



May 2023

Greetings Tahoe Gardeners!

After this record setting winter, everyone is looking forward to some warmer weather! As the snow melts and the ground softens, signs of life emerge. Lupines are about 4-6" tall in my Zephyr Cove meadow. Daffodils and Iris are poking their stems up. The ribes leaves are uncurling, and the grass clumps are turning from brown to green. Voles and moles are chugging through, creating tiny tunnels just under the surface. I try to ignore them, as long as enough of the meadow plants survive their excavation.



This month, the Lake Tahoe Master Gardeners are continuing to work in the local elementary schools in South Lake Tahoe and Zephyr Cove, preparing for the Grow Your Own collaboration with Slow Foods Lake Tahoe, UC Davis TERC, and the Great Basin Institute in June (see below). By the end of the month, the Tahoe Friendly Demonstration Garden will be cleaned up and ready for the growing season.

We are continuing to recruit our next class of UCCE Master Gardeners of Lake Tahoe trainees. Classes are set to begin in the fall of 2023 and continue through the winter of 2024. If you are interested in learning to become a UCCE Master Gardener, [visit the **Becoming a Master Gardener page of our website.**](#)

Scroll down for our May garden tips, some local events, information on garlic "scapes", wolf lichen, and ideas on how to melt snow the fastest! Take a tour of the Sherman Garden in Southern California.

As always, your feedback is important to us, so send us suggestions on what type of information you would like to see in this newsletter. Most importantly, enjoy the longer days and warmer weather.

Sandy Gainza
UCCE Master Gardener Volunteer, Newsletter Editor

May Gardening Tips

by Annie Christy, Lake Tahoe Master Gardener

Spring Clean Up - After the snow has melted, you can begin to remove pine needles and other fallen debris from your garden. Be careful to wait for the temperatures to rise to 50 degrees because pollinators and overwintering beneficial insects can still be hibernating in your leaf litter. If you clear the debris, consider



piling it in a corner for a week or two before getting rid of it to give these beneficial garden partners time to wake up and get active. If you can take the time to sift out the large debris and leave the smaller pieces, you will be adding to the development of your soil. Remember that in general, the native Tahoe soil is not very rich in nutrients. Leaving small, partially decomposed leaf bits and plant stems helps to create better soil over time.

Pest Management - Our vector control experts inform us that now is the time to set out your yellow jacket traps. Early in spring yellow jacket queens emerge from winter hibernation to search for ground nesting sites. If you can trap these queens now, you avert having a whole colony of ground nesting bees on your property. Set two lure traps, one at either end of your yard. Avoid hanging the traps near your patio or bbq area, as the yellow jackets will come to the traps. Be sure and keep the traps baited as the spring progresses.

Seed Starting - Now is a good time to start some summer vegetable or annual flower seeds, if you haven't begun already. A grow light, consistent temperature and moisture will get the best results. Our final frost date is around mid-June, so it is too early to plant anything outdoors that is not frost or freeze tolerant. Use frost cloth to protect any transplants you decide to try outside this month.

Irrigation Systems - Generally now you can turn on your sprinkler and irrigation systems; make sure that your ground is no longer frozen and test each station while watching for leaks and drips. The harsh winter and heavy snow may have damaged drip lines and emitters. Check to make sure that they are working properly and go slowly when pressurizing your system to avoid blowing out your water lines!

Plant shopping - You will see summer plants begin to appear in the big box stores, and our Tahoe nurseries will open this month. There are also several plant sales taking place in the area. If you buy, be aware that anything you plant outside is subject to a late season snow storm or a freeze. Protect your new arrivals with frost cloth or bring them indoors on cold nights until the danger of frost has passed. Hardy native shrubs grown locally are fair game, however, and can be planted as soon as you can work your soil. Remember that even native plants need some time to get established, so have a plan to irrigate them their first summer after planting.

