North Lake Tahoe DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

The North Lake Tahoe Demonstration Garden is an educational community garden which promotes lake-friendly landscaping to help preserve our unique and fragile alpine environment

LATE AUTUMN TIPS
by Jan Steinmann

Still Time to Plant: Trees, shrubs and perennials can be planted at Tahoe until the ground freezes. But make sure to water at planting and any time during winter warm spells when freeze/thaw conditions can destroy roots. Dormancy means that plants can concentrate on their root growth and not have to worry about leaves, seeds and flowers. (Admit it, we'd all like to be allowed a dormant period.)

Still time to plant and divide bulbs and corms: Daffodils and narcissus are toxic to squirrels. Irises and other corms also seem to be inedible. Plant tulips and crocus if you are prepared to see them neatly dug up or, if you're fortunate, eaten after you've had a glimpse of flowers. If it doesn't happen this year, the word will eventually spread in the furry-tailed community that 5-star dining is available at your house.

To Cut Back or Not: It doesn't hurt to cut back messy-looking perennials (iris leaves look especially sad), but experts say it's best to leave stems and leaves for extra protection through the winter. I've never understood the writers who claim that dormant black-eyed susans and coneflowers add "winter interest" to

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From the President's Plot
by Mimi Komito

Thud, thud… what's that noise? It's the sound of large green pine cones hitting the ground. It's also a sign of the arrival of fall. The tree squirrels are busy harvesting pine cones and pine nuts, stashing both cones and nuts for the coming winter. The Stellar's Jay is hard at work hiding seeds in the bark crevices of pine trees. It is a busy time indeed.

So where did the summer go? Every year it seems we jump from late June to early October in just a couple of weeks. This summer was extremely busy at the Demonstration Garden. We conducted our ever popular Green Thumb Thursday classes, which were well attended as usual. In addition we launched our new and improved web site (www.demogarden.org). We had many visitors and tours in the garden, a Scavenger hunt for a group of young budding gardeners. We also finished laying a flagstone path from the Gazebo down through the garden, we will plant thyme and mosses in the spring to hold the stones better. Our grass plots are looking very nice indeed (thanks to John Coburn for cutting the grass and KC Evans for letting us use her weed eater) and they attracted a lot of interest, especially from home owners wanting an alternative to a "putting green".

I would venture, however, that the new Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden is the most stunning accomplishment of this summer (see related article by Jan Steinmann in this newsletter). We started planning it last summer and continued with general layout and plant selection during the winter months. As soon as the snow melted and we could start digging (May 1st in Tahoe), we tilled the area we had chosen (thanks go to Dan Yori of High Sierra Gardens who supplied labor and rototiller) and worked in a large amount of compost. Nothing but the best for our garden! Then came the installation of irrigation and other hardscape (a path, garden art and some "seats"). A beautiful burl bench (donated to the garden a couple of years ago) became the anchor on the right side of the demonstration. After that came the fun

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(Late Autumn Tips cont.)

the garden, but it's probably worth leaving them to re-seed, unless you are collecting the seeds and spreading them yourself.

Don't prune spring-flowering shrubs: You will cut off all of your lilac, flowering plum and cherry and crabapple blossoms if you do. Wait until after spring flowering if you need to prune.

Stake and tie trees susceptible to snow damage: Trees in heavy snow dump areas (where they probably shouldn't have been planted) and special trees such as Japanese Maples will need to be tied between two stakes or otherwise protected from damage. Established natives such as aspen and mountain ash can fend for themselves, although they may lose a few branches. Note: If you try to "rescue" tree branches from piles or Sierra Cement snow, you will cause more damage than would naturally occur.

Winterize container plants: Perennial containers can be left outdoors with pine needle mulch. Important to water during freeze/thaw conditions. Some so-called annuals such as snapdragons, violas, and pansies may surprise you by blooming again next spring. Supermarket chrysanthemums are worth planting--they will also re-appear in late August but should be cut back so they don't become leggy. Geraniums can be brought inside to a sunny window and will flower on and off all year.

