

STRAW BALE GARDENING

Susan Minaya, Paul Bidinger, and Rich Zimmerman, U.C. Master Gardener trainees, Solano County

Straw Bale Gardening: Getting Started

For many urban and suburban residents, vegetable gardening is often a romantic notion but not necessarily feasible. For some, it might be the lack of yard space or compacted, rocky soil that you can't dig into. For others it may be a physical limitation, such as a bad back, that prevents them from doing the prolonged bending and stooping that gardening typically requires.

We set up straw bale gardens in our own yards this year and are so enthusiastic about the ease of it all that we wanted to share what we've learned and the "how-to's" of getting started with others. In this first of a two-part series, we'll introduce straw bale gardening, tell you how to set up and compost them, what and how to plant, and how to integrate some aesthetics with flowers.

The What, Why and Where of Straw Bales?

Straw bale gardening is technically a raised garden bed on which you can grow vegetables, herbs and annual flowers. Purchase wheat straw bales (not hay or rice straw) tied with synthetic twine and simply place the bales where a planter is desired. Wheat straw bales are available from local feed supply stores or fruit stands and are relatively weed free. Feed stores, which carry wheat straw for animal bedding year around for about \$7 each, are listed in the yellow pages and the internet. Fruit stands generally have wheat straw bales left over from Halloween pumpkin displays and will sell whatever they have.

What Can Grow In Your Straw Bale Garden?

You can grow many types of vegetables and flowers in a straw bale. Suitable vegetables include lettuce, kale and other greens, squash, cucumbers, peppers, chard, tomatoes, eggplant, peas, and annual herbs such as parsley and basil. Corn and pole beans are too tall for this method and root vegetables such as beets, carrots and turnips don't do well in straw bales since the root zone is rough and the straw will tangle the roots. Radishes are one root vegetable that are suitable for straw bales. Remember that if you plant vines such as peas or tomatoes, you'll need to provide trellis or cage support as they mature. The key is to plant what you like to eat or love to look at, and don't be afraid to experiment!

Getting Your Straw Bale Garden Ready For Planting.

What is great about straw bale gardening is that it doesn't take long to prepare the bales for planting. By preparation, we mean composting the bales. Here are the easy steps for setting up and preparing your straw bale garden for planting:

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OUR PLENTIFUL PRETTY PLUMS

Pearl Eddy, U.C. Master Gardener and U.C. Master Food Preserver, Solano County

Almost all of our nation's prunes are produced in California, and we supply 70 percent of the world's needs. Prunes are varieties of the European plum (*Prunus domestica*), but not all plums can be dried into prunes. In recent years, packaged prunes for sale have been labeled "dried plums" to get away from the idea of prunes being "medicinal."

Fresh plums are available here from May through October. Harvest plums as they ripen. A ripe plum gives slightly under your fingers. They can be ripened on a counter for several days, if needed; store ripe fruit in the refrigerator for several days. Most plums have about 35 calories each and are high in dietary fiber and vitamins C and A.

I suggest that if you are interested in planting a plum tree in your yard, that you sample assorted plums from the local farmers' markets this summer and make notes of the names of those you find especially tasty. You can then plan a good spot for planting and can shop for (or order) your choice. Plums are often grafted (or budded) on common purple-leaved plum rootstocks.

Pests of plums (prunes) include aphids, peach twig borers and San Jose scale. Spring diseases include blossom brown rot and russet scab. Both are commonly treated with fungicides during bloom. In most local soils nitrogen is the only needed fertilizer (21-0-0). Adequate pruning will help improve fruit size and keep the tendency for alternate-bearing (a cycle in which the tree bears excessively in one year and little the next year) under control.

European plums are yellow, red, green and purplish-blue. They were probably introduced in the United States by Pilgrims. Japanese plums, which probably came from China in 1870, are usually more pointed at the apex than the common European plum. They are usually yellow or light red but never purplish-blue. The Sunset Western Garden Book has a lot of valuable information on varieties.

