



Into the Garden

The Gardeners' Club
Santa Cruz County,
California

September 2026

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Fire Smart Gardening: Hardening Your Home and Yards



In the face of escalating wildfire threats across various regions, homeowners and communities are turning to innovative solutions to safeguard their properties. One such approach gaining popularity is “firescaping,” a strategic and intentional landscaping technique designed to mitigate the risk of wildfires. Firescaping involves creating a defensible space around homes using fire-resistant plants, proper spacing, and other landscaping practices. You don’t necessarily need to spend much money to make your landscaping more fire-resistant. A fire-resistant landscape can increase your property value and conserve water while also beautifying your home.

Our September meeting will feature a presentation by the Fire Safe Council of Santa Cruz on on fire safety and what is known as “home hardening”. Gary Nelson from the Council will give a power point

talk, assisted by Wendy Mathias. You will learn about how to create a FireSmart yard, get a Fire Smart yard checklist, review UC Master Gardener tips, and review a FireSare Marin plant list. Marin County has a similar climate zone to ours and website that is a good resource for many aspects of Fire Safety (www.firesafemarin.org). There will be samples of home hardening materials.

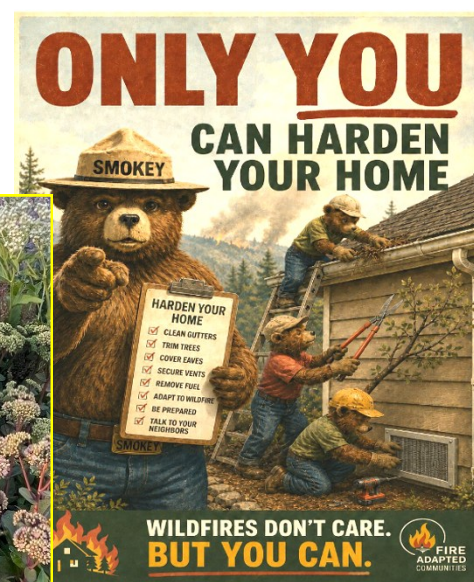
About our presenters:

Gary Nelson is a volunteer HIZ Assessor for the FireSafe Council of Santa Cruz, a qualified Defensible Space Assessor, and a leader of the Brooktree Ranch FireWise Neighborhood. After a career as a tech professional in Silicon Valley, Gary became a Master Gardener, a UCSC Arboretum volunteer, an equestrian jumper, and has always been an avid cyclist and traveler.

Wendy Danno Mathias is a volunteer HIZ assessor for the FireSafe Council of Santa Cruz County, the lead of Cox Road Fire-wise community, and leads a local MURS radio group in Aptos (Day Valley Radio



Network). She was a Registered Nurse and Nurse Practitioner for many years and now her passion is home hardening and improving her community’s resilience to wildfire.

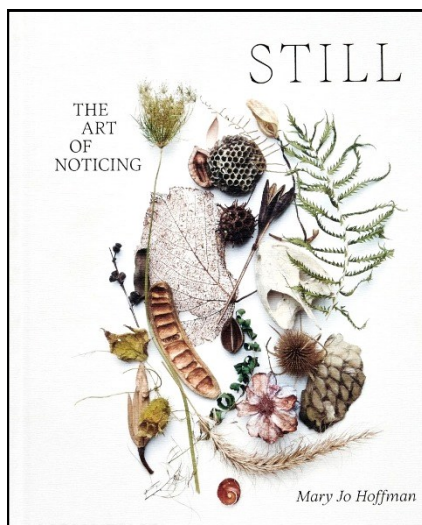


Join us! Thursday, September 10, 7:00pm
Aptos Grange, 2555 Mar Vista Dr., Aptos

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ahjohansson_wui-homehardening-wildfire-share-7492041671073783

808- 6Cf/

The Art of Noticing



I am in love with this book. You could call it a stunning photography coffee-table book, and it is, but it is so much more. *Still: The Art of Noticing* by Mary Jo Hoffman chronicles a decades-long daily creative practice. It brings together 275 images alongside six reflective personal essays. She took daily photographs for over 12 years. The photographs alone will astound you. The short essays ground it with humor, vulnerability, and philosophical depth. Playing closer attention can fundamentally transform our relationship with our immediate environment and our larger world.