Mulch, mulch and more much: A layer of pine needles or a protective blanket of fir or pine branches will help protect your garden beds from drying out and freezing over winter.

(Presidents Plot cont.)

part. With the help of Lainie Vreeland we decided on the placement of the plants (which for the most part were donated by garden members and by Dan Yori of High Sierra Gardens) and then we dug in. We managed to get the whole demonstration planted in a week. In addition to planting mature plants we also spread seeds of a Sierra Wildflower mixture behind the burl bench (can't wait for those to bloom in the spring). We had a lot of visitors to the garden all summer, both the winged and two legged kind. I dare say the Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden is a success.

My most heartfelt thanks go to all the volunteers who helped in the garden this summer. The most fun work was probably planning and planting the Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden, but there are so many other things to do in the garden. All the weekly regular maintenance (weeding, raking, dead heading among other things) was carried out by our wonderful volunteers always rallied by Margaret Solomon who tirelessly summons the troops every week. To all of you - Thank You, without you there wouldn't be a garden! I hope to see you all next summer, bring a friend.

See you down the garden path…

THANK YOU TO OUR FRIENDS!

Dan Yori, owner of High Sierra Gardens, has been a friend of the Garden from the beginning. His insight and guidance was instrumental in creating the garden and he has continued to support and contribute to the garden in the years since.

This year with Dan's help we created our lovely Butterfly Garden. We are grateful for his help throughout the years and look forward to working with him for years to come. Thank you Dan.

Sara and **Leonard La France** have been Friends of the Garden for many years. This year we received a request from Sara to add more plant identification signs to our garden. Her request came with a very generous donation.

Thanks to Sara and Leonard's ongoing support we were able to purchase 100 plant identification signs for the garden. It is our intention to update the signs as the garden grows and evolves in the future. Thank you Sara and Leonard. Members like you help make our garden the special place that it is.

FLYING FLOWERS· BUTTERFLY AND HUMMINGBIRD GARDEN

by Jan Steinmann

A Monet palette of pink, gold and lavender appeared in the Demonstration Garden last summer, as Demo Board members and volunteers enthusiastically installed our newest demonstration, the Butterfly and Hummingbird Flower Garden. Originally planned as a bird/butterfly garden, we realized that accommodating both of these groups would require a huge range of food and habitat; besides, birds sometimes, well...EAT...butterflies. (Not as often as you might think, however, since many Lepidoptera species eat certain plants that enable them to exude a distasteful substance in both caterpillar and adult forms---this is one of the many fascinating facts just a brief look into their lives reveals!)

So we limited the demonstration area to a butterfly/moth habitat. However, noticing that hummingbirds are attracted to most of the same plant species as are Lepidoptera, we fortunately decided to include these pretty, energetic little birds. Research of butterfly-friendly plant species was great fun and we were helped by knowledgeable Butterfly Garden teacher, Lainie Vreeland.

Western Tiger Swallowtail

Fortunately for flower lovers, our "flying flower" insects are experienced connoisseurs of fragrance, color hues, blossom forms, and nectar. They use all senses except hearing (and we may find out that sound plays a part in flower choice, who knows?)

Groups of color attract the sharp vision of winged creatures, so we planted flowers in groups of three. Red and shades of pink are especially visible to entice both butterflies and hummers, so our first choices were tall, scarlet Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*, "Gardenview Scarlet"), a clear pink, multi-flowered dianthus (dianthus "First Love"), and a fuchsia-colored coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*). Size and shape of the blossoms determines the species of animals attracted, since the butterflies' nectar-sipping proboscises are of different lengths.

In addition to filling the need for constant nectar, we also planted shrubs to provide habitat for egg-laying, chrysalis-forming, and hibernation for those species which propagate over our Lake Tahoe winter. Elderberry (Sambucus) shrubs provide winter shelter and baby caterpillar food in spring. We are excited to learn and to share information about these hardy species, as well as details of the many varieties of Lepidoptera, which migrate to the Lake from as far away as South America.

