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Garden Views

Riverside County Master Gardener Newsletter

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UCCE Master Gardener Program

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A Tale of Two Graduations



While the Desert Master Gardeners opted to cancel their Training Class graduation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, West County Master Gardeners chose a physical-distancing strategy to honor graduates of their 2020 Training Class.

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West County Graduation Car Parade

Contributed by Patti Bonawitz, West County UCCE Master Gardener

There were handwaving, loud cheering, and noisy car horns blowing as the West County Training Class celebrated at a Graduation Car Parade on Sunday, June 14, 2020 in Murrieta. Yes, the car parade was different; yes, the face masks weird to wear; but, all in all, the car parade brought a ton of smiles to the faces of the graduates.

The graduates received their certificate of completion, a graduation program, and a shower of gifts. Included were a box of cupcakes decorated with succulents and roses and the note "a sweet ending to a new beginning, congrats grad"; a gift bag filled with goodies, donated by Pam Clarke; and a Starbuck gift card from Juanita Wielenga.



A Master Gardener cheering squad, complete with a very cute bumblebee—our very own Chair-Elect Darrilyn Erickson (above, right)—cheered on the graduates as they paraded down the street.

Who knew that when this small, but mighty class of 26, started their training in September 2019, that they would have to overcome obstacles, never seen before, due to the COVID-19 pandemic? These past few months have been a roller coaster ride for all of us! The Trainees persevered and completed their classroom training experience through unique distanced learning and non-traditional training tools and

methods; and, they became awesome Zoom users. Homework, quizzes, and their final exam were completed via e-mail, some volunteer hours were achieved in ways that have never been done before, and student presentations were given via Zoom. Yet, through all these challenges, and in spite of the obstacles, these trainees made it to the finish line.

Several of the graduates were recognized for individual achievements. The "Spirit of Master Gardening" Award went to Adrian Ceja (pictured below left) who also volunteered the most hours (168.5). Jonathan Crook was honored with the Outstanding Trainee Award (below right with Rosa Olaiz). Three individuals earned the top score on the Final Exam (100%): Darlene Butler, Vern Shattuck, and George Spiliotis. Adrian Ceja and George Spiliotis were 100 volunteer hour pin recipients. The 75 volunteer hours club included Vern Shattuck, Jonathan Crook, and Margaret Whaley. Several individuals volunteered over 50 hours: Kay Force, Daniel Weatherford, Debby Leuer, Betty Ingalls, Jane Payne, Christal Ferlisi, Sharon Sharpe, and Marcelle Williams.



Among the graduates were Darlene Butler, Lisa Casey, Adrian Ceja, Amy Clayton, Jonathan Crook, Linda Cummings, Christal Ferlisi, Kay Force, Alba Good, Renee Gissendaner, Lauralynn Hake, Betty Ingalls, Debby Leuer, Rebecca Mach, Kim Nielsen, Jeremy Noye, Jane Payne, Joel Robles, Sharon Sharpe, Vern Shattuck, George Spiliotis, Deborah Stewart, Dan Weatherford, Julie Weatherford, Margaret Whaley, and Marcelle Williams.

None of this could have been achieved without the “true spirit and teamwork” of the Master Gardener Program. Four Project Coordinators surpassed expectations to ensure that some of the trainees achieved their much-needed volunteer hours: Thurman Howard, Goldminer Coordinator; Susan Bookman, Help Line; Mike Horak, Speakers’ Bureau; and Kathy Warner, Grow Lab. Although the hours were achieved in a very different and creative manner than ever before, some of the Trainees would not have been able to complete requirements without their support.

We had so many challenges and obstacles this year, but with such great support on several levels from help with Zoom to mentoring. Rosa Olaiz, UCCE MG Volunteer Services Coordinator, took on a new role as Zoom master guiding us through the use of this new technology. Melody Knox assisted in class and will be the 2021 West County Training Class Coordinator. Juanita Wielenga coordinated the mentoring program. Georgia Renne, our new Chair, provided support to help things run smoothly. Debbra Corbin-Euston, the new Past Chair, livened up graduation by providing photo props including colorful hats and “Lorna Jean” (the garden lady, pictured below left with Deborah Stewart and Thurman Howard; below right, George Spiliotis).



The Trainees truly appreciated the efforts of the class organizers. Below, Christal Fersili thanked

Rosa Olaiz, Patti Bonawitz, and Melody Knox (left to right in the photo) in a big way.



Through this COVID-19 pandemic, we are learning a lot about ourselves, reflecting what’s important and what’s truly not, and the importance of kindness, joy givers and connection. The “spirit” of the Master Gardener Program prevails—through our graduates, our Project Coordinators, and in our membership.

The course lecturers deserve recognition as well, especially our fellow MG Linda Mullins, past member of the CA State Avocado Commission, who taught the class about avocados. Words cannot express my thanks to everyone for their support.

Graduate Colette (Renee) Gissendaner (pictured below) paraded her car up and down the street, toting the phrase that says it all—“live life in full bloom.” Good advice for us all! Congrats 2020 Grads!!! YOU MADE IT TO THE FINISH LINE!!!



The Graduation that Wasn't

Contributed by Smoky Zeidel, Desert UCCE Master Gardener

Wednesday, March 4, 2020—the final night of instruction for the Desert Master Gardener Training Class. Final exams were distributed, and everyone was talking about their projects which would be presented over the course of the next two weeks. We left class filled with both regret that our program was drawing to an end and excitement that we soon would be Master Gardeners.

The graduation committee, meeting before class began, finalized the ceremony invitations, catering and decorating plans, and heaved a sigh of relief we had collected enough money to pay for everything. We had spent months planning a ceremony and party to remember, and it was going to be fabulous!