UC Master Gardeners of Lake Tahoe Events



**Garden Day Festivals
Coming In June!**

*Everything you want to know about
growing food and plants in Lake*

Tahoe will be at your fingertips. Come join the fun!

These community events highlight growing your own food at home or at community gardens around the Lake Tahoe area.

June 2, 2023 in Tahoe City from 3 p.m to 7 p.m.

Hosted by UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center

June 3, 2023 in Truckee from 11 a.m to 2 p.m.

Hosted by Slow Foods Lake Tahoe

June 10, 2023 in South Lake Tahoe, Tallac Estate from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Hosted by Great Basin Institute



FREE admissions for all three festivals. But space is limited, so please [register here](#).

The **Lake Tahoe Master Gardeners** will be on hand to discuss growing these vegetables in the Tahoe Basin:

Tomatoes and Peppers

Leafy Greens

Potatoes

Peas

Squash and Pumpkins

Onions/Leeks

Edible flowers

Vegetable starts (plants) will be available for sale. Tours of the host sites will be available during the event. See you there!

OTHER AREA EVENTS OF NOTE:

UCCE Central Sierra

(El Dorado, Calaveras, Tuolumne, and Amador Master Gardener programs and events in Northern California)

Check out their ongoing events [HERE](#).

Join our Team!

Master Gardener Volunteer Training for Lake Tahoe begins soon

Want to be a Master Gardener? The University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) invites adults living in the Lake Tahoe area interested in helping others learn about sustainable gardening and landscaping to apply to train as a Master Gardener volunteer.



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Agriculture and Natural Resources

UC Master Gardener Program

UCCE Master Gardener volunteers participate in a University of California program of scientific-based information on sustainable gardening and then share that knowledge with their communities. Master Gardener volunteers are adults of all ages and from all walks of life with a common desire to help others learn about sustainable gardening and landscaping. Any adult resident of communities in the

four counties (Placer and El Dorado Counties in California and Washoe and Douglas Counties in Nevada) surrounding Lake Tahoe can apply to become a Lake Tahoe Master Gardener volunteer. Training includes bi-weekly web-based and in-person sessions supported by reading assignments, regularly spaced over a 6-month period, as well as hands-on opportunities to join ongoing Master Gardener activities. Applicants need reliable internet access as most communication will be through email and web-based learning. Our training materials are mainly in English but we can provide Spanish language materials as needed.

Our commitment to Master Gardener trainees is to teach you research-based home gardening and landscaping solutions for the Lake Tahoe environment. Training topics and activities will cover basic plant science, plant propagation, fertilization, irrigation, soil science, composting, vegetable and fruit gardening, tree management, integrated pest management, research tools, and outreach techniques. An additional focus will be on fire resilience, climate-based solutions, and food security for home gardeners within the context of the challenges and opportunities for gardening and landscaping at higher altitudes. We will provide you with a Master Gardener mentor and plenty of volunteer and continuing education opportunities.

UCCE will invite potential applicants to attend an in-person orientation meeting in June in both South Lake Tahoe and Truckee, (possibly other locations too). We look to consider candidates with prior community service, experience teaching others, and personal experience and interest in gardening. A specific date for the orientation meetings will be announced soon. For more details about how to join our talented and dedicated Lake Tahoe team please [Click Here](#).

An Informal Experiment in Snow Melting Techniques By David Long UC Master Gardener of Lake Tahoe



This year we've had a significant accumulation of snow, covering everything including our gardens. At the Tallac Historic Site demonstration garden we had 4 feet of snow as of April 1, 2023. While we all want to start working in the garden, how to best deal with the snow is something to consider. If the area is small enough or if you have a raised bed that you want to start early you could just dig it out. At the Tallac site we thought we'd try to help the sun melt snow by experimenting with various techniques to

accelerate the process.

We tried four different covers placed on the snow to see which might speed up snow melt. The project was located at the Tallac Historic Site vegetable garden.