We planted several varieties of plums in our orchard 36 years ago, and most are still struggling along after fights with assorted borers. My favorites include the Elephant Heart plum, developed in Sonoma County in the 1930's, which is very large with dark red skin and a juicy, sweet red flesh. (This may need a Santa Rosa plum as a pollinator.) We also like the Santa Rosa plum, which when ripe is slightly soft with a smooth dusty purplish-red skin. The Green Gage plum is small to medium size with greenish-yellow skin with very sweet amber flesh.

We also like the Italian Prune which ripens in late mid-season. It is sweet with purple-black skin and sweet yellow-green flesh. It is excellent fresh, canned and dried. As we live in the hot English Hills area, we dry this "plum" on plastic nursery trays with no pre-treatment.

Preserving plums is a colorful and easy way to enjoy them throughout the winter months. I simply prick the skin on two sides with a fork to prevent splitting. Freestone varieties are easy to pit after being cut in half, but I can them whole. Place them in jars, covered with either water or syrup. (A light syrup is one cup of sugar per one quart of water.) A "cold pack" (uncooked with cool liquid) is processed by the boiling water bath method for 20 minutes for pints, and 25 minutes for quarts.

Spiced Prune-Plum Jam (yield 9 to 10 cups)
 7 pounds prune-plums (about 4 quarts prepared plums)
 8 cups granulated sugar
 2 cups cider vinegar
 1 teaspoon each of ground cloves, ground nutmeg and cinnamon
 1/2 teaspoon grated lemon rind

Wash, halve, and pit prune-plums. Place all ingredients in a large kettle. Cook slowly, stirring often, until thick, approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

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TOP TREE CULPRITS IN SOLANO COUNTY FOR ALLERGY SUFFERERS

Launa Herrmann, U.C. Master Gardener trainee, Solano County

Sniff. Drip. Wheeze. Are these familiar sounds in your home? If so, you are not alone as another Solano County spring approaches. Allergenic activity appears on the rise with drier air and little rain to knock down the pollen. Flowers, grasses and weeds produce most of the pollen that commonly causes allergies. Yet these pollinators are not the only villains wreaking nasal and bronchial havoc. A highly-prized well-loved backyard shade tree can also be a culprit.

Five years ago, when our family moved to Vacaville, I was clueless about the area's notoriety as a windy transport corridor for pollen. Raised on a Southern California orange grove without a prior history of allergies, I had no concept of the misery ahead. That first spring I faulted the grassy open space at the end of the street. One season I even accused the daffodils. Later years, I barked at March's blustery winds while blaming the dust. After all, its fingerprints are everywhere. Now I'm on to something bigger. Instead of looking down, I'm glancing up. This year I'm glaring weepy-eyed at trees.

Truth be told, out of more than 50,000 types of trees, less than 100 are linked to allergies. Most experts agree hardwood deciduous trees that lose leaves in the fall are the primary pollen producers. Since pollination by wind is less effective than by insects, these trees produce copious amounts of light, dry, aerodynamic grains to assure reproduction, especially dioecious males. Landscape gardener and former nurseryman Thomas Ogren, author of "Allergy-Free Gardening," believes allergens are increasing since many urban landscapers favor these "litter-free" dioecious males over messy female trees that drop debris (seeds, seed pods and fruit) on the ground requiring cleanup.

In Solano County, where pome orchards and nut groves abound, the fruit trees exude sticky, heavy pollen, are insect-pollinated and less known to create an allergic response. Often, our main allergy offenders are overlooked because we are oblivious that these trees reside in our yards, throughout the valleys and on the foothills surrounding us. The top tree culprits culpable of triggering an allergenic response in our area include:

- ☛ Alder (*Alnus*), a genus of the BETULACEAE family.
- ☛ Ash (*Fraxinus*), a genus of the OLEACEAE family
- ☛ Birch (*Betula*), also a genus of the BETULACEAE family.
- ☛ Box Elder (*Acer*), a genus of the ACERACEAE family.
- ☛ Oak (*Quercus*), a genus of the FAGACEAE family.
- ☛ Willow (*Salix*), also a genus of the OLEACEAE family.