None of us anticipated what came next: coronavirus came to town. And, out of “an abundance of caution,” UC Riverside Palm Desert shut its’ doors. Confusion reigned. Final exams could be emailed in; that was no problem. But how would we do our presentations? Most of us hadn’t even heard of Zoom. And what about our graduation?

It was just a matter of days before word came down: our March 31 graduation was cancelled. It was decided that PowerPoint presentations for our projects would be posted on VMS. Graduation certificates and badges would be mailed.

After more than four months of attending weekly classes and putting in hours of hands-on time working in the field on various MG projects, to say this was a disappointment would be a bit of an understatement.

It took a couple of months, but at long last, graduation certificates and master gardener badges were in our hands. No one got to walk across a stage to claim their rewards; no one got a round of applause for a job well done. There was no party; no bells or whistles.

But when I opened the fat envelope that arrived in the mail one day in May, and saw my name and the words Master Gardener on my certificate and badge, somehow none of that mattered anymore. I was a

Master Gardener, something I’d dreamed of for years and worked hard to earn. Everything else would have been just window dressing.

Congratulations to the Desert Class of 2020! We’re the class that gets to brag that not even a deadly plague prevented us from earning our badges.

Desert Graduation—“A Quiet Thing”

Contributed by Mike Reandeau, Desert UCCE Master Gardener

Kudos and congratulations to the Riverside County Desert Master Gardener 2020 graduating class: Cristina Acosta, Jeffrey Baumgartner, Linda Borlaug, Ann Coulston, Dan Fast, Timothy Hassett, Fredrica Hooper, Heather Keenan, Buddy Knoles, Rita Kraus, Jill Kroesen, Mary Loe, Cesar Lopez Barreras, Joel Masotti, Rochelle McCune, Marsha McNamara, Cynthia Morris-Sotelo, Susan Panitch, Sherry Parkos-Martinez, Ursula Penn, Alexander Quintana, Bruce L. Radler, Vilma Raettig, Virginia Roberts, Kristin Ryall, Paul Seelos, Jeffrey Wright, Cyndy Zaech and Smoky Zeidel.

As Smoky recapped in her article, for the completion of our MG Training Class we were not able to hold a typical graduation ceremony. All of us were disappointed to forego the fun, recognition, and camaraderie of the event. And like our beloved plants, we adjusted to our new environment.

Several trainees, in a class filled with remarkable individuals, earned special awards. They are:

Most hours—Cynthia Morris-Sotelo accrued over 140 volunteer hours through late April 2020! Many of these hours were spent in support of our Date Festival booth and also many shifts at local Farmers’ Markets. Cynthia contributed about 10% of this class’s total volunteer hours! She attended every class meeting and, along with Vilma Raettig, were the class representatives to the Desert Advisory Board. See her photo below.

Top Final Exam score—Paul Seelos received a perfect score on the final exam! In fact, he earned more than 100% on the exam since he clarified ambiguous questions and offered many more examples than required. Paul's photo is below.



Outstanding Trainee—Cesar Lopez Barreras attended all training class sessions, achieved high exam scores, and volunteered many hours. His MG training complemented his academic training and teaching experience. Based on his final exam answers for harvesting questions he demonstrated a valuable blend of practical and research-based knowledge. (See Cesar's photo on page 6.)

Spirit of Master Gardening—Smoky Zeidel attended every training class and actively participated in each of them. Her final exam answers were almost perfect. She is the new Desert Chair-Elect and will assume the Moorten's docents coordinator position when the garden re-opens. In many ways Smoky exhibits all the admirable qualities of a MG Trainee and has exemplified the spirit of being a Master Gardener! (See Smoky's photo on page 6.)

It was a sincere pleasure to coordinate the class, picking up from Linda Delaney's superb leadership as the course began. I wish all our graduates continued growth!

If you are a fan of musical theatre you may know a song titled "A Quiet Thing" that captures in some ways the "Graduation that Wasn't". I hope for each of you that "happiness comes in on tip-toe"!

2020 MG Trainee Presentations

PowerPoint presentations of the 2020 Trainees can be found on VMS. On the homepage, click on "News/Docs." When the page appears, click on "Documents/Presentations" near the top of the page. PowerPoints of the Desert Trainees are under #38 and of the West County Trainees are under #39 (yet to be posted as of July 31).

Some of the topics include: Wellness Gardens, Rose Propagation, Tree Communication, Climate Smart Gardening, Citrus, Monarch Butterfly Conservation, Landscape Design Principles, Seed Collection and Distribution, Garden Makes and Takes, Date Palms, Valley Fever, Grafting, Propagating Potatoes in Buckets, Beekeeping, Ocotillos, and Home Vegetable Propagation.

Master Gardener Milestones

Volunteer hour milestones achieved by MGs since last reported in the March/April edition of *Garden Views* were submitted by Karen Fleisher and Cynthia Morris-Sotelo for West County and the Desert, respectively. Congratulations to all and thank you for your service!

Honorees in the West County— 2,500 hrs (Platinum Badge): Debbra Corbin-Eustin; 1,000 hrs (Gold Badge): Patti Bonawitz and April Wilson; 750 hrs: Joyce Allen and Kathy Warner; 500 hrs: Lee Bayer and Kathy Warner; 250 hrs: Mike Horak; 100 hrs: Adrian Ceja, Jill Hishmeh, Alex Rajewski, and George Spiliotis.