The insects' need for water was addressed by securing a large ceramic bowl into the garden, which featured perching rocks as well as a small, sandy Butterfly Beach to keep the thirsty visitors from drowning. For human critters, we added a curved pathway, two sitting logs, and some donated colorful globes for reflecting. Adjacent to this garden, we planted wildflower seeds, too late in the season for much bloom; but we look forward to a beautiful wildflower meadow next spring.

Cass planting butterfly garden

An extremely valuable source of information for learning about the possible species attracted and their needs is Dr. Arthur Shapiro, Professor of Ecology and Evolution at UC Davis. Dr. Shapiro is a butterfly expert who often field-studies Lepidoptera in the high Sierra. He informed us that seventy-five species of Lepidoptera migrate to or hibernate at our altitude, although possibly not all in the same location as the Demo Garden. We hope that Dr. Shapiro might be persuaded to teach a class for us next summer.

Now that the Butterfly/Hummingbird Garden is in place, we plan to study these pollinators' role in Tahoe's plant community. We eagerly welcome anyone interested in learning about the intricate lives of these creatures and sharing the information with the Garden in time for our first beautiful flutter-by visitors next spring.

Not only do the flying flowers bring grace and life to the garden, their critical role as plant pollinators holds together the delicate fabric of nature and we are happy to provide the plants that allow them to thrive.

DAFFODILS - Fall Planting, Spring Bloom

by Jan Steinmann

"I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven…"

I always think of this line from Walt Whitman when I'm planting bulbs in fall. One does have to rely on a "hopeful" disposition to spend time burying dead-looking daffodil (*Narcissus*—the latin name) bulbs on a chilly November day. Even though I am busy preparing the garden for a winter's rest, planting bulbs allows me to marvel at nature's renewal and anticipate next spring season's beauty.

But spring dreams require autumn preparation, in this case planting and dividing the bulbs. Luckily, they can be planted as long as you can dig into the ground, even under early December snows.

Here are some ideas for cultivating these most resilient and beautiful blooms:

1. In my experience, they don't have to be planted quite as deep as the packages show, especially if large rocks dictate your landscape design as they do for most of us. Good drainage is essential.

2. They look prettiest in natural plantings, clustered against a boulder or "naturalized" in groups throughout the yard or beds, rather than lined up like sticks of butter.

3. Use bone meal...or not. You can top dress next summer, but I'm not sure it makes a difference. Definitely plant in sun for abundant flowering. In fact, blossoms will "look for the sun", an idea that didn't occur to me when I planted our southwest facing lake side garden with bulbs. Still attractive, but the flowers turn their trumpets to the lake rather than to our windows.

4. All daffodils and narcissus are poisonous to squirrels, and the critters know it!! The furry rascals may dig up one or two and mull them over, but you can just replant them. Ground squirrels adore most other bulbs, however.

5. Don't worry about daffodil spears poking up during warm winter weeks--the bulbs seem to be very wise and just realize that spring has not yet sprung if it turns cold and snowy again. The flowers are also amazingly resilient even during fairly heavy spring snows--they just "pick themselves up and brush themselves off" (it doesn't hurt to help them a bit.)

6. Exquisite miniature daffodils seem to come up first and are delightful in containers or rock-garden microclimates, where you can see them close up.

7. Plant enough bulbs so that you can bring cut flowers indoors--the cut flowers are long lasting and really lift your spirits during May snowstorms.

8. Experiment with early and late-blooming species, so that you have a long season of spring flowers, with waves of blooms from March through June.

Following are some of my favorites, based on beauty and hardiness at Tahoe:

Thalia--small but not miniature, many pure white and fragrant orchid-shaped blossoms. It is impossibly lovely and blooms for a long time, fairly early.