Mostly against a stark white background, Hoffman elevates ordinary items—from maple seeds and beach rocks to deer spines and chrysalises—into profound studies of place and connection.

The book's visual narrative is organized using the framework of time, including the ancient Japanese calendar structure, breaking the year down into 72 micro-seasons that honor the subtle shifts in the natural world.

What resonated most for me in this book is her ruminations on “The Power

of Dailiness”. Because I personally struggle so much to keep any routines, this encourages me to practice dailiness with more determination and acceptance. Hoffman—a former aerospace engineer turned botanical artist—explores how committing to one small act every single day removes the pressure of “important”

“Dailiness takes all the pressure off any given day. There are no important or unimportant days. There is just one day after another. Showing up and remaining in a state of noticing.”

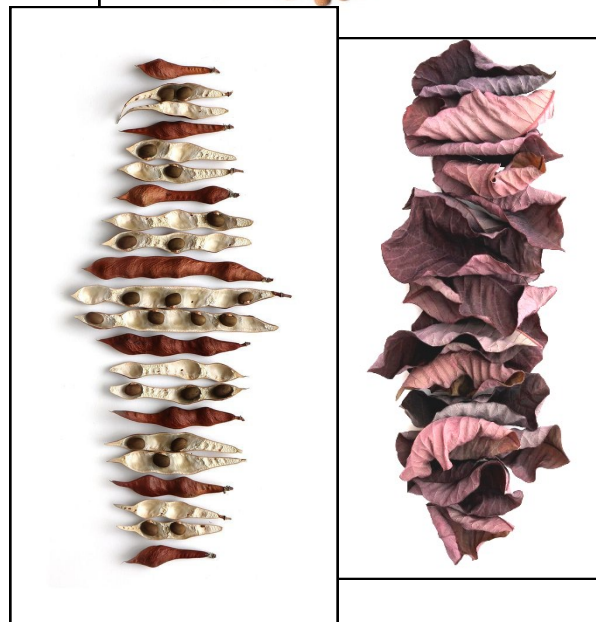
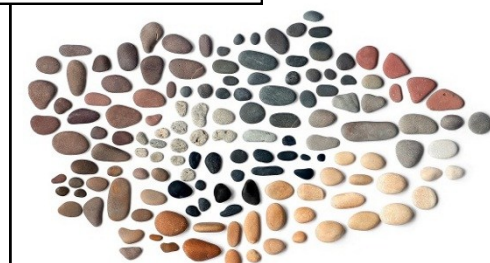
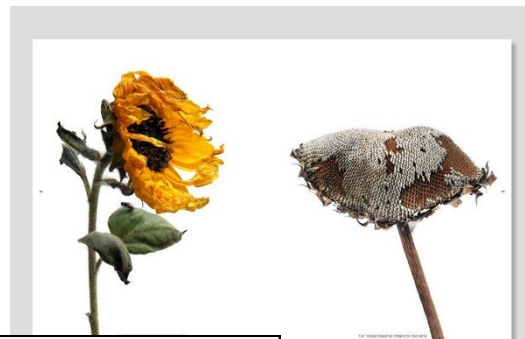
versus “unimportant” days, building a quiet rhythm of life.

Is noticing indeed an art? Perhaps, but it is also a learned skill, a practice, a habitual way of being.

You can view more details or purchase a copy directly via Phaidon (<https://www.phaidon.com/en-us/products/still-the-art-of-noticing>).

But Mary Jo is committed to sharing her work and her philosophy in many other ways. She has a blog where posts one image, daily, of gathered natural objects found near her.

She says, “The Still blog is a place to stop. A place to look at one thing at a time. A place to be still.” <https://stillblog.net/>. If



Still more on Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/p/Dcd_OW5Ds7/)

you go to

Pinterest (<https://www.pinterest.com/marentoom/mary-jo-hoffman/>) you can see many categories of her work.

