



A Secret Garden

by Susan Schieferle, UC Master Gardener

The children's novel, *The Secret Garden*, written by Frances Hodgson Burnett and published in 1910, is also enjoyed by adults, and it makes readers want to get back to gardening--or try it for the first time. The story, set in England, focuses on a lonely, ill-mannered orphaned girl, Mary, and her sickly cousin, Colin. Together they discover a private, secret, locked garden, which the children tend to and explore. Gardening improved Mary's attitude and manners and surprisingly improved Colin's health!

The Master Gardeners of Tulare/Kings Counties also have a "Secret Garden". But unlike Mary's garden, it will not be a secret for long! Master Gardeners would like you to know that a visit to our garden will offer you new adventures in gardening, will make you happy and will hopefully set you on the road to healthier eating! The nine garden beds and ten fruit trees in our "Secret Garden" are unique, special and inspiring. Let us show you the garden in person, but, first, let us tell you about it.

Our biggest garden bed displays a small scale front yard and back yard. This garden demonstrates "**Gardening Central Valley**" style, using all Water-wise California Native Plants. We have selected one of the plants in this garden, Cleveland sage, to share with you. Cleveland sage (*Salvia clevelandii*) is a drought-tolerant and fragrant perennial plant that is native to southern California and northern Baja California. Cleveland sage grows 4 feet tall and wide, but can easily expand to 8 feet. This sage, with gray foliage and beautiful blue kabob-shaped flowers, provides good hiding places for birds. Cleveland sage needs full sun with well-drained soil. It is found in abundance along many of Visalia's trails and bike paths.



Our next two beds are **Alternate Lawn Substitute Beds**. Simply stated, you can replace your lawn with one of our 7 recommended drought tolerant groundcovers. Come choose the one that is your favorite! One of our much-loved groundcovers is Frog-fruit or Lippia (*Phyla nodiflora*) which is a native butterfly host plant in the Verbenaceae Family. It is a perennial, drought-tolerant groundcover that spreads horizontally by runners that will root into the soil as they lay on the ground (4-8 Inches high). The flowers are a mixture of purple, pink, and white and make a great nectar source for butterflies, bees and other insects. The best part is that Frog-fruit is foot-traffic tolerant!

Next is our **Square Foot Garden**. Square Foot Gardens reduce work time, number of seeds needed, amount of water and space required, and there are fewer weeds to battle. Digging or rototilling are not required, and the amount of produce is. Let our expert Master Gardeners show you how easy this method is!

Our **Salad Garden** follows! You will find everything you need to make a crisp, juicy salad every night: lettuces, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers or whatever your palate desires! And we can show you how easily you can grow your own!

And what would our meals taste like without **herbs**? They would be tasteless and bland. Our expert herb Master Gardener, who is also a published herb author, will show you how easily you can grow your preferred herbs. She especially likes to share information about mints (*Mentha*) one of her favorites. And do you know what square stem herbs are? You should come find out!

We also have a **Themed Garden**. A *what* you say? Our themed bed has the "backbone" plants that you need in your yard. These plants include Crape Myrtle shrubs (*Lagerstroemia* hybrids), Heavenly Bamboo (*Nandina domestica*) and Artemesia (*Artemisia Californica*). These shrubs produce brilliant color splashes and flowing greenery to carry your garden from season to season. Adding your own touches of preferred annuals and perennials to develop a theme will enhance your seasonal garden.



Our **Pollinator Garden** consists of host flowering perennials and native plants to attract both beneficial and non-beneficial insects (pollinators). Pollinator insects need a water source, lots of sunlight and shelter for insects. One of our favorite plants is Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). The yarrows in our garden have pink, purple, and yellow blooms from summer through winter!

Over 20 **Succulents** are on display in the next garden section. Who doesn't love these drought tolerant plants? One of our many favorites is Fire and Ice (*Echeveria subrigida*). It has a large "rosette", growing 18 inches wide with blue-green leaves highlighted with pink or rose tones. In summer, there are upright stalks bearing coral-pink flowers.

Also trending in our "Secret Garden" are **Mulching and Composting**. **Mulching** is a layer of material applied to the surface of an area of soil to conserve moisture, improve health of the soil, reduce weeds and enhance the visual appeal of your garden. Come find out why we LOVE mulching!

Do you **compost**? We do! Come see our state-of-the-art compost bins and learn how you can start composting now! It is so simple and easy. We can show you how! Once you have compost, no more purchasing of expensive soil amendments and fertilizers is needed.

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