Honorees in the Desert— 500 hrs: Curtis Beyer, Patty Reed, Ralph Thompson, and Martha Tureen; 250 hrs: Michael Hammond and Mary Marks; 100 hrs: Rosemarie Andrews, Maury Corbett, Cheryl Fey, Jane Grubbs, Margi Jacobson, Cesar Lopez Barreras, Cynthia Morris-Sotelo, Richard Shonerd Nancy Westerholm, Chun Wong, and Smoky Zeidel.

New Officers Elected to the County Master Gardener Advisory Boards

Contributed by Ron Jemmerson, UCCE Desert Master Gardener

Five new officers were elected to serve on the MG advisory boards for the 2020-2021 fiscal year that began July 1. Smoky Zeidel and Darrilyn Erickson are the new Chairs Elect for the Desert and West County Advisory boards, respectively. Cesar Lopez Barreras and Joyce Allen will serve as recording secretaries for the Desert and West County, respectively. Jeremy Noye is the new Treasurer for West County and will become the Fiscal Officer next year. Other continuing officers are listed on the last page of this newsletter.



Smoky Zeidel is a first year MG. She enjoys vegetable gardening and experimenting with unusual edibles for growth in the harsh conditions of the desert, and is a collector of adenium and cactus. She has several favorite MG activities including serving as a docent at Moorten's Botanical Gardens, where she recently took over the role of docent coordinator; gardening with the visually impaired; and volunteering at the Coachella Valley Rescue Mission and the Desert Helpline. Her background as a published author, freelance journalist, and teacher of writing in a community college shows in her writings for this newsletter.



Cesar Lopez Barreras is a first year MG. He is an instructor at Indio High School teaching Horticultural Science, Floral Design, and Agriscience and advises the local chapter of the Future Farmers of America. Cesar enjoys volunteering at children's gardens and has spent many hours helping to develop the raised

bed gardens at the Coachella Valley Rescue Mission. Cesar will also be at docent at Moorten's.



Darrilyn Erickson completed the MG Training Program in 2016. She is a seed master for the Grow Lab and assists at their plant sales and MG social events. As an avid flower gardener, she is a committee member of the Riverside Community Flower Show.



Joyce Allen is a third year MG. She enjoys the WIC Program (Women, Infants, and Children), information tables, and special events. Joyce promotes gardening for butterflies and other pollinators and raises Monarchs for personal enjoyment and teaching presentations.



Jeremy Noye is a first year MG who has a passion for fruit trees, berries, sustainable vegetable gardening, and community work. He's excited to be able to continue on his journey of gardening education and to be able to reach all parts of the community to provide what he continues to learn. With a background working on executive boards for nonprofits, he is accustomed to the necessity for a detailed eye when it comes to finances.

Coordinators and officers of advisory boards, WCAB and DAB, should attend a program orientation on either August 4th or 11th (Tuesdays), 10:00 a.m.-noon. This ZOOM meeting will focus on creating continuity in reporting, filing for efficient reimbursements, answering procedural questions, and more. An e-mail invitation will be sent from Rosa Olaiz, MG Volunteer Services Coordinator.

Honoring Our Platinum MGs—An Interview with West County Master Gardener Otillia “Toots” Bier

Contributed by Georgia Renne, West County Master Gardener

For this article I readily agreed to interview Otillia “Toots” Bier, one of our original Master Gardeners with 5,000 hours of volunteer service. As a Riverside native, for over 30 years I regularly read her Saturday column answering questions on gardening. She was certainly a celebrity to me when as a trainee I met her at our class on soil and fertilizers. She presented “Soil Science Fundamentals.” I took five pages of notes. By email I recently asked her questions and she replied with her usual humbleness and humor.

Toots, how did you acquire your interest in gardening?

I’ve enjoyed gardening for as long as I can remember. I grew up in the Philadelphia area. My mother was a devoted gardener. Neighbors called her garden, “Mrs. Thompson’s Jungle,” because every square inch was covered in assorted plants,



with rambler roses covering the enclosing fence. Well before I was school age, I remember how I loved to weed the relentless rose of Sharon seedlings that sprouted everywhere. It was so satisfying! I guess that’s why I still enjoy pulling weeds today. In the photo at left I am 14 years old and knee deep in the vegetable garden. The first Girl Scout badge that I earned was Garden Flower, or something like

that. I even planted a peach pit in my mother’s flower garden and it grew! Not wanting to dis-

courage me, she let it live, and we even got to harvest peaches from it.

How did you gain your vast knowledge and wide experience?

I’m a compulsive reader, so I read all of my mother’s gardening magazines. Besides flowers, we had fruit trees and a vegetable garden, too. Consequently, I was comfortable gardening in a temperate climate garden. But then I married a California man, and we moved to the San Diego area. What a climate change, but I could grow lots of new plants. My first purchase was a camellia, followed by lots of other “exotic to me” plants. After a few years, my husband accepted a job in Barstow. Good grief, the desert! I had some learning to do. And I learned, sometimes from books, sometimes from the local nurseryman, and sometimes from trial and error. When we sold that house, the buyer commented that the beautiful rose bushes and landscape sold her.



After eight years we left for Virginia and 3 acres in a rural area near Washington D.C. I explored every inch of the woods. Jack-in-the-Pulpits, trilliums, dog-wood trees, and assorted ferns grew with wild abandon. Native books on plants became my evening reading material. But after 4 years, it was back to California, and Mira Loma has been

our home for 41 years. The photo at left was taken in the Hoh Rain Forest, Washington. A really magical place, at every turn I expected to glimpse an elf or a fairy.

We are just celebrating the 40th anniversary of CA Master Gardeners that started in Riverside and

Sacramento Counties in 1980. Tell us about your early MG experience.