Mt. Hood--a perfect white, tall trumpet daffodil which blooms early and comes back faithfully each year.

King Alfred (and his hybrids, such as **Dutch Master**)--the big and bright golden trumpet daffodil of Wordsworth's poems.

Icicle--refined with small, lacy, pale yellow cups and sparkling white petals. Mid-season.

Tahiti—light gold, almost translucent double petals, orange/flame centers, and heavenly fragrance.

Tiny rock garden narcissus—these are usually the first to bloom but do well because of reflected warmth on the rocks. Tete a' tete (butter yellow), Minnow (white with yellow cups) and Jettfire (orange trumpet, gold petals) all produce many blossoms.

You should deadhead after bloom so they don't spend their spring energy filling their tiny ovaries with seed. But do keep the leaves around as long as you can stand it, as they make nutrients for the roots. If you plan ahead, they will be hidden by other, less stalwart garden flowers which are finally getting up their courage to face the mountain springtime.

Gardening Faux Pas to Gardening Success Stories

by Mimi Komito

This is the first in a new series, please submit your stories to us via email to mimi@bagel.com.

So here it is November, the ground is frozen solid and dusted by the first snow. It sounds nice, actually, if it weren't for the fact that I still have those large grab bags of "spring" bulbs in the garage. Does it sound familiar? I think most gardeners have faced this problem at one time or another (in my case more than once). Last year I found myself in this situation (again). Since I have already been out in the garden planting bulbs in November with a pick ax more than once, this time I wanted to salvage the bulbs some other way. As I was reading an article about forcing spring bulbs for Christmas, I had an idea. It was too late for forcing for Christmas, but not too late to plant a potted bulb garden for spring bloom. I bought some nice lightweight large pots (most garden centers have the light weight fake pottery pots), a couple of bags of potting soil and started planting. Since I had a large variety of bulbs, I decided to plant each pot as a small "garden". I planted tall bulbs (tulips and daffodils) in the middle and surrounded them with shorter bulbs (grape hyacinths, snow drops, snow glories, crocuses). I topped each pot with some coarse compost for mulch, watered and placed the pots on my deck. At this point you can cover the pots with a wire netting, to protect them from burrowing critters, if you like.

I made a list of what bulbs I had planted in each pot along with growing instructions and taped to the side of the pot. The week before Christmas I gave a pot each to my gardening friends. It was probably one of the most appreciated gifts I had given them. Not only did I salvage the bulbs, I spread some Christmas Cheer to my friends as well. Now that's how a gardener makes lemonade when life gives her lemons!

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE - A Naturalist's View

by Lesley Higgins

There are challenges to living and gardening in the mountain environment of Lake Tahoe—extreme temperatures, short growing seasons, heavy snow loads, and an abundance of local wildlife. It can be frustrating trying to maintain a planted landscape when the native animals seem intent on eating or digging it up. We move up here because we love the mountain environment, but how do we combine our desire for a pretty garden with the needs of the local ecosystem?

The Tahoe Basin is our natural garden: from the smallest soil microbes to the large mammals, Tahoe has an intricate web of life. Native plants are the backbone of the system, providing food, shelter, and nesting sites to a variety of animals. These animals do not need to be fed, as there are plenty of native berries, seeds and insects for them to eat on their own, especially if you plant and maintain the native plants on your property.

Artificially enhancing the habitat for the local wildlife can change the natural balance. For example, bird feeders are great for attracting a variety of birds to your yard, but they also attract a variety of animals you may not want, such as bears, rodents, and even ants. Consider installing a birdbath instead—the birds and squirrels will like it, but you won't be artificially contributing to the local food web (and attracting more animals than the property can naturally support). Also, planting non-native fruit trees or bushes may not be a good idea, as they can attract bears, with destructive results.

