



THE MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN SOCIETY

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BRANCH

The Mediterranean Garden Society is a non-profit, international organization for anyone interested in gardens, gardening, & plants native or suited to the world's 5 Mediterranean climates (Western and South Australia, California, Chile, the Mediterranean Basin, South Africa). This newsletter reports the activities of Branch members in Northern California.

issue 11
Spring 2002

The San Luis Obispo Joint Gathering of the Northern and Southern California Branches

The Northern and Southern California branches of the Mediterranean Garden Society joined forces in San Luis Obispo on March 23/24, 2002, midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The group convened about 9:30 Saturday morning at Leaning Pine Arboretum which is adjacent to the campus of the California State Polytechnic University at San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly).

The weather was ominous, but threatening rain did not materialize, and all were prepared for slightly chilly temperatures. Some 70 members from Southern Calif. and 15 from Northern Calif. (many Northern Californians were unable to attend because of a conflict with the San Francisco Flower and Garden Show that same weekend) gathered in the Mediterranean-themed entry garden recently redesigned by a student intern as his senior student's project. He joined the Arboretum's director, Tom Eltzroth and Dave Fross, MGS member and instructor and director of the California area garden for an introduction to the arboretum.

Then we split into two groups to tour the five acres of gardens, which are organized into Mediterranean region groupings. The gardens were gorgeous, very well maintained and many areas were in full bloom. The South African ice plants were neon, the restios were in full brown flower, and many ceanothus and lavenders were clouds of azure. Mounding and raised beds are used extensively to improve the drainage of the clay soil. Dave pointed out that some ceanothus and other California natives that receive runoff during the summer from a lawn just up the hill are doing very well, debunking the myth that natives should receive no summer water. (Your results may vary.)

After the tour, we retreated to a large, impeccably neat barn for lunch. Rain arrived while we were eating, but cleared as we finished.



Leaning Pine Arboretum

The next events were visits to two private gardens with the landscape designer who created them. The first was in Arroyo Grande on a five acre flat piece of land that abuts a mini canyon (30' deep) created by a creek. The property owner requested native shrubs and a native grass lawn over a septic leach field. Watering is unnecessary and mowing is infrequent. The lawn was beautiful.

Because he feared that trees would impede his view of the distant hills, the homeowner did not want trees planted on the site, one had the interesting impression of being in a forest of tall shrubs.

The second garden was in a gated community, also near Arroyo Grande. The designer has preserved the Oak Woodland habitat surrounding the house, but tucked other interesting rare and choice native plants into appropriate places where they

offer delightful surprises to the garden viewer. Close to the house are more exotic plants that enhance the Mediterranean theme.

The day concluded with a visit to Native Sons Nursery (owned by Dave Fross) for excellent wines and appetizers and an invitation to explore this extensive wholesale nursery and select whatever treasures we wanted to buy. By this time, the skies had cleared and we relished the lovely setting, Dave's intriguing personal garden, the warm air, and the generous hospitality provided by Dave and his staff.

Sunday, members had their choice of two events. A group of intrepid hikers joined Dave for a five-mile walk at Montana de Oro State Park to spot local wildflowers in their full glory. The less athletically inclined visited the San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden, a brand spanking new public garden that is dedicated to growing only plants from the five Mediterranean regions of the world. Although only two acres are currently planted, (and this garden is currently planned, planted and maintained exclusively by volunteers!), the garden will eventually cover 150 acres and will include a visitor center, exhibits, multimedia show, gift and plant shop, cafe, garden art and more. MGS members Ken and Gaby Levine showed us around, and introduced us to the instigator of the whole thing, Eva Vigil, who gave us an enthusiastic preview of what is to come.

The weekend was great. Most of us saw many new plants (and wrote them down to locate later), met many delightful people, and had a wonderful time. Fervent thanks to organizers Nancy Mead and David Fross! All who attended are looking forward to another Mediterranean Garden pilgrimage!

Nancy Swarengen

Spring Garden Tour

Saturday, **May 11** at the UC Davis Arboretum (and a private garden) with **Warren Roberts** see inside for details!

Annual General Meeting

Oct 1-3 in Pasadena, California, hosted by the So. Calif. Branch of the MGS see inside for more information!

Pelargonium betulinum var. *album*

Many years ago I found a small 3in. specimen in a nursery 'herbs' section with a label declaring *Pelargonium album*. Being a fan of pelargoniums, I was immediately intrigued, but this seemingly dubious epithet was unknown to me. The stiff, leathery, bright green leaves were quite unique and the single open flower, while classic pelargonium in shape (white with ruby veining on the large upper petals), was none-the-less charming and appealing. The nursery did not seem to know where they had purchased this single plant (it appears it may have come accidentally in some group of plants) nor could they provide any information. I grew this plant in a pot for many years while I tried to find out more.

I guessed from the character of the plant that it preferred a gritty soil with good drainage, and it also seemed to follow the winter wet/summer dry of our mediterranean climate quite happily, so I presumed it to be native to the winter rainfall region of South Africa. Eventually I ascertained that it was actually the white (var. *album*) form of *Pelargonium betulinum* (or perhaps a hybrid involving), an identification that remains consistent as I find out more information.

This plant remained in my collection of potted specimens where it performed admirably, in spite of the various forms of horticultural neglect I inflicted upon it. One day I decided I might plant it out, thinking it a perfect candidate for a portion of the garden that was particularly challenging – a raised section between two concrete stairways, a mere 2