# Nipomo Native Garden Newsletter

Fall 2014 nipomonativegarden.org

## Save the Date: October 5 is our annual plant sale.

As you can see from the announcement in this newsletter, our annual plant sale is coming up soon. It will be held on Sunday, Oct 5 from 9am to 1pm in the parking lot of the Nipomo Native Garden. We will have a wide selection of plants suitable for planting in our Mediterranean climate.

In addition to plants, we will be selling our tee shirts and caps. We have restocked the tee shirts and there are some new colors to choose from. In addition, we have added a selection of long-sleeved shirts to the mix. So come check them out. Good for gifts.

The California Native Plant Society will be at the event, selling a wide selection of books to help you identify and understand the uses of native plants in your landscape.

I know all of us are concerned about the impact of the drought on our lifestyle and our gardens. Everyone wants a yard where they can enjoy the peace and beauty of nature. Adding more native plants to your landscape is one way to insure that you can have such a yard without increasing your water bill.

I hope we will see you on Sunday, Oct 5. For information or questions, call me at 929-3589.

**Cindy Jelinek**

NIPOMO NATIVE GARDEN
2014 ANNUAL OCTOBER PLANT SALE
**Sunday - October 5th - 9 till 1**
Nipomo Native Garden Parking lot on Osage

For more information 929-3589

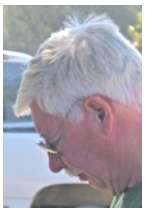
Wide Variety of Landscaping Plants
Many Drought Tolerant Grasses, Shrubs, Trees
NNG Tee Shirts & Caps
New Product: Long Sleeve Shirts
Information — Advice
— Great Plants Great Prices —
Support our all volunteer local Botanical Garden

Directions: Tefft to Pomeroy, left on Camino Caballo. Right on Osage.

**Workdays at the Garden**: Oct 5 (Plant Sale), Nov 1, Dec 6

# Water Conservation and NNG

Gene Schroeder



The topic dominating most conversations these days begins with water and rapidly moves to subtopics such as what to do about lawn, garden, landscape, fruit trees etc. Cost is seldom the first item of discussion, just availability and its effect on our lives and surroundings. Cost is simply a budget item that we all allocate according to our own lifestyle preferences.

Media provides constant reminders of our peril but little in the way of encouraging advice. They too are in fear of insulting the lifestyle and choices of either subscribers or advertisers. Fortunately for all of us, this is slowly changing as people look about for resources and examples that can be adopted or adapted to help their personal needs, budget, and even conscience. Brown lawns are becoming a statement but there is underlying hope that all will be well with the next rainy season.

Nipomo Native Garden started as the dream of a group of citizens to create a preserve for the native flora and fauna of the Nipomo mesa dune complex. Over the years, it has evolved to become part of the SLO County Parks master plan. The mission, though basically unchanged, has also evolved to the current complex which includes areas mirroring the natural ecological divisions found in the dunes-mesa complex. Follow the trails through oak woodlands, coastal sage, dune scrub, manzanita, grasslands and even riparian wetlands.

OK. So how does this help my water problem? Stay with me, it will make sense shortly!

The basic goal of NNG is that of a natural preserve. One that represents what life can look like with little or no interference to the endemic flora or natural climate cycles. To accomplish this, we have adopted practices that take advantage of what nature provides, only giving a helping hand where needed to improve initial survival of plantings and speed their acclimation into the garden.

These practices can be very helpful to anyone trying to deal with current water shortages.

To begin, there are

"**Things we have always done**".