An Overlooked Good Bug: The Hoverfly



If it looks like a bee and acts like a bee, is it a bee? That bee or wasp-like insect you see on the flower just might be a hoverfly, a fly in disguise. Hoverflies, also called flower flies, belong to a large insect family, Syrphidae, with over 200 species in California. Many species mimic the look of a bee or wasp to defend against predators that don't want to eat creatures with stingers. But unlike bees and wasps, the hoverfly has no stinger and is harmless to predators and humans. Same as all true flies, it has two wings (one set) compared to bees and wasps that have four (two sets of wings). Also, notice the hoverfly's big eyes are about the width of its abdomen, much bigger than a bee's eyes relative to its bee body. True to its name, it hovers in the air by vibrating its wings very rapidly—a behavior that helps the hoverfly detect predators or inspect plants before it deposits eggs. Many species feed mainly on nectar and pollen. They are important pollinators that provide this essential service while sipping nectar.

Hoverflies can be beneficial in another way, as pest control. The larvae (maggots) of some species eat aphids and other soft-bodied insects that gardeners and farmers consider pests. For instance, the female of some hoverfly species lays her eggs on plant parts near aphids. When eggs hatch, the fly larvae's food is within easy reach. A single hoverfly larva can eat up to 400 to 500 aphids during its short developmental stage, consuming roughly 30 to 50 aphids a day.



Female hoverflies sometimes lay their eggs inside the nests of social bees or wasps. When the larvae hatch, they act as scavengers, consuming debris, waste, dropped food, and dead organic matter as they leave the nest.

Hoverflies are impressive pollinators, second only to honeybees, in pollinating plants. One reason is that bees are hairier and their hair collects more pollen, but hover flies have more motivation. They visit more flowers within a field, starting earlier in the day before it warms up and work in poor weather conditions.

There's another reason why they are so important: their ecology. Hoverflies have migratory or at least long dispersal behavior. Studies have shown some hoverfly species migrate thousands of miles, following the seasons. This means that they have great potential for long-distance dispersal of pollen, and thus can contribute strongly to the pollination of plants that may be spatially far away from each other. Thinking about pollination and its role in plant reproduction, such long-distance pollen dispersal can be key in the reproduction of isolated plant populations, and even in increasing and maintaining genetic diversity in those populations. All of that tends to positively impact the ability of those plants to maintain their populations, making hoverflies key actors in sustaining the diversity of many wild plant species.

Planting a diversity of flowers in and around one's garden and yard is a

surefire way to promote flower fly populations. Flowers in the carrot family, such as dill, Queen Anne's Lace, fennel, and parsnip are favorites of many species. Hoverflies will also frequent daisies, asters, borage, and buckthorn, as well as perennials such as goldenrod. Try to cultivate a variety of flowers that bloom throughout the year to ensure that forage is always available.

Margaret Roach Fall Webinar Series

At Away to Garden, Margaret is again offering The Virtual Garden Club's "Garden 2.0" series for a new season, featuring three dynamic classes with experts of the ecological horticulture realm whose work she admires—for their aesthetic and ecological vision:

9/17: "Creating a Gravel Garden: A Step-by-Step Guide to Beautiful, Ecological



Landscapes," with Jeff Epping, author of a new book on the topic and an ecological designer with more than 35 years' experience.

10:15: "Rhythm, Repetition and Texture: Garden Design for Year-Round Interest," with Richard Hayden, Senior Director of Horticulture at the famed High Line in NYC.

11/12: "How to Grow a Better Bird Feeder," with Desirée L. Narango, a conservation scientist who co-authored research with Doug Tallamy, including the much-cited study that revealed that a chickadee needs thousands of caterpillars to rear its offspring.

Complete details about each instructor and their presentation is at <https://margaretroach.podia.com/fall-2026-class-series>. You can join for one class, \$29 each, or two, or the whole series for \$75 and each one will also be recorded for watching on demand instead, if you prefer.