Clear plastic sheeting – Held at corners by masonry bricks. Clear plastic might act as a greenhouse would in heating beneath the plastic, thus melting the snow.

Dark brown tarp – Held at corners by masonry bricks. The dark surface would heat up and the heat would melt the snow underneath.

One inch of soil spread on the snow surface – The soil would absorb heat during the day and

radiate heat melting the snow beneath.

Blue tarp – Held at corners by masonry bricks – Everyone has a blue tarp so why not put it to use in the garden.

The results were surprising but explainable. The experiment ran for 20 days, during which the site had one day of falling snow (2 inches). One area of the garden, no cover was placed (our control), which resulted in a 16 inch decrease in the snow depth during the 20 days.

Clear plastic sheeting – The placement of the clear plastic actually retarded melting so that the surface beneath the plastic was about 6 inches higher than the surrounding snow levels. The snow beneath the plastic did not absorb heat, rather the snow reflected the sunlight, and the plastic protected the snow from any wind that might have accelerated the snow's sublimation.

Dark brown tarp – The clear winner based on surface depth changes, melting about an additional 18 inches of snow during the test period.

One inch of soil spread on the snow surface – The soil greatly insulated the snow, and protected the snow surface from wind, so the snow level beneath the soil was 10 inches higher than adjacent areas.

Blue tarp – This worked almost as well as the brown tarp, registering about a 14-inch depression beneath the tarp.



Tahoe Plants and Trees

Wolf Lichen (*Letharia vulpine*)

by David Long, Lake Tahoe Master Gardener

The wolf lichen is easily recognized, found on the bark and branches of conifer trees throughout the Tahoe Basin but more frequently at the higher elevations. This lichen is bright green and is multibranched. It is one of the largest local lichens. The vegetative reproductive structures (soredia and isidia) are circular and dark brown giving rise to another name for this organism, Brown eyed wolf lichen. The specific name, *vulpine* refers to fox. The wolf lichen as with most lichens are long lived and slow growing, increasing in size only a few millimeters per year. Lichens in general are indicator species for air quality, with epiphytic (growing on trees) lichens most susceptible to poor air quality. The wolf lichen is found on the trunks and branches of coniferous trees, seldom lower on the trunk than typical annual snow accumulation levels. It is more commonly found on the trunks of thick barked trees such as Jeffery Pine, Red fir and Western White Pine. It is found on other conifers, mostly on the upper side of dead branches. Research has shown that this type



lichen can actively photosynthesize at temperatures well below freezing. Lichens are interesting in that they actually are two organisms (fungus and algae) functioning as a single unit in a symbiotic relationship. The fungal component provides the structure while the algal portion provides the photosynthesis necessary to provide nutrients to both partners. Research on various lichens demonstrate that the fungal partner actively “farms and protects” the algae. Protection is in the form of providing suitable substrate that often includes coatings and coverings that absorb ultraviolet radiation, a concern in many of the harsh environments where lichens are found. The fungus also “controls” the number and distribution of the algae cells, much as farmers limit the extent of crops that they plant.

The wolf Lichen is found in the Sierras, Pacific Northwest, Rockies as well as in coniferous forests in Eurasia. It gets its name from its use as a poisonous component in wolf (and fox) bait, frequently used in Europe from the Middle Ages. The lichen was collected, ground and mixed with meat (sometimes glass fragments added) and left out for the foxes and wolves to eat. The animals would die shortly after consuming the concoction. In certain native American cultures, the lichens would be boiled and the extracted coloring would be used as a dye. The lichen is used by several bird species in construction of their nests, which may assist in distribution of the lichen. There is increasing interest in the use of extracts from the wolf lichen in developing pesticides. Ground wolf lichen has been shown to be an effective control for snails and slugs, at relative minute concentrations. The poisonous component primarily being the vulpinic acid found in the lichen. This lichen is also extensively collected for use in ornamental arrangements and in floral arrangements. Even when dried the bright green color remains. The green color is actually not from the algae partner rather it is the color of the fungal portion.