With the rare exception of oaks, the majority of these trees are used as ornamentals throughout cities and can pollinate any time from January through May. Some oaks expel all their pollen in a week. Willows, while predominately insect-pollinated, are known to release into the air large volumes of highly allergenic pollen that is problematic to fewer people. Alders, which are capable of significant allergenic activity, are infamous for their dangling catkins loaded with pollen awaiting a ride on the slightest breeze. The birch species, an extensively planted non-native to California, reportedly causes severe pollinosis when grown in large numbers.

Of course, I can't deny that a big old birch stands as sentry beside our driveway. To make matters worse, three alders grow pampered and protected in our yard. As the evidence stacks against these culprits, I decide not to solicit my husband's help in estimating how many troublemakers live on our block. I know he'll bolt for the garage, fantasizing about arresting the land to the raucous roar of his chain saw.

Instead, I ponder my predicament. Alone. For me, the choice between *Sniff-Drip-Wheeze* and *Buzz-Crack-Crash* is obvious. Trees provide wind protection and a habitat for wildlife. Trees add curb appeal and privacy. Trees lower utility bills by reducing heat reflecting from asphalt and concrete. Without these leafy umbrellas of shade, I cannot imagine surviving Vacaville's scorching summers.

So . . . the trees stay. Sentencing the four to death solves nothing if trillions of pollen grains from surrounding neighborhoods can drift for miles on warm, windy, dry days. Maybe next season my allergies won't be as severe. For now, that's the fertile hope with which I cope while I pray for a rain shower to cleanse the air.

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ASK HOTTIE!

Lauren Peters, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County

Dear Hottie,

I have been searching internet for bulbs or plants that grow well in artificial office light.

Deanna

Hi Deanna,

Thank you for your inquiry. I have been looking through my manuals and have come up with a few suggestions for your project.

Chinese evergreen (*Aglaonema* hybrid) enjoys low light and moist soil. Its sap contains an irritant, so it should be placed out of reach of children and pets. *Sansevieria*, or "Snake Plant" also is a low light plant known for its stiff leaves. *Aspidistra*, or "Cast-Iron Plant," can grow to 3 feet, and will tolerate some neglect. The Kentia palm (*Howea Forsteriana*) and the Parlor palm (*Chamaedora elegans*) do well in low light but require more water and fertilizer than *Aspidistra*. A philodendron is another choice. For ferns, choices include the Japanese holly fern (*Cyrtomium falcatum*) and the *Davallia fejeensis* or rabbit's foot fern.



Aglaonema hybrid



Davallia fejeensis



Chamaedora elegans

SPRING GARDENING GUIDE

“AS THE SMELL OF HOT LEATHER TO THE HUNTSMAN, AS THE REEK OF A HUSBAND’S OLD PIPES TO A WIDOW, SO IS THE INCENSE OF NEWLY-TURNED SOIL TO A GARDENER IN SPRING.” RICHARDSON WRIGHT