The recipe below is from a great resource for you gardeners, cooks (and chicken keepers): the website, blog and newsletter ocalled Garden Betty.



Garden Betty is an award-winning gardening and lifestyle blog created by writer and modern homesteader Linda Ly. You will find real-world tips on growing vegetables, herbs, and

fruits, plus raising backyard chickens, urban homesteading guides on making the most of small plots or suburban yards to live a simpler life and farm-to-table cooking ideas using homegrown produce. Start exploring at her blog at gardenbetty.com. Sign up for her newsletter at <https://gardenbetty.com/subscribe>.

EASY PEASY HOME MADE TOMATO SAUCE (NO PEELING REQUIRED!)

Fresh homemade tomato sauce without the need for blanching, peeling, seeding, straining or other traditional (and time-consuming) methods of processing.



Prep Time 20 minutes; n

Cook Time 30 minutes

Total Time 50 minutes

Ed. Note: The directions below are for stove cooktop cooking, but we've used our air fryer quite successfully...you'll

have to figure out the timing for your appliance if you have one.

Makes 4 to 6 quarts (depending on length of simmer time)

Ingredients

15 pounds tomatoes, stems removed
8 tablespoons bottled lemon juice (optional, if canning)

Step 2: Transfer the tomato puree to a large stockpot, then repeat Step 1 until all tomatoes are processed.

Step 3: Place the stockpot over medium-high heat and bring the puree to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer uncovered, stirring occasionally, for 30 to 90 minutes until the tomato sauce is thickened to your liking.

Step 4: When the sauce is finished, let cool to room temperature, then transfer to jars and refrigerate for up to 1 week.

Alternatively, you can transfer the cooled sauce to freeze-proof containers or zip-top bags and freeze for up to 3 months.

(Tip: When storing the sauce in bags, portion them into 2-cup or 4-cup servings for ease of cooking, squeeze out the excess air and then flatten the bags before stacking and freezing.) If you want to can the sauce in Mason jars, and other freezing tips, go to <https://gardenbetty.com/easy-peasy-homemade-tomato-sauce-no-peeling-required/?signInSource=one-tab>. You can freeze it in jars as is without canning, but make sure you follow her tips. Use only straight-sided mason jars and fill them to the freeze-fill line.

Garden tip from Jo Thompson: how to garden when it's HOT,

Jo Thompson posted from Italy on her Substack blog (The Gardening Mind, <https://jonthompson.com/>), and here are some of her tips for gardening in hot weather. I, too,

sometimes garden in a dress, but I buy mine at my favorite thrift shop.



"It's a hot one, and I'm one of those annoying people who love the heat. I soak it up and it's the best sensation. But I do manage... I definitely don't garden beyond 8am and until 8pm. I wear 'house dresses' intended for grannies, bought from Italian street markets.

The HEAT. How are you doing? Basically don't do too much in the garden, and if you do go out there, make sure it's early or late. Not in the day. Sit in the shade and try to enjoy the roses who are absolutely loving it."

Also from Jo, from her calendar:



Speaking of dahlias...



You may have missed the annual Monterey Dahlia Society annual show last month at the Capitola Mall, but you can feast your eyes on a huge array at the 2026 Santa Cruz County Fair Dahlia Show at the fairgrounds Floriculture Building. More info at <https://www.santacruzcountyfair.com/>.



DAHLIA WATERCOLOR WORKSHOP

*Harvest your bouquet with Karla
Paint your bouquet with local artist
Sarah Orre*

YOUTH ART SCHOLARSHIP FUNDRAISER COMMUNITY THROUGH ART

Saturday August 29th or September 12th
5 PM - 7 PM

\$99 workshop, materials and
bouquet included

Located at Beeline Blooms Farm



Workshop Details Beeline Blooms Dahlia Farm
220 Stephens Lane Ben Lomond. Saturday,
September 12, 5–7 PM Two-hour watercolor
workshop, flowers and materials included .
Come enjoy the beauty of the dahlias, create
something beautiful, and support a great cause!