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Lichens on Western White Pine

For the Traveling Gardener by Cindy Wise, UC Master Gardener of Lake Tahoe

Sherman Library & Gardens
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Corona del Mar, CA 92625
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Located just blocks from the Pacific Ocean in the southern California beach town of Corona del Mar are the Sherman Library & Gardens, a historical research library and botanical gardens. Formerly a commercial nursery property, the gardens were started in 1955 when the property was purchased by Arnold D. Haskell. Mr. Haskell was a successful businessman passionate about education and gardening. In 1966, he founded Sherman Library & Gardens, naming it after his mentor, Moses H. Sherman. (Sherman was an influential railroad and property developer in the Phoenix and Los Angeles areas in the late 1800s to early 1900s.)

The Sherman Library is a small, historical research library with books, archival collections, photographs, maps, and newspapers specializing in the history of the Pacific Southwest (southern California, Arizona, northern Mexico and adjoining areas.) It also includes a small collection of California Impressionist art.



The 2.2 acre gardens are lush with begonias (over 130 varieties), fuchsias, fountains and a koi pond. Plant collections include palms, orchids, ferns and succulents. The grounds are divided into 16 different garden types. I found these three gardens types to be interesting and unique: Bog, Bromeliad and Island Ecology.

The Bog Garden recreates a freshwater peat wetlands featuring carnivorous plant species such as American pitcher plants, sundews, and Venus flytraps. The Bromeliad Garden includes mostly lithophytes that would naturally grow in the crevices of cliffs, or on rocks. Bromeliads are a very diverse group of plants that get nutrients from their leaves, using their roots for balance or attachment. The Island Ecology Garden focuses on plants found on oceanic islands from around the world including California's Channel Islands, Canary

Islands, New Caledonia, and Hawaii. Plants on islands often develop special ecological adaptations in response to their isolated, unique environments.

The Sherman Library & Gardens are open to the public daily (closed on major holidays.) A garden-to-table restaurant is on the grounds featuring herbs and other edibles grown onsite. Lectures, plant shows, classes, tours and performing arts are also available with the calendar of events posted online at theSherman.org

Why GARLIC SCAPES and WTF are they? by Melissa Guthrie, UC Master Gardener of Lake Tahoe

Garlic scapes are the flower bud and the pig-tail looking stalk or stem bud (botanically known as the peduncle) of **hardneck garlic** plants. They are cool looking and a mild-garlic, very tasty treat. Think tapas. Who doesn't like semi-crisp, lemon-olive oil-garlicky shoots?

We have found that garlic grows well here and is quite pest resilient. Late May and June are great times to harvest your "scapes" and treat yourself.

We normally think about the garlic bulb but, the cool kid knows that IF the flowers are removed, the plant doesn't put its energy into seed production (from the flower) but instead, concentrates energy on the bulb itself. Harvesting your scapes now is a great utilization of the whole plant and also helps future plantings. So, go ahead and remove the flower and use it in your cooking!



Master Gardeners and our partners (SlowFoods Truckee, TERC, Tahoe Heritage, DiGG), offer a few varieties to try yearly. Dave Long, a fellow Lake Tahoe Master Gardener, is the expert and he has spent numerous hours learning and procuring garlic for our "GYO" program. In addition to all the vegetables, Dave has chosen different varieties in our quest to see what garlic varieties grow best in our special area of the world... so that every home gardener is successful in home grown vegetables.

Viewing each plant for all its bounty opens up a whole new utilization of garlic; as a beautiful plant with multiple uses. In mid summer enjoy the fresh scapes and flowers, and later, garlic bulbs are a staple, both fresh and dried through winter. We encourage all enthusiastic food gardeners to embrace every aspect of the plants they work so hard to grow

If you grow garlic, always save a few of the bulbs in a paper bag in the the back of the fridge for future planting

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