	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
PLANTING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Edibles: Loose-leaf lettuce, culinary herbs, chard, carrots, radishes, spinach, sorrel, beets broccoli. Warm-season annuals: Ageratum, alyssum, bedding dahlias, impatiens, lobelia, petunia, phlox, portulaca, salvia, sunflower, zinnia. Perennials: Ceanothus, lavender, coreopsis, penstamon, rudbeckia, dwarf plumbago, scabiosa, verbenas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Edibles: Beans, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, melons, okra, peppers, pumpkins, squash, tomatoes, watermelon. Butterfly, bee and hummingbird attractions: Agastache, alstroemeria, bee balm, coneflower, coral bells, fuchsia, honeysuckle, penstamon, salvia. Plant chrysanthemums for fall color. Perennial shrubs, trees or vines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Edibles: Melon, beans and corn from seed; tomato, squash and cucumber seedlings. Successive plantings of basil and cilantro. Summer annuals: Cosmos, marigolds, portulaca, sunflowers, zinnias. Summer-blooming perennials: Daylilies, gloriosa daisy, Russian sage, salvia, yarrow.
MAINTENANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Control weeds – pull or hoe them as soon as they appear. Fertilize and clean up around azaleas, camelias, and rhododendrons. Fertilize citrus. Tune up motor and sharpen blades on lawn mower. Mow often enough that you cut no more than 1/3 the length of the grass blade in any one session. Leave clippings on lawn. Spray olives, liquidambar and other messy trees with fruit control hormone or blast with hose to curb fruit production. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aerate and fertilize lawns. Fertilize citrus and established perennials and vegetables. Deadhead spent flowers to encourage new bloom; pinch back petunias and fuchsia. Allow spring bulb foliage to yellow and dry out before removing. Remove extra suckers if they appear around raspberry bushes. Watch for weeds among ground covers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roses: Cut back faded blooms to 1/4" above first five leaflet that faces outside bush. Fruit trees: Thin apples, pears, peaches and nectarines, leaving about 6" between fruit. Sprinklers: Summer heat increases water needs by 2" per week. Adjust sprinklers for adequate coverage and irrigation. Fertilize annual flowers, vegetables, lawns and roses. Dig and divide crowded bulbs; allow to dry before replanting. Deep water trees to encourage deep, strong root growth.
PREVENTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bait for snails and slugs, following all product instructions. Rid new growth of aphids with blast from hose every few days. Dump standing water to slow mosquito breeding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tune up drip irrigation systems. Build basins around the bases of shrubs and trees; mulch those and garden plants to conserve moisture and reduce weeds, leaving a mulch-free margin around plant crowns and stems. Stake tomatoes and perennials. Remain vigilant against snails, slugs and aphids. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mulch to keep roots cool and retain moisture. Check underside of tomato leaves for hornworms. Spray roses with Neem oil to help control aphids, black spot, whiteflies and powdery mildew. Inspect garden for earwigs. Remain vigilant against snails and slugs.

(Continued from page 1-Straw Bale Gardening)

1. **Placing your bales.** Bales can be placed in a yard, or on a patio or paved area and arranged individually, lined up in rows, or grouped together to form a wide planting surface. Placing the bales with the twine horizontally, or on the top, yields the greatest planting area and a root depth suitable for most vegetable crops. If tall and deep-rooted plants that need staking such as tomatoes are anticipated, place the bales with the twine vertically, or on the sides, to give the greatest root and stake depth. Either way works, it's up to you and your space constraints to determine what works best for you.



Susan and Rich with the bales. (photo by Susan Minaya)

2. **Composting your bales.** The following chart details the steps activities necessary to compost your bales in preparation for planting:

Step	Activity	Days	Instructions
1	Thoroughly Soak Bales	1-3	Water the bales thoroughly each day to initiate self-composting and be sure to keep them uniformly moist.
2	Heavily Fertilize Bales	4-6	Once each day, sprinkle the top of each bale with 1/2 CUP of high nitrogen fertilizer such as ammonium sulfate (24-0-0) and water it into the bales. You can also use blood meal for the nitrogen if you prefer. The bales will heat up noticeably during the composting process.
3	Lightly Fertilize Bales	7-9	Once each day, sprinkle the top of each bale with only 1/4 CUP of the fertilizer and water into the bales.
4	Water Only	Day 10 & After	Water the bales to keep uniformly moist and check for cooling.

3. **Planting and Maintenance.** Once the bales have cooled down noticeably, roughen the surface with a trowel and place a 3" top dressing of compost or potting soil on top of each bale. Don't use heavy or weed-contaminated soil as a top dressing. Greens, herbs and peas can be either seeded directly or transplanted into the covering seedbed whereas plants such as squash, eggplant, and tomatoes should be transplanted deeper into the bale. For transplants, use a trowel or dibble to create a space within the bale and backfill with compost or potting soil.