- Proper plant selection and location is key. For us, the selections are limited to native plants endemic to our target area. Location is determined based on the eco areas of the garden. We don't plant water thirsty trees outside the riparian area nor sun loving grassland plants under oak trees. Natural grouping fits our mission and greatly aids survival.
- We do almost all our plantings in Nov or Dec to take advantage of seasonal rain. This is the time to plant most natives or xeriphytic plants. As new plantings are added, supplemental irrigation generally in the form of drip has been employed to aid initial survival. This watering is limited to 6 months or so and the frequency to once every 14 days. Once the plants are established they are on their own. There are some failures but that is just part of the process.
- We make every effort to retain all water on the property. It is configured as a giant bowl and serves as a flood control outlet for the Pomeroy, Camino Caballo triangle. The lower portion drains into an especially created riparian area. We use the roadways to collect water, not channel it away.
- We retain all green waste from pruning, plant/weed removal, etc on the property. Much of the pruning is "chop and drop" where the removed parts go directly to ground cover. Larger pieces are collected and chipped into mulch used throughout the garden. This practice helps moisture retention and eliminates green waste disposal expenses.
- Maintenance is limited to periodic pruning and cleaning, pathway maintenance, inspection and repair of drip water systems and removal of non-native plants that constantly creep in from the surrounding lands and roads. Remember, removing what you don't want to grow is also a water saving measure!

Then comes

**"Things we are doing now"**

A look at data from the CIMIS weather station #202 located just west of the garden on Monarch Dunes gives us, from its inception in 2006 to Aug 31, 2014, a yearly average rainfall of 12.05 inches with a high of 27.71 in 2010 and a low of 4.98 in 2013. There have been only two years over 15 inches, 2006 at 18.27 and 2010. In line with this trend, we changed practice and plans.

- After completing our kiosk projects and their more intense, landscape plantings, we have greatly reduced new plantings. Nature reduces the biomass in times of drought and so have we. Selective pruning and removals have also reduced water use leaving more for what remains.
- We have worked more on infrastructure adding a secure storage shed which reduces the need for volunteers to haul everything we need for every occasion. We have also added a shade structure over our amphitheater which will make mid-day events more comfortable as we move our mission more toward education and outreach.
- To aid in outreach, the kiosk information boards have been updated and will continue so.
- All water systems have been reviewed and many removed or reconfigured to reduce use and maintenance
- A water use review has prompted us to have our water meter replaced with a smaller size for reduced base rate and in line with our expected future usage.

And lastly

**"Things we are planning for the future"**

- Rather than just move into the shade and hide, we are planning to more actively take our message to a public that now needs it.
- Public outreach plans include a future "Children's Garden", More public events such as our open house and plant sale are also in the plans.
- To accomplish these plans, we need to increase our small group of active volunteers adding people that may not want to "play in the dirt" but have planning, speaking or teaching skills that can help spread the message. We have lots of unfilled and undefined jobs just waiting for people to share our interests and passion.

# California Columbine

Larry Vierheilig

This Columbine is a perennial that enjoys morning and mid-afternoon sun and moist soil. It is in bloom from late May to mid-August and Hummingbirds relish the nectar. The flower spikes can be up to 3 feet tall. The flowers are edible and sweet but the rest of the plant is somewhat poisonous although it was used for medicinal purposes by some Native American tribes.

Planting Preparation:

Choose a site that receives morning sun until about 11am and shade until about 3pm and experiences a daily gentle breeze. The site needs to be moist at all times. I find that watering every 3 days maintains a satisfactory moisture level. For each plant, work about 4 inches of compost into a 1 square foot area about 12 inches deep. Use a garden fork if you have one. Dig the planting hole twice as wide as the pot and half again as deep. Add compost to the bottom of the hole and firm the compost. Place the plant and pot in the hole and check soil level. The surface soil must be at the same level as the soil in the pot. A little higher (1/4") is OK but not lower. Extract the plant from the pot and place in center of hole. Using a 50/50 mix of compost and clean native soil, back-fill the hole and gently firm the soil. Water the plant well once every other day for a week or allow your irrigation system to do the watering for you.

This will be the first year that Nipomo Native Garden will be offering California Columbine (Aquilegia formosa) at our plant sale although the quantity will be limited.

California Columbine produces an abundance of seed which is quite viable. Keep this in mind; your single plant will become many over time. Many birds such as Finches also enjoy the seed. If you want to transplant some of the seedlings, wait until they have at least 6 to 8 leaves. In digging them out, you need to get the majority of the root system including the entire tap root.