How Did Our Gardens Do? Plan While the Garden Is Fresh in Your Mind

September is a good time to evaluate what worked—and what did not—during the growing season. Take photographs and note areas that need more color, different color combinations, privacy, shade or structure. Is there anything that requires too much work? Start a notebook! We have a chance to take another run at correcting problems or improve disappointing views. By adding or subtracting plants, we can recharge a garden that has become overwhelming or static. Author Claire Splan says to take the opportunity to breathe in fresh air. “Dividing and transplanting perennials has the same effect as rearranging furniture in your house—old things become new again and what might have seemed cluttered now seems tidy. Planting trees or hedges can change the bones of a garden...and redirect the flow...This is a good time to revisit garden plans you made in January. What dreams are still yet to be achieved?” ([Month-by-Month Gardening California](#))



Good people, great plants, strong community! Join fellow gardeners for the free monthly Santa Cruz Garden Exchange from 8 to 9 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 26, in the parking lot of the Live Oak Grange, 1900 17th Ave., Santa Cruz. . Gardeners are welcome to bring seeds, bulbs, succulents, houseplants, vegetables, fresh flowers, informational materials, manure or any other garden-related items to trade within the gardening community. You do not need to bring anything to participate—you can just bring yourself to connect with other garden enthusiasts!

This month's featured baker is Get Loafed, bringing delicious artisan sourdough goodies to share with the gardening community. Stop by, say hello and enjoy something freshly

baked while you browse the garden exchange.

The Santa Cruz Garden Exchange 2026 Garden Tours finishing the season Sept. 26 with a special visit to Cabrillo Cottage Farms in Aptos. After the Garden Exchange, look for your tour host, who will distribute the garden address and details. Just before 9 a.m., everyone will head over together to enjoy the tour.

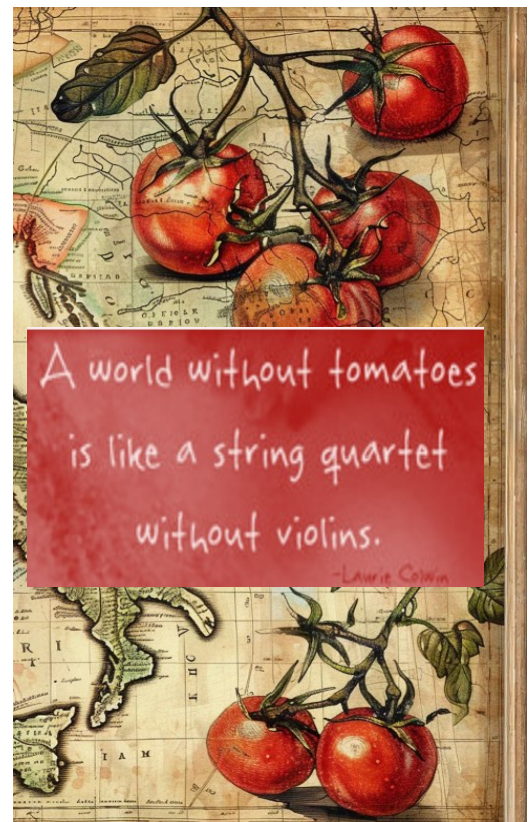
Participants are asked to take home any items that are not claim. There will not be an evening pop-up exchange in September. The evening exchange will return for October.

Interested in hosting a future garden tour or workshop? Call 831-515-7162 or email santacruzgardensexchange@gmail.com.

Birdsong Orchards and Cabrillo Cottage Farm: Fresh Fruit, Farm Stands and More

The summer harvest continues at Birdsong Orchards and Cabrillo Cottage Farm, with locally grown seasonal fruit, flowers and other farm products available throughout the summer..