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(Continued from page 6--Growing Good Roses-Selecting the Site and the Rose)



Bale with fertilizer on top. (photo by Susan Minaya)




Bale with soaker hose on top. (photo by Rich Zimmerman)

A dedicated soaker hose or drip line interleaved on the surface will facilitate irrigation and can be connected to a timer if desired. The bales should be kept uniformly moist throughout the growing season. Be sure that the center of the bales does not dry out during hot weather. After the initial composting, some supplemental fertilization promotes healthy plant development. Don't overload the bales with nitrogen or overwater them. Regular applications of a dilute fertilizer such as compost tea or fish emulsion will provide sufficient nutrients during the growing season.

When the bales are exhausted after a year or two, the twine can be removed and the remaining straw left to cover the ground as compost. Start over with fresh bales.

Aesthetics of Your Bales. To enhance the look of your straw bales, you can tuck flower seeds into the corner edges or sides of your bales to achieve a cascading floral display that hides the rugged look of the bales. Try sweet alyssum or nasturtiums, or something like marigolds around the base. Don't forget that many edible plants also produce flowers, colorful and cascading vegetables that can also enhance the overall look of the bales. To learn more about what plants you might want, check out the great FREE UC Davis Cooperative Extension Program's California Garden Website resource available to you at: <http://cagardenweb.ucdavis.edu/>.

Feed stores, which carry wheat straw for animal bedding year around for about \$7 each, are listed in the yellow pages and the internet. Fruit stands generally have wheat straw bales left over from Halloween pumpkin displays and will sell whatever they have.

In our next article, we will share the results of our own straw bale gardens, share our best practices and lessons learned, and talk about what to plant for your fall and winter crop. Happy gardening! 

'ERBS AND HERBS

Cheryl Potts, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County

Gardening and cooking seem to go hand-in-hand, especially if one has a vegetable garden. Cooking veggies from the garden right after they have been plucked from one's own soil can be the defining moment for the home gardener. However, a true gardener/cook, of course, has also planted those delightful, fragrant, and colorful additions called culinary herbs. Easy to grow, fun to smell, a delight to the eye, and a joy to the taste buds are all reasons to include herbs in your vegetable garden. Also, herbs attract many needed and appreciated beneficial insects, which are a positive for the garden as a whole.

If you have not yet attempted growing herbs, here are some guidelines to get you started. As with your vegetables, you need an area that gets full sun (six or more hours of direct sun per day) and your soil should easily drain. Great soil is not a requirement for herbs. Actually, many herbs prefer poorer soil and do not want to be fertilized. Herbs are a bit more aromatic if slightly "starved." In other words, do not overwater and do not fertilize. However, apply compost any time, and mulching is always a plus.

This spring, I am going to be planting all my herbs in one of my raised beds so I can finally have "My Herb Garden." However, please note that herbs can be scattered among ornamental plants, mingled with perennials, planted in hanging baskets, or used as a ground cover. Herbs growing in a pot right outside your kitchen door makes it so easy to harvest quickly when you are hungry.

What to plant? Best to start with some of the easiest to grow. That would include parsley, rosemary, sage, oregano, basil and mint. Dill and cilantro are wonderful herbs, but a bit more difficult, as they do not transplant well and do best planted in the fall. If you are a seasoned gardener, you may want to explore more "exotic" plants such as lemon grass, holy basil (tulsi), capers, epazote, shiso, or Goji berries.

Many herbs can be started in spring, via direct seed. Seeds can be found in catalogs, big box and hardware stores, nurseries, and even grocery stores. Inexpensive four-inch pots can often be found in these same places. Direct

sowing is recommended for basil, borage, cilantro, marjoram, and dill. Chives, sage, and thyme do best started indoors and moved outdoors when frost is passed and the soil is warm. Mint, rosemary, parsley, tarragon and oregano are best grown from already started plants. Note that mint should be planted in a pot or other container as it can be extremely invasive.


Do not buy tarragon seeds. The herb you use in cooking, French tarragon, does not grow from seed but is started from cuttings and is sold as a started plant. Do not buy Russian tarragon, as it is bland and tasteless. Smell the plant before you buy, and purchase the most aromatic.

