

The River Park Garden Club

June 2024 Newsletter

Next Meeting: French Gardens - Unique Experiences

France takes its gardens, large and small, very seriously. Among the mix are massive royal ones the size of a town; small mobile ones that fit between cars in parking lots and huge estates with kitchen gardens that could feed an army. are. A lot to see. Ooh La La.

Pat Smith, River Park Garden Club president, will share her experiences and her photos of French gardens she's visited, at our next general meeting. The meeting will also include the investiture of 2024-25 officers.

"I have seen such an incredible variety of gardens in France, from one of the smallest and most personal that is a National Historical Monument, to many of the more famous and unbelievably large garden expanses. All impressive in their own way," said Pat.

(A garden at Villandry Chateau, right)

"The vistas of some of these gardens are stupendous. They often include forests, hills landscaped to a fare=thee-well and yet others are as intimate as some of our own gardens," Pat said.

Her travels have taken her to nearly every region of France, so the variety she has observed is extensive.

"They had a lot of kings and queens who apparently loved gardens. There was no TV, so for entertainment, they'd stroll with their guests around the grounds. All I could think about was how dirty those long silk dresses would have been after one of those strolls!

"On a smaller scale, nearly every walking bridge over rivers in towns, have some kind of floral display and often in summer, municipal buildings will have masses of red geraniums draped over their facades. Most cities also have amazing botanical gardens with experimental beds and medicinal plants. There is no end to the French affection for plants of all sorts," Pat explained.

The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m., Thursday, June 20, at Shepard Garden and Arts Center, 3330 McKinley Blvd. Please bring your own dinner. Desserts and beverages will be provided. Guests welcome!



Anne's Yard – From Monster to Masterpiece

Last fall, I told you a cautionary tale of an out-of-control bird of paradise that had taken over



a garden bed, blocking light and access to our front porch (left). With some regret, we removed the beautiful monster...along with most

everything else. Succulents gone wild? Gone. Sticky drippy crepe myrtle? Axed! Higgledy-piggledy pottery? Smashed.

In their place, an attractive low-water garden (right) has risen like a Phoenix. Well, not exactly like that.



We hired an amazing designer, Roberta Neidigh of Sacramento, who recently completed the Dry Garden Design Certificate program at the Ruth Bancroft Garden in Walnut Creek. She knows her drought-tolerant plants and is a well-exhibited and published landscape photographer (far left).

We couldn't have done it without her knowledge and vision. She was here working the entire day of installation and beyond.

After much discussion, photos, and presentations, we agreed upon a layout and plant list. It was a process that lasted over a year, but which allowed the designer to evaluate the space in each season, different times of day, and from all points of view.

(See Masterpiece next page)

(Masterpiece)

For the installation, our designer collaborated with a professional landscaper -- Living Systems Landscaping -- who converted overhead irrigation to a modern drip system. Top soil was hauled in to create pleasing contours.

Next, the new plants were carefully set out around the centerpiece yucca (yucca rostrata 'Sapphire Skies') and cacti (stenocereus marginata 'Mexican Fence Post' and cleistocactus strausii 'Silver Torch' (right)).

Tones of soft sea-glass blue, green, and white are repeated with echeveria (echeveria elegans 'Mexican Snowball'), California fuchsia (epilobium canum 'Bert's Bluff'), and dudleya (dudleya brittonii 'Giant Chalk').

Sultry grasses (lomandra 'Platinum Beauty' and bouteloua gracilis 'Blonde Ambition') sway in gentle breezes. Agaves (agave 'Blue Flame' and mangave 'pineapple express') provide sculptural beauty. Other curated succulents contrast in burgundy, orange, and gold. A thick mulch of micro-bark finish and protect the plantings.

Our new dry garden is a stunning complement to our 1928 Spanish Revival home in Curtis Park and it makes me smile every time I see it. I don't miss the bird of paradise at all.

By Anne Mazur Fay



Our Club's 2024 Garden Tour, a Success



Nearly 200 people (some checking in at the ticket table, left) visited the remarkable and varied gardens on our "Six Special Garden Spaces" event April 20.

