's easy-peasy to join our club!

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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