The MG program was a wonderful introduction to Inland Empire gardening. Actually, I have been a Master Gardener since 1980. Shortly after we moved to Mira Loma in 1979, I spotted an announcement in the Press-Enterprise that a MG program was starting up. I enrolled immediately, but when the day of the first meeting arrived, I felt so nervous that I almost didn't go. But I did go and met so many wonderful fellow gardeners that I felt right at home.

Meetings have been held at many locations over the years: the Gas Company building on Central Avenue, UCR Botanic Gardens, The Boat House at Fairmount Park, and two locations with the Water Company come to mind. My favorite was the Botanic Gardens because we could make a mess with plants and soil, and it was easy to clean up. Back in those days, classes were very "hands-on" and far more casual.

What were some of your leadership roles and committees during these times?

My first regular activity was answering the phones at the UCCE office. It was really scary to me at first. What if they asked us something that we didn't know? We didn't have computers, but we had lots of reference books. And with two of us on duty, one could be talking to the gardener on the phone while the other was checking the books for the answer. Teamwork! Later, I managed the Speaker's Bureau. We had a good number of requests, but nowhere like we have now. If no speaker was available, I covered the request myself. I was Master Gardener vice-chair for the 1998-1999 year and chair for 1999-2000. We survived Y2K, and that was a relief.

What are your favorite ways volunteering in MG activities?

These days, I prefer to work by myself, to be honest. My mother always said I was too much of a hermit, but maybe that's why I enjoy the solitude of a garden. Right now, I've been constructing two quilts, one with a floral theme

and one with a vegetable theme, to benefit the Riverside MG Program for the Annual Conference. COVID may have delayed the conference, but I'm continuing the construction.

What important policy and program changes in the MG program have you see over the years?

Well, in the olden days, we were allowed to recommend chemical treatments, as long as they were approved by the University. Classes became more formal as time passed, but the level of information is pretty much the same. Emphasis on native plants and water-wise gardening has increased. Nobody had to be fingerprinted, and we didn't pay dues. Things were way more casual 40 years ago.

Please describe your most memorable MG experience that made an impact on you.

That's an easy one. While working the Hot Line at the extension office, I mentioned to Ted Stamen, the UCCE Ornamental Horticulture Advisor, that I was thinking about enrolling at Cal Poly Pomona in Ornamental Horticulture one of these days. He replied that he knew the Dept. Chair and said, "Let's call him," and started off to his office with me trailing behind him, protesting that I was only "thinking about it." That was in August 1983 and one month later I was in class. After graduating in 1986, I went on to UCR in Soil Science, later accepting a citrus research job in the Botany and Plant Sciences Dept. at UCR. I retired in 2006, so you see, learning has been a continuous process, and the MG program certainly changed my life.

How did you come to write for the weekly Press Enterprise answering gardening questions?

Back in those early years, the assignment was supposed to run for one year, and then another MG would take over. So, as I recall, there were two or three MGs who each wrote for one year before me. When my year was up, there was no one who wanted to take the column assignment, so I just continued. The UCCE information office was happy, the newspapers were happy, and the years just kept rolling by.

How many years did you write that column?

I wrote the column continuously from May of 1986 through December 2018. That's 32 years. In the beginning, questions came in by mail. Because the column was distributed throughout California, I received questions from all parts of the state. Later, with the internet, it was not unusual to receive questions from anywhere. I think I've answered questions from almost every state, and even from England, Germany, and Spain. Only a small percentage of questions ended up in the newspaper, but I tried to answer every one personally. I also provided my own photos, so a camera was my constant companion.

When you passed the shovel to Laura Simpson to write the column, did you give her any advice?

No advice needed! Laura, as well as all of our MGs, came well qualified and ready to carry on.

How would you describe your style when answering gardening questions or giving advice?

I would have to say, my answers are offered as the voice of one gardener to another. In fact, many of those posing questions became sort of pen-pals.

What topics have you presented in talks?

I have given more lectures to garden clubs and senior centers than I could ever count. I've also given presentations at Home and Garden Shows, Orange County Fair, Rare Fruit Growers, Los Angeles County MG classes, even the CA State MG Conference, with groups from half a dozen to a couple of hundred. Topics included citrus, roses, soils, vegetable growing, plant propagation, etc. The most memorable one was for the rose society back in 1986. I had just started as a graduate student and when I got up to begin my lecture, there was the Soils Dept. Chairman sitting in the front row. Nothing like a little pressure!

How are you spending your time these days? What gardening do you enjoy today?

In retirement, I'm as busy as ever. We still have a vegetable garden every year, summer and winter, although not as extensive as before. We have fruit trees, of course, and lots of flowers. I'm usually in

the garden by 6 a.m. for my first inspection, deadheading roses and petunias, harvesting vegetables, and checking soil moisture levels. Later in the day, it's time for any needed chores: weeding, planting, or clearing. A third visit in the evening is just to enjoy the garden itself. In addition, my husband and I ride our tandem road bike regularly. In the last six years, we have pedaled over 20,000 miles. We especially enjoy traveling in our motorhome to the western national parks and biking throughout the parks. With any time left of the day, I devote to making quilts. A favorite project is making baby quilts for Showers of Appreciation, an organization that holds baby showers for military families.

Of course the one question many want answered is how you received the name, "Toots?"

My given name is Ottilia, as was my mother's name, her mother's name, etc. It's an unusual name, and every year, when the nun called role the first day of school, when she hesitated, or said, "Umm," I knew she had come to me. My parents were married in 1927, and in their era, Tootsie evidently was a cute pet name. So, when I came along in 1944, they called me Tootsie. As an adult, I shortened it to Toots. By the way, Ottilia is my daughter's MIDDLE name.



