

Master Gardeners Mark 16 Years of Demonstration Garden Open Garden Days

In 2004, University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners of Tuolumne County entered into a collaborative agreement with Sonora Union High School District to provide gardening demonstrations for the community and develop instructional projects for the students at the District's Alternative Education Campus (the 'Dome'). The garden was originally planted by Jim Johnson, a teacher at Cassina High, and his students. It was used by Mr. Johnson and fellow teacher Bob King for school projects. Containing several varieties of fruit trees, blackberries, grape vines, raised beds, a small rose garden, and shaded tables, the garden is also an ideal break area for students.

Master Gardeners' initial involvement in the garden was to hold fruit tree and rose pruning, and composting demonstrations open to the community. These demonstrations have been held every year with an excellent response from the public participants. In 2004 the Forest Service donated Sequoia trees to replace a large redwood that had been removed from the campus. Working with Cassina High students, Master Gardeners transplanted the one-gallon size trees to larger 5-gallon pots and placed them where they could be watered by drip irrigation throughout the summer. The following year, students once again helped plant the trees in the ground. The trees were purchased as memorials to honor members of the community who were influential in working at Cassina High or in the garden. Proceeds from these memorials went to purchase supplies for the garden. Weeding, removing overgrown berries bushes, pruning ornamental trees and setting up compost bins were just some of the projects the Master Gardeners completed during the first two years. In 2005 the ROP construction classes built a storage shed and a greenhouse as well as an information board that contains educational material for each season. Art students were responsible for the graphics on the board.

In 2006, the garden committee decided to set up teams for each section of the garden. Master Gardeners could be involved in the area of the garden they enjoyed most. The fruit production team, along with help from Mr. Johnson, revitalized the fruit trees, grape vines and blackberries. They added raspberries and blueberries. The rose garden team, with generous donations by Don and Renee Paulsen, were able to double the size of the rose garden. Two of the raised vegetable beds were rebuilt and two new beds added. A rock garden was added to the garden and, the native plant team has four areas where natives are currently growing. Drip systems were installed throughout the garden and a fabulous timer system helps keep the water usage to a conservative level. Master Gardeners are also involved with composting demonstrations, and plant sales.

To support the activities in the garden, in 2006 and again in 2010 Master Gardeners compiled material from these columns into a book and offered it for sale. We are happy to report that only a few copies remain. We have also had generous donations from many businesses and individuals in the community.

In May 2007, Master Gardeners began holding an Open Garden Day on the first Saturday of each month. Three demonstrations on each of these 'open days' are offered and have been publicized through media columns, posters and an e-newsletter. Demonstrations have been on

drip irrigation, herbs, planting in raised beds, planting native plants, building a water feature, and composting.

This year's Open Garden Days return on Saturday, February 1 with the garden opening for questions at 10:00am and free demonstration classes beginning at 10:30. Open Garden Days are held on the first Saturday of each month. The month of February will have demonstrations on pruning. University of California Cooperative Extension gardeners will be available and the gardening book mentioned earlier is available for purchase. The Demonstration Garden is located at 251 S. Barretta Street, Sonora...at the Dome. There is ample parking and restrooms are available.

See you there!

Originally written by Carolee James, former team leader for the native plant areas of the garden; edited and revised by University of California of Cooperative Extension Rebecca Miller-Cripps and Francie McGowan of Tuolumne County

UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne County can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/ You can also find us on Facebook.