Without our club's many volunteers before, during and after the tour, it couldn't have happened. Many thanks to all of you!

Photographer-members Gayle Abbott and Erik Fay recorded the event through their lenses. A collection of what they saw continues on page **(see TOUR)**

(TOUR, page 4)



Sometimes it's just too hot to be in the garden!

Two new books might pique your interest and make being inside not so bad.

Olivia Laing, a prolific British writer on everything from being alone to ghosts who inhabit landscapes, has a new book -- **The Garden Against Time**.

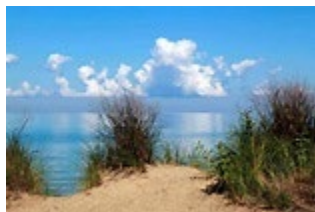
It grew out of Laing's restoration of a walled garden in Suffolk, England (right). The subtitle is "In Search of a Common Paradise," and signals her exploration in prose and poetry, of how gardens have been sought as refuge, playground, food source and therapy throughout history. With overtones of the politics of gardens, once only the preserve of wealthy landowners, her book chronicles not only her discoveries in the garden she restored, but many others through history, worldwide.



"New modes of living can and have been attempted amidst the flowerbeds, experiments that could prove vital in the coming era of climate change," she wrote. In a New York Times opinion piece in May, she asserted that gardens are no mere luxury (like so many also think of the arts) but instead living solutions for climate warming.

The University of Surrey, she wrote, did a study in February that analyzed "how green spaces in cities can have a cooling effect during heat waves." A giant green landscape project in Sheffield, England, transformed a high traffic, rundown neighborhood, actually lowered temperatures in the area by as much as nine degrees Fahrenheit! This isn't really news to gardeners, but it proves the point on a more global scale. We could use more cool spaces in Sacramento.

The Light Eaters, by Zoe Schlanger, introduces some fairly amazing scientific studies on the lives of plants. Forget AI, her reporting shows plants have "intelligence." They recognize family – their genetic kin --and strangers and act accordingly. Schlanger, who covers climate change for The Atlantic magazine has written a stunning book that introduces such research.



In one chapter, Schlanger reports on the work of evolutionary ecologist Susan Dudley of Canada's McMaster University. Dudley's study on plant behavior in the rather inhospitable sand dunes of Indiana Dunes National Park on lower Lake Michigan, (left). She revealed that the plants that survive there do so through intelligence.

"Plants take note of the quality of light falling on them," Dudley discovered. Sensing their plant neighbors are taller, they grow their stems even taller. "With fewer neighbors nearby, they grow their stems shorter. It's called phytochrome-mediated extension." They can also sense their family roots below ground. The hearty dune plant searocket Dudley researched, recognizes its cousins, siblings as it were, and "when they were growing beside their kin would politely confine their roots, leaving space for siblings to make a living beside them." With strangers nearby, they'd grow more aggressive roots to protect the underground space and sparse nutrients they need. Smart. Right?

NOTES AND NEWS:

The Yermol Fountain area at the entrance to River Park, is well kept by garden club members Lee Ruth and Paul Townsend, plus friends Howdy Hoover and Joe Vansickle. These intrepid fellows dig in new plant material, deadhead the roses, prune, add mulch and keep the irrigation system around the beds and fountain in good working order.



Recently, someone stole the irrigatrion regulator. Through much effort, a new one was purchased and installed by the handy helpers -- with new security measures in place. Fortunately, Lee, Paul, Howdy and Joe care and River Park thanks them.

Membership Renewal Time

Please be sure to put your attached renewal form and fee for 2024-25, in the attached envelope and mail it off as soon as possible, then you will continue to receive your club newsletters and reminders of all meetings and activities. THANKS!

Participating in the neighborhood's **Fourth of July** celebration is just one of the club's fun annual events. It's coming up soon, so plan to be there. We will have a booth in Glenn Hall Park after the parade and we'll have a surprise for the kids.



One of our club's longtime members, **Elfriede Von Geldern**, recently passed away. We will remember her fondly as an enthusiastic and loyal member of our club for 20-plus years. She always generously supported club activities and reveled in her fellow gardener friendships. We will miss her bright spirit.