Golden-mantled ground squirrel

Many people with squirrel, chipmunk or mouse problems may not realize that they have an over-abundance of rodents because they have provided the perfect shelter for them—their own house. Evicting them will return them to a natural population level. Keeping animals out of houses is a maintenance issue that requires a comprehensive yearly check of all vents and garage doors, other potential openings, and making sure that there is a minimum of debris (such as wood piles) around the house.

Here at Lake Tahoe, we've moved into an established ecosystem. Trying to re-create a suburban yard is a difficult endeavor that requires lots of maintenance, and is an uphill battle. Don't fight your yard—the yard will win in the end. Instead, think of your gardening efforts as enhancing the local ecosystem, not replacing it. By doing so, you will have a much more enjoyable experience with your plants and native animals.

GARDENING AT 7000 FEET

by Ronda Tycer, PhD

SQUIRRELING AWAY

I knew we had a problem when my husband Richard named the squirrel Chick—short for Chickaree. The squirrel—a small frenetic fellow with a sparse tail, brown fur, beige eye rings, and amazing vocals—had become the most commanding critter in our garden. Starting in mid-September we noticed him bounding across the yard, running up tree trunks, and gnawing off green pinecones like there was no tomorrow. After half a dozen cones hit the ground, he'd head down the trunk with another in his mouth.

One day we watched in amusement as he carried a green pinecone as big as his body to a stack of new logs wedged against a tree. There he sat and ate with gusto, systematically rotating the cone while his teeth threw chips like a buzz saw. After finishing about half of each cone, he was up the tree harvesting another one. We didn't know how many he could consume, but we thought he was cutting off more than he could chew. This we verified the next morning when we discovered dirt scattered around each of the geranium pots on the downstairs patio. Reaching through the dirt into one of the still open tunnels, Richard pulled out a fresh green cone. How clever of Chick to bury cones in the soft potting soil instead of the hard rocky yard.

The next morning, before we could plan a defense, Chick found the potted plants on the top two decks. Richard quickly put a collar of green plastic-covered chicken wire around his herb pot on the second deck. But that afternoon, as I watched from my office window, Chick leaped from the railing into the center of the green wire like a pro basketball player making a jump shot. The dirt began to fly before I could rush out to stop him. Like Super Squirrel, he leapt almost straight up out of the pot to the rail, and flew a full 12 feet from the rail to a nearby Jeffrey pine.

After Chick tunneled into two more geraniums, we conceded him his own pot of dirt. We moved an empty pot close to the geraniums and added fresh potting soil. He dug down a bit, but, curiously, didn't bury a cone until I put a potted miniature Christmas fir on top.

We next covered the geranium pots with grey river rocks in the hope the extra weight would dissuade him— which it did—sort of. But in one pot he found a space between the stem and the rocks and tunneled in. We added two more layers, before he gave up.

As we thwarted his stashing places in the flowerpots, Chick found other spots to stow cones. One of the most artistic was a nook inside the bark of an old stump under the front walkway.

We began to admire Chick not only for his indefatigable harvesting, but because he seemed to be feeding the masses—willingly and unwillingly. His pinecone refuse attracted Stellar's Jays and chipmunks. And on more than one occasion, we saw California ground squirrels feasting on dropped cones. Once, Richard saw a ground squirrel making off with a cone with Chick hard on his heels, barking and causing the ground squirrel to drop the cone, which Chick then retrieved. Impressive given that Chick was one-third the size of the thief.

One evening our dinner guest arrived at the door, looking around at the multiple cones lying on the lawn, and said he worried about walking under the pine trees to the door. Just then a large cone hit the driveway behind him with a sobering thud. We confessed we'd never seen a more dangerous squirrel, and parked our cars in the garage.

We know we can persuade Chick to carry out his winter storage program elsewhere by putting sheet metal around the trunks of the pines; but we don't, because—to be truthful—we want him to stick around. We're curious to see if, after a few snowfalls, he recalls where he buried any of his treasures. And, just in case he doesn't, we've buried a few more green pinecones under the miniature fir.