I have a higher success rate starting them from seed in pots and doing the above planting. If starting from seed, the seed should be placed between 2 slightly moist paper towels, placed in a sealed container and stored in the refrigerator for 2 months (January & February). Plant the seed shallowly in the pots using potting soil with lots of organic matter, keep moist and shaded but bright and no direct sun.

Diseases and Pests:

Columbine is prone to a fungal disease called Powdery Mildew. The spores of this disease spread through splashing water and can travel on wind currents. This disease develops when daytimes are warm and nights are cool. It is a difficult disease to control but you can help by cutting back the affected parts down to ground level if necessary.

One of the most common pests on Columbine is the Leaf Miner. These are fly larva that feed inside the leaf. Their damage shows up as light-colored winding trails on the leaf surface. Cut off and dispose of all infected foliage after the plant has bloomed. The new leaves that emerge will be leaf miner free.

# Travels with Charlie

## Charlie Gulyash

Cindy and I just got back from another Heirloom Exposition in Santa Rosa. It's put on and attended by growers of food in all its forms. No chemical or pesticide companies were there. There was the inevitable preaching to the choir, but this is also where you get to find out all the latest information about sustainable agriculture. It could easily have been the Heirloom Cucurbit Exposition because squash was everywhere. There was a section of school gardens showing the projects that students have put together. Education is a big part of this shin-dig, farmers showing off their successes and sharing how they do it. In the background of all this excitement there is the reality of how our planet is doing in the face of desertification, population expansion, decreasing fresh water, loss of genetic diversity, pollinators... don't get me started. Given the grim outlook, attendees find hope that food can be grown with less water, and by letting nature do what it does best. I like that message, and am once again excited to try new things.

We went to a handful of talks, and one given by author Robert Kourik inspired me to rethink my drip irrigation. We are often told that most plants prefer to be watered deeply. Commercial growers may go weeks between watering. It seems that if you can coax roots downward with deep watering, they would be better off. Well Robert had a whole bunch of slides that showed the actual roots of all kinds of plants including trees, shrubs, and vegetables. After looking at dozens of these it was clear that most plants install 50 - 70% of their roots in the upper 2 feet of soil and most of those are half that deep. Many trees may have a "tap" root, but the main feeding happens up near the surface. The conclusion that Robert made was that if you are paying attention to water use, you are probably wasting anything that goes deeper than 2 feet. So should I water more often but not as long? Every time we run an irrigation, we lose some water by evaporation even if everything is mulched, so mathematically more frequent watering is wasteful. But how about this: If you keep the upper soil sufficiently moist (not wet) where all the feeder roots are, you promote a soil biology that might not survive wet and dry cycles, even under mulch. The increased bacteria, and fungi etc will build up humus and that stuff, which stores water, so roots can use it more effectively. Maybe not wasteful after all.

Another point that Robert K. made was how difficult it is to drip irrigate tree roots properly. Emitters don't make a wide circle of water, and most tree root systems go laterally way beyond the "drip line". So after the first year you have to move the water outward continually. Most of the roots under a tree are old with bark and they don't make root hairs. Move the water out gradually though, maybe after it rains.

The drive to northern California from here features a lot of native "golden" state habitat. Once past Santa Rosa we drove on parts of the old 2 lane 101 that still goes through the middle of little towns you don't even see from the freeway, like Geyserville. and along the Russian River I swam in as a teen. Big old houses set into the same chaparral we have here. We stayed east of Cloverdale and wandering down a trail we came upon deer, wild turkeys and quail. They are some of the species that manage without our help, although like heirlooms they don't mind if we do.

---

- President — Cindy Jelinek
- Vice President — Bonnie Eisner
- Secretary — Peggy Smits
- Treasurer — Larry Vierheilig
- Internet Guru — Greg Doudna
- Newsletter — Charlie Gulyash

Nipomo Native Garden is a community-based, non-profit organization that has undertaken the restoration to native habitat a twelve acre portion of Nipomo Regional Park. Our mission is: The Nipomo Native Garden will provide opportunities for education, conservation, restoration, research and recreation using plants of the Nipomo Mesa Guadalupe Dunes complex. The plants will be organized in an associative framework to illustrate plant community dynamics demonstrating the unique character and rich biological heritage of the Nipomo Mesa.