Here I am with my husband, Bob, at the Chihuly Garden and Glass in Seattle, an amazing incorporation of art glass and garden plantings.

Many thanks to Toots Bier for sharing these delightful stories of her Master Gardener life!

Toots Shares a Memorable Letter and Her Private, Unpublished Response

I've had a PC ever since 1983 and have all of my columns and replies. From January 25, 1991, I received a question from a man who had two large trash bags of hair and wanted to know if he could possibly use them as soil amendment:

Dear Mr. Cruikshank,

Your letter posed a question that I have never before been asked. There is very little information readily available on the subject of using hair in the garden. One reference that proved useful is The Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening ... "Hair, like wool and feathers, has a high nitrogen content. If the sweepings from a barbershop were regularly applied to a compost heap, an enormous amount of nitrogen could be saved...If kept in a well-moistened heap, hair will disintegrate as easily as feathers."

Although the book only suggests adding the hair to a compost pile, it seems to me that there is no reason why you could not add the hair directly to the moist soil of your garden as long as the strands are not so long that they make it difficult to work the soil...Since this is a method that I have not personally tried, I would like to suggest that you try this only in a small area to start. It might be interesting to make comparison plantings of identical crops side-by-side with one planting growing in hair-amended soil and the other growing in unamended soil. Any effects from this amendment should be visible by the end of summer.

I would be very pleased to hear the results of this hair amendment.

Sincerely,

Ottillia (Toots) Bier

[Toots never heard back from Mr. Cruikshank.]

Meeting Cultural Diversity with Healthy Traditions in the WIC Program

Contributed by Joyce Allen and Janice Rosner, West County UCCE MGs

The federal Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program provides food supplements to low-income women who have given or are about to give birth and includes children up to 5 years. WIC in Riverside County has become a source of pride for MGs. Each of us on the committee has taken to heart that we are able to make an impact on lives each time we present a new topic of engagement.



Beginning in 2017 Riverside County MG Thurman Howard and Lorie Brendecke RDN, a public health nutritionist from the Riverside University Health System, came together with a common vision: To connect participants in the WIC program with nature, thereby increasing mental, physical and spiritual health. During the monthly Health and Wellness Fairs at WIC, various vendors and resources were selected to present their programs; however, none addressed the concept of connecting with nature and the benefits of healthy living.

The Master Gardeners were challenged to come up with a low-cost nutritionally-based container garden with no drainage in a small space, such as a balcony or patio. Thurman Howard introduced

ollas, in-ground irrigation pots used by Native Americans, to meet the challenge. Without the support of other MGs who caught the vision for this program, we wouldn't have reached the goals we set to make it a success. Several MGs filled key roles. Sue Hill, in the photo above, came on board to help schedule the Health and Wellness dates to attend. Michael Fisher, in the same photo, came in with knowledge of hydroponics. Debra O'Brien, Jean Wagner, Gail Bell, Janice Rosner, Joyce Allen and Kim Coons-Leonard helped to bring an increase in events as we went from 4 offices to 12, including in the Desert led by Joan Kyle-Baerman.

"The WIC personnel in the Desert have been very supportive of our presentations," said Joan. "The WIC clients have been receptive and interested and often have mentioned their own gardening with their parents and how they missed it. These presentations have brought back memories and provided new ways to supply family nutrition with limited space, time, and investment. This is what amazed me and made me enthused. The clients and staff really enjoyed it!"

Master Gardeners understand that health and wellness suffer when people disassociate with nature and its attributes. Our hopes were to reach the underserved urban population by bringing the "green" to them through such topics of engagements as olla gardening in a container, vertical gardening, gardening from seed, and growing micro greens. MG Gail Bell discusses vegetables with a client in the photo below.

With the growth of our partnership with WIC and the numbers to back our increase in personal contact at an increased number of facilities, we decided to apply for the Search for Excellent Award 2020, an opportunity to celebrate and showcase the talents of UC Master Gardeners across the state. To date we have had no response from the state due to the pandemic.



Our committee members Gail Bell, Janice Rosner, Kim Coons-Leonard (with a parent in the photo above), and Joyce Allen continue to work together with Thurman Howard to expand our ability to reach the community. Our new Diverse Community Project will encompass WIC, Head Start, and community farms.



Why Do Some Trees Live So Long?

Contributed by Ron Jemmerson, Desert UCCE Master Gardener

The lifespans of trees vary considerably among different species. Some species live no longer than humans, while others live for hundreds or even thousands of years. The record seems to be held by a bristle cone pine tree in eastern California, aptly named Methuselah, that is believed to be the oldest tree on Earth at 4850 years, although it is not clear that the tree has actually lived that long or has re-cloned itself over time. Ginkgo biloba is one of the long-lived species and is similar to redwoods with lifespans as long as 1500 years. Originally from China, ginkgo biloba thrives in temperate climates in the United States. Even these trees cannot survive severe drought, fire, flood, or pestilence. The basis for their otherwise typical lengthy viability has remained a mystery, until now.

As reported recently in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science U.S.A.* (vol. 117, pp. 2201-2210, 2020), a collaborative study between scientists from China and the U.S. has provided evidence that the long lifespan of ginkgo biloba may largely be due to an effective immune system that does not seem to age. These researchers studied 9 trees, 3 each in the age ranges of 20-22 years, 196-236 years, and 538-667 years. Genes for disease resistance and secondary metabolites, such as anti-oxidants, were highly expressed in the cambium of all 3 age groups and expression of senescence (death) genes was lacking. Cell division in the cambium did slow up to 200 years, but seed germination rates and leaf surface areas, along with their chlorophyll content, did not change with age. In most respects the 600 year old trees were not chemically distinguishable from the 20 year-olds. Eat your hearts out, fellow humans. Maybe there is something for us to learn here? That said, the American scientist on the study recommends red wine over ginkgo biloba extract for good health.