Birdsong Orchards' Watsonville farm stand is open Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., offering a changing selection of seasonal fruit and locally made farm products. Cabrillo Cottage Farms, [4461 Porter Gulch Road, Aptos](https://www.cabrillocottagefarms.com/), is open Sundays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. The farm stand features locally grown, organically farmed seasonal fruit from Birdsong Orchards and Cabrillo Cottage Farm. Offerings may include figs, avocados, pears, quince, pineapple guava, apples, citrus, walnuts, persimmons, peaches, plums, pluots and apricots, depending on the harvest. Visitors can also enjoy the farm and U-Cut rose experience. Offerings vary with the season. More information available at BirdsongOrchards.com





Hosted by
**Monterey Bay
Master Gardeners**

Earth Friendly Gardening: Protecting Wildlife & the Environment

Your garden can do more than look beautiful - it can help protect the environment and support local wildlife.

Discover simple, practical ways to create a healthier, more sustainable landscape by providing food, water, and shelter for pollinators, birds, and other beneficial creatures. Learn how to reduce pesticide and fertilizer use, conserve water, and work with nature to grow a thriving garden that's easier to maintain and better for the world around you.

Adults

\$13

Your ticket includes all class activities as well as admission to the UCSC Arboretum

Seniors 65+

\$10

UC Santa Cruz Arboretum & Botanic Garden, 120 Arboretum Rd, Santa Cruz, CA 95064



WATSONVILLE WETLANDS WATCH

**SAVE
THE
DATE**

**Fall Native
Plant Sale**

Locally grown
California native
plants for water
wise and wildlife
friendly
landscapes

**Saturday,
October 3,
2026**

500 HARKINS SLOUGH RD. WATSONVILLE CA

Bring your garden to life while supporting local wildlife! Join us at our Fall Native Plant Sale and explore a beautiful selection of locally grown native plants.

Whether you're an experienced gardener or just getting started, you'll find inspiration, expert advice, and plants that help make your garden beautiful and our community greener. Come shop, learn, and grow with us - we can't wait to see you!

Watsonville Wetlands Watch

Garden Variety



PLANT-FOCUSED RECIPES
INSPIRED BY MY GARDEN

TIMOTHY PAKRON
Author of Mississippi Vegan

Just in time for the late summer/early fall harvest! Garden Variety: Plant-Focused Recipes Inspired by My Garden by Timothy Pakron is a plant-based cookbook released on September 1, 2026, that features Southern-inspired recipes grown and cooked from his New Orleans backyard. The author, known as the Mississippi Vegan, shot all of the photos himself using produce from his own garden.

"For the garden is not only a place in which to make things grow and to display the beautiful flowers of the earth but a place that should accord with the various moods of its admirers. It should be a place in which to hold light banter, a place in which to laugh, and, besides, should have a hidden corner in which to weep. But above all, perhaps, it should be a place of sweet scent and sentiment." - Alice Lounsberry

Alice Lounsberry



September is National Mushroom Month

Types of Fungi

Saprophytic Fungi - nature's decomposers (Oyster, Shiitake, and Button Mushrooms and Yeast)

Parasitic Fungi - survive from other living organisms (Cordyceps)

Mycorrhizal Fungi - work closely with plants by tapping into their roots and exchanging energy and nutrients (not all species)



Mycorrhizal Fungi in your Garden

Almost all of the plants we grow in our gardens greatly benefit from mycorrhizal fungi (2 exceptions are the goosefoot and brassica families).

Mycorrhizal networks increase the surface area of roots 100 - 1,000 times, allowing them to tap into more nutrients and absorb more water.



We want to highlight the wonderful ways fungi are working hard behind the scenes to support what we grow in our gardens. Learn more at <https://ucanr.edu/blog/garden-notes/article/magic-and-benefits->

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www.thegardenersclub.org



It's easy-peasy to join our club!

Dues are \$20 per calendar year. Make check to "The Gardeners' Club" and mail to P.O. Box 3025., Ben Lomond, CA 95005. Meetings are held at 7:00 p.m. on the 2nd Thursday of each month at the Aptos Grange, 2555 Mar Vista Dr., Aptos

Our front page logo is graciously shared with us by artist Lisa Zador. Order a print or see more of her work at her Etsy shop www.etsy.com/shop/curiousprintpattern.