Know that each of these herbs come in a great multitude of varieties, so doing a bit of research prior to shopping will enhance your garden as well as your main dish. Also be aware that there are many culinary herbs not mentioned here. Exploration may lead you to a new taste sensation as well as a unique, garden beauty.

Generally, harvest leaves just prior to flowering. The best time to harvest is morning so as to not lose essential oils. Use your herbs fresh in your cooking, but use more (usually double) than the recipe calls for if the recipe calls for dried herbs. As you will have a much greater crop than you can possibly use, you will want to dry the majority of your leaves. Clip leaves from plants like basil and sage. Cut down the whole stem of herbs like oregano. Place leaves in a paper bag, and shake a few times per day to prevent clumping and molding. Leaves will be dry in a few days and can be stored in plastic bags. Be sure and label. (Do not dry in the sun.)

Visit your garden daily and clip. Your plants will thrive.

Know that your herbs can develop many of the same problems that your other garden treasures experience—seedling wilt, chewed leaves, powdery mildew, pale leaves, and stunted growth, to name a few. Follow the IPM (Integrated Pest Management) strategy for the healthiest outcome.

Happy gardening and *bon appétit!* 

UPCOMING LOCAL PLANT SALES

California Native Plant Sale, May 5. The Willis Linn Jepson chapter of the California Native Plant Society, serving Solano County, will have a native plant sale on Saturday, May 5, at the Benicia Community Garden behind Heritage Church from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. There will be a selection of perennials, groundcovers, shrubs and trees to meet your gardening requirements, including garden favorites such as Sticky Monkey Flower, Penstemon, California lilac bush (Ceanothus), Coral Bells (Heuchera), and Sea Thrift (Armeria). Native plants are beautiful in the garden, and they are drought tolerant and attractive to wildlife like birds, butterflies, and bees. A kids activities table will be available. For more info call Sue at 707-747-5815 or visit the Jepson Chapter website for a plant list at www.cnpsjepson.org. The Benicia Community Garden is on the corner of Military and East 2nd Street, in downtown Benicia, behind the Heritage Church (1400 East 2nd St.). Free parking is available in the church parking lot off 2nd St. The Community Garden will have an ongoing workshop on irrigation that day that is open to all.

SCC Horticulture Club Spring Plant Sale, May 10-12. The Horticulture Club at Solano Community College will host its annual Spring Plant Sale from Thursday through Saturday, May 10, 11, and 12. The plant sale will feature many varieties of tomato plants, including heirloom and hybrids, vegetable starts, plants and trees for outdoor landscaping, herbs, succulents, seasonal flowering plants, house plants, floral arrangements, and more ... all in time for Mother's Day. The plant sale will be located in the Horticulture Building 1000 on the main campus in Fairfield, with convenient parking in Lot #6. The sale will be held Thursday, May 10 from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm, Friday, May 11, from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, and Saturday, May 12, from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. Snacks will be available during the day, and raffle drawings will occur throughout the sale. Proceeds from the sale provide scholarships, equipment, and reference material for SCC Horticulture students. Cash and checks accepted. For further information, contact Sandra Diehl, 707-486-0179, avantgarden@sbcglobal.net.

UC Davis Arboretum Plant Sales: Saturday, April 14

3Bs: Birds, Bees, and Beneficials

Public sale 9 am-1 pm

Focus on attracting and supporting pollinators in the home landscape.

Saturday, May 19

Some Like it Hot: Summer Bloomers and Sizzling Deals

Public sale 9 am-1 pm

End of season clearance sale with a focus on the stars of the summer garden.

http://arboretum.ucdavis.edu/plant_sales_and_nursery.aspx 



Master Gardeners in Your Community

Free Vacaville Library Series

Every Third Thursday of the Month

7:00-8:00 p.m.

Vacaville Public Library-Ulatis Center

1020 Ulatis Drive, Vacaville

Master Gardeners present a wide variety of topics from January through October.