Update on the Smoketree

For the May/June issue of *Garden Views* Mary Ann Egan, Desert UCCE Master Gardener, had written an article about the smoketree, *Psoralea argophylla*, that grows naturally in sandy washes in the Southern California desert. We had hoped to include a photograph of the tree in full bloom. Knowing that locally they bloom in late May, every week or so we scouted out trees hoping to get a picture for the article. As it turned out, two days after the issue went on-line a number of trees had finally blossomed. Below are photos of the same young tree from slightly different angles before and during blooming. The flowers are indigo with specks of orange visible up close.



Desert Gold Badge Master Gardener, Brenda Costantino, Heads East

Contributed by Mary Ann Egan, Desert UCCE Master Gardener

The Desert Master Gardeners will soon be waving good-bye to one of its powerhouse members. Brenda Costantino, who became a certified Master Gardener in 2016 and already holds a gold badge, is leaving the Desert. Brenda condensed an enormous amount of volunteer time and activity into her 4 short years as a MG, but it is the substantial impact she has had on the Desert Area MG program that is so impressive.



Some background—Brenda was raised in the “Garden State” of New Jersey where both of her parents were avid gardeners. Her mom was devoted to growing flowers and her dad to vegetables. Brenda says that the green thumb she inherited from her mom for flowers on one of her hands, and the green thumb she got from her dad for vegetables on her other hand both awakened when she moved to the Desert several years ago. Before moving to the Coachella Valley, Brenda raised four children in South Jersey and had a full career in nursing and nursing administration.

Desert MG trainee classes—While Brenda was a student in the 2015-2016 Desert trainee class, she expressed an interest in “helping the helper” with the next class. When the intended coordinator for the 2016-2017 class rather abruptly left the Desert before Brenda’s class had even graduated, she was surprised to learn that her offer to help had suddenly put her front and center for the job as coordinator for the next class. The Desert Master Gardener Program was still a small, fledging group in 2016 and was working hard to build itself into a viable part of the MG organization. The group did not have a wealth of experienced MGs to draw on to fill the time-consuming and detail-oriented job as class coordinator so the departure of the intended class coordinator created a big hole. Joan Kyle-Baerman, the Chair of the Desert MGs at that time, said that “It was a godsend” when Brenda stepped up to fill the job as class coordinator— it “helped the whole attitude” of the fledging Desert Area group.

Brenda did an admirable job as coordinator, not only for that class of 2016-2017 but also for the next class of 2017-2018. Janet Hartin decided on the educational content, Brenda worked with Rosa Olaiz and Janet to set up the speakers, but there was no one available to help Brenda get the classes organized. Brenda’s independent streak and her background in nursing administration proved to be organizational gold. When Brenda took on a job, said Joan, “it just got done.”

Brenda’s caring approach with people came through in her work with the students. Brenda fostered her students and did a lot of hand-holding. She didn’t let details slip through the cracks and she followed through on issues that came up. MG Jerry L’Hommedieu, who helped out in both classes, observed that Brenda was “like a loving mother with a firm hand.” According to Linda Henry, a student in the 2016-2017 class, Brenda was very inspiring and “did an incredible job as coordinator” with the “rowdy” class.

Brenda continually reassured the students that they “could do it” and always made sure they were having a good time. She encouraged them to meet their classmates and work together to foster camaraderie. Brenda often helped the students personally. It all worked well. The students had fun and developed into a tight-knit group, said Linda. Brenda’s two very successful classes added many valued MGs to the desert group.

Other Desert MG projects—No matter what new job Brenda took on as a MG— and there were many— her organizational skills, her work ethic, her desire to learn and her ability to reach out and involve people produced results. The Desert MG projects at Moorten Botanical Garden, The Living Desert, and the “Ask a Master Gardener” information tables all benefitted from Brenda’s touch and her many hours of dedicated volunteer time.

Always ready to learn about desert plants, Brenda soaked up information about cacti and succulents from Clark Moorten while she was at Moorten Botanical Garden. She turned the then-seasonal MG propagation project at Moorten into a year-round project by volunteering to do propagation work during the summer at a prominent place in the Garden where visitors could watch and learn about the plants growing in the Garden. When she manned the summer information table every other week at the Indoor Farmers’ Market in Palm Springs she also successfully recruited many students for the trainee classes. At the Living Desert, Brenda developed a special relationship with the loquacious plant propagator for the Living Desert, Bob Linstead. During breaks, Brenda talked to Bob about health and Bob talked to Brenda and the other MGs there about his experience with desert plants.

Brenda’s love of desert plants certainly showed in her volunteer work with the Desert MGs. She always did her research about the plants she would be talking about, no matter what the venue. When working as a docent at Moorten Botanical Garden, Brenda learned the history of the plants

and told stories about them to entertain visitors. Linda Henry said that Brenda could rattle off the botanical names of the plants “like it was her first language.” Brenda’s ability to relate to people from all different walks of life allowed her to connect with people and share her plant knowledge and experience with them whether she was at Moorten’s, at the information tables, or with the students in her trainee classes.

Brenda loves gardening and also loves ballroom dancing. She danced often at the Pavilion Ballroom in Palm Springs. We hope that the fun she had dancing in Palm Springs and working in the Master Gardener Program has created fond memories of the Desert that will always stay with her. The Desert Master Gardeners are going to miss Brenda Costantino and her caring, dedicated energy tremendously.

“Hope is the thing with feathers,
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all...”