April: Debunking Horticultural Myths, Michelle Davis, MG

May: Top 10 Bugs in Solano County, Riva Flexer, MG

June: TBA

Earth Day-Solano Community College

April 18

In the Quad, north of the Student Union

11am until 2pm.

Master Gardeners will be on hand to answer home gardening questions for the public. The Horticulture Club of SCC will join the Master Gardeners at their information table.



Farmers Markets We Work

Benicia: Thursday from 4-8 p.m.

Downtown Benicia

Vacaville: Saturdays from 8 a.m.-12 p.m.

Downtown between Main and Parker Streets

Vallejo: Saturdays from 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Georgia and Marin Streets

OSH-Fairfield: Every other Saturday starting on March 3 from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Under the Solano Sun blog

This weekly blog is written by the UC Master Gardeners of Solano County. They write about new plants, garden musings, and other horticultural happenings. Stop by and have a look some time.

<http://ucanr.org/blogs/USS/>

Dixon May Fair 2012

The U.C. Master Gardeners of Solano County will have a booth in the Floriculture Building at the Dixon May Fair. They will have manned hours where you can come with your home gardening questions. They will have a composting display (also worm composting) and presentation that they will do several times throughout the fair. The booth will also feature the interactive IPM Kiosk where you can use the touch screen to help diagnose your home gardening questions if the Master Gardeners are not available.

The days the booth is open will be the evening of May 10 through May 13.


(Continued from page 2-Our Plentiful Pretty Plums)

Ladle hot jam into hot, clean pint or half-pint jars. Seal and process for 5 to 10 minutes using the boiling water bath method.

Poached Spiced Plums in Brandy (yield about 32 ounces)

The following recipe is an excellent way to preserve the flavors of autumn and provide a store of instant desserts during winter. Serve the plums with whipped cream.

2 cups brandy
Rind of one lemon, peeled in long strips
1 3/4 cups granulated sugar
1 cinnamon stick
2 pounds plums

Place the first four ingredients in a large pan and heat gently, while stirring often, until the sugar dissolves. Add the plums and poach for 15 minutes until soft. Remove the fruit and pack in sterilized jars. Boil the syrup rapidly until reduced by a third, then strain over the plums to cover. Seal the jars tightly. Store for up to 6 months in a cool, dark place. 


(Continued from page 3-Top Tree Culprits in Solano County for...)

Resources:

Learn more about landscape trees at http://cesolano.ucdavis.edu/Master_Gardener/Landscape_Trees/

Review an online list of specific trees with significant allergens at www.pollenlibrary.com/LocalSignificantAllergens/in/SolanoCounty/CA

For more information about allergies, log on to <http://www.webmd.com/allergies>. To check the pollen count in your area, go to <http://www.weather.com/outlook/health/allergies> and enter your zip code in the search column.

For another list of predominant tree pollen and daily allergy count, enter your zip code at <http://pollen.com/allergy-weather-forecast.asp> 

Fall Public Plant Exchange

The U.C. Master Gardeners of Solano County invite you to their Annual Public Plant Exchange. The free event is scheduled for September 8, 2012 from 9:00 a.m. until noon. If you have them to share, please bring cuttings, potted plants, and seeds that are non-invasive, pre-cleaned and free of insects and disease. We also will have gardening magazines, tools, pots and other gardening tchotchkes. Be prepared to receive as well, regardless of whether you have plant material to offer. Please note we prefer pots not larger than 5 gallons.

The location of this event is the UC Cooperative Extension office at 501 Texas Street, 1st Floor conference room in Fairfield. The closest cross street is Washington Street. We have a small parking lot just in front of our little 2-story building.

Mark your calendars now!

If you have any questions about the event, please contact Jennifer Baumbach at 707-784-1321 or jmbaumbach@ucdavis.edu.



***Seeds For Thought* is produced by
the Solano County Master Gardeners**

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Have a comment or question about *Seeds For Thought*?
Contact us!

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Please put '*Seeds For Thought*' in the email Subject line.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'J Baumbach'.

Jennifer M. Baumbach

Master Gardener Program Coordinator



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