(Emily Dickinson)

What lies ahead—Brenda has been diagnosed with ALS, a neurodegenerative disease. She is moving back to the East Coast to be close to her extended family. She will live in Virginia near the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains and close to one of her daughters. She will be seeing physicians at the University of Virginia’s cutting edge ALS Program. They are already offering her the latest information and their encouragement. Brenda’s other 3 children are not far away in the South Jersey area near Philadelphia. Brenda’s spirit, drive, determination, and her close family will hopefully provide the support that she will need. We are fortunate that Brenda has spent part of her life with our Master Gardener Program.

Janet's Jottings

Contributed by Janet Hartin, UCCE Master Gardener Program Director



Hi everyone!

I wanted to thank you for all you do as the pandemic continues. My thoughts are with you and your families, hoping you all stay well and have added time to spend outdoors.

Save the date! We will be hosting a virtual UCR Field Day on September 3, 2020 featuring our drought-tolerant landscape plots at UC Riverside that was to be held live last May. More information is forthcoming but it will provide at least four hours of continuing education hours and a chance for you to ask questions of Dr.'s Amir Haghverdi, Don Merhaut and myself.

A silver lining for me over the past few months has been the opportunity to summarize results of some of my ongoing research studies, including a mulch trial that I'll report on virtually in August at the American Society for Horticultural Science conference that was to be held in Orlando. I thought you might be interested in the results.

The objective of the research project was to measure the impacts of organic mulch treatments on the growth and health of four species of low maintenance, drought-tolerant landscape trees under deficit irrigation. Species selected were: *Parkinsonia* x 'Desert Museum' (top photo), *Chilopsis linearis* 'Bubba', *Pistacia* 'Red Push', and *Prosopis glandulosa* 'Maverick' (bottom photo). Trees were planted in a randomized complete block experimental design at the Chino Basin Water Conservation District (CBWCD) in Montclair in October, 2016. Half of the trees received 4" of organic mulch and half did not. Trees were transplanted from 15-gallon containers and irrigated with recycled water at 80 percent of reference evapotranspiration (ET_o)

the first 12 months. Irrigation was reduced to 50% ET_o in November 2017 which was maintained until May 2020 when irrigation ceased. While the study continues through October 2020 there are interesting early results.



To date, organic mulch applications enhanced growth with no loss in quality in the *Pistacia*, *Prosopis glandulosa*, and *Chilopsis linearis* trees while growth was better in the *Parkinsonia* trees that did not receive mulch. This may be due to the fact that its trunk and branches actively photosynthesize as well as its leaves. *Parkinsonia* leaves also feature sunken guard cells, providing another form of drought avoidance. Furthermore, *Parkinsonia* tends to root deeply and may not need the added benefit of reduced soil evaporation in the top few inches of soil provided by the mulch. The trees are part of a larger study at University of California, Riverside to determine the ability of 12 species of landscape trees to mitigate impacts of climate change. While I'll be long retired by then, growth and health data of all

species will continue to be evaluated through at least 2035. The study at CBWCD provided the opportunity for a mulch/no mulch treatment for four of the most promising species which was space-limited at UCR.

News! from Rosa

Contributed by Rosa Olaiz, UCCE Master Gardener Volunteer Services Coordinator



Congratulations to all of the new Master Gardeners and to those MGs who have achieved a milestone in volunteer hours served! Many thanks for all you do!

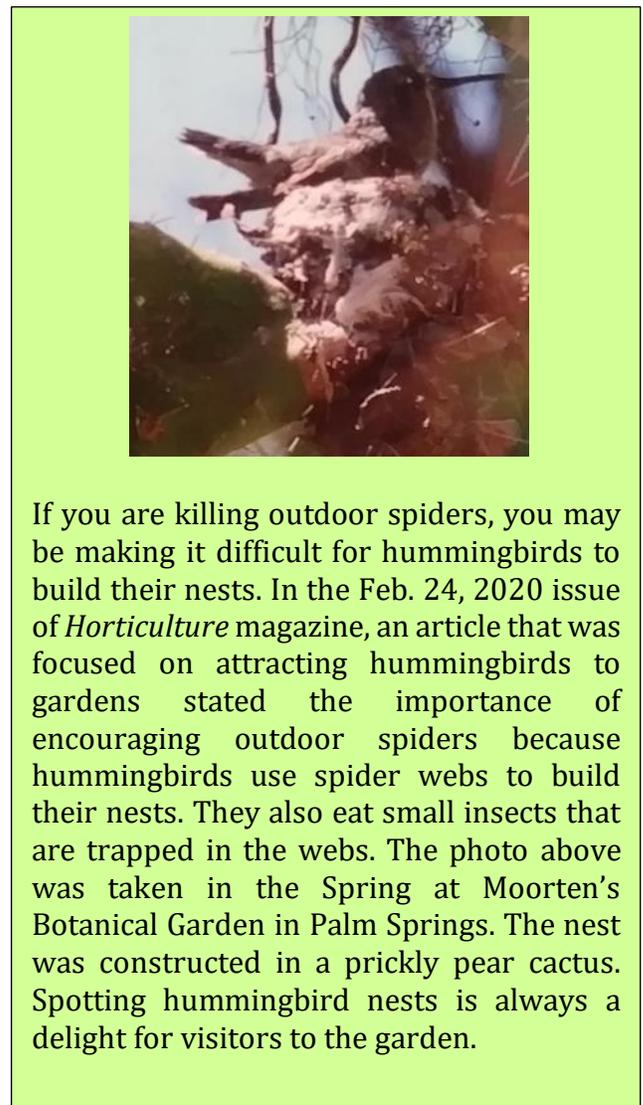
- The UCCE office will continue to be closed due to COVID-19. At this time we do not have a projected opening date as the situation constantly changes. The Return to Office Safety Plan has been approved by Risk Management and will be in place once the office opens.
- **USDA security alert:** Unsolicited seed packages are arriving in the U.S. from China. The Department of Homeland Security and USDA are beginning an investigation. They are collecting the seeds and testing them for anything that could endanger the environment such as invasive species or noxious weeds. If you receive seeds that you did not order hold on to them, along with the packaging, and notify the State Plant Regulatory Official, whose contact information is posted on the National Plant Board website, or the State Plant Health Director at the following website: aphis.usda.gov. **Do not plant seeds from unknown sources.**
- All project coordinators and advisory board officers should join one of the Zoom meetings scheduled for Tuesday, Aug. 4 or Tuesday, Aug. 11 from 10 a.m.-noon. The purpose of the meeting is to review procedures for reporting,

filing for reimbursements, etc. I will be sending an e-mail with details.

- Upcoming “Lunch and Learns” via Zoom (see the homepage of VMS for internet connection):

“Adeniums” by UCCE Desert Master Gardener Barbara Kay Levin
Thurs., Aug. 20, noon

“Garden Photography” by UCCE Desert Master Gardener Tim Labonge
Thurs., Sept. 17, noon



If you are killing outdoor spiders, you may be making it difficult for hummingbirds to build their nests. In the Feb. 24, 2020 issue of *Horticulture* magazine, an article that was focused on attracting hummingbirds to gardens stated the importance of encouraging outdoor spiders because hummingbirds use spider webs to build their nests. They also eat small insects that are trapped in the webs. The photo above was taken in the Spring at Moorten’s Botanical Garden in Palm Springs. The nest was constructed in a prickly pear cactus. Spotting hummingbird nests is always a delight for visitors to the garden.

Riverside County Master Gardener Program

UCCE Riverside County Director	Eta Takele
UCCE MG Program Director	Janet Hartin
Volunteer Services Coordinator	Rosa Olaiz

West County Advisory Board Officers

Chair	Georgia Renne
Chair Elect	Darrilyn Erickson
Past Chair	Debra Corbin-Euston
Treasurer/Fiscal Officer	Jeremy Noye
Recording Secretary	Joyce Allen

Desert Advisory Board Officers

Chair	Marcia Stone
Chair Elect	Smoky Zeidel
Past Chair	Barbara Kay-Levin
Fiscal Officer	Bruce Wilcox
Secretary	Cesar Lopez Barreras

Committee & Project Coordinators

West County Parliamentarians	David Brandtman/ Cindy Peterson
Coachella Valley Preserve	Marcia Stone
West County Community Gardens	Thurman Howard
Desert Events	Rita Kraus
Desert Farmers' Markets	Ron Jemmerson
Gold Miners	Thurman Howard
Grow Lab	Kathy Warner
Desert Help Line	Jim Thompson/ Ralph Thompson
West County Help Line	Susan Bookman
IT/Website	David Brandtman
Desert Membership	Marsha McNamara Cindy Morris-Sotelo
West County Mentoring Program	Juanita Wielenga
Desert Mentoring Program	David Dean Joe Dean
Moorten's Botanic Garden-Docent -Propagation	Smoky Zeidel Linda Henry
Desert New Projects	Carolyn Daniels
West County Equip./Inventory	Steven Lee
West County Public Relations	Sue Cline/ Pam Clarke
Desert Public Relations	Donna Maul
West County School Gardens	Jonie Kipling
Desert School Gardens	Brad Hardison
West County Socials	Yvonne Wilczynski
Desert Socials	Kathy Miller
West County Speakers' Bureau	Mike Horak
Desert Speakers' Bureau	Gail Nottberg
West County Tours	Linda Carpenter
Desert C.E. Events	Carolyn Daniels
West County Training Class	Melody Knox
Desert Training Class	Martha Tureen
UCR Botanic Gardens	Yvonne Wilczynski
Desert WIC	Joan Kyle-Baerman
West County WIC	Thurman Howard
Desert Large Events	Mary Moses
Desert Home Gardening Class	Linda Borlaug
West County Home Gardening Class	Linda Powell
WEL	Janice Rosner
Desert Visually-Impaired Classes	Barbara Kay-Levin

Mission Statement

Master Gardener Volunteers are trained by the UCCE Advisors, Specialists and other qualified instructors to provide the gardeners of Riverside County with research-based information to promote environmentally responsible and sustainable horticultural practices. Activities of volunteers are solely educational - without inclusion of any purpose or intention of carrying on a business, trade, avocation or profession for profit.

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The Back Page

Contributed by Ron Jemmerson, Editor

Retention—can anything be done to increase it? That's a question I have been asking since I completed the Desert Training Program 5 years ago as I saw my own class dwindling in number, now below 50%. I am glad for the attention to this issue now being given in the "Rooted" Project that is originating in West County and set to launch in January, 2021. It would be helpful to know why MGs are leaving the MG Program so that those specific issues may be addressed. Increasing member retention was a goal of the Mentoring Project. To my knowledge this project has not been assessed for its impact on retention. Clearly, it has not solved the problem. Mentors could be asked for any insight they may have into why MGs under their charge decided to leave the Program. Having been a mentor I have some insight. Suffice it to say there are reasons that we cannot address, such as health issues or a move outside the county, and there are reasons that may be tractable, such as loss of interest in the MG Program or feeling left out. Before a lot of effort is put into any initiative, perhaps we should find out how many individuals could be retained and ask ourselves if the effort required for a retention initiative is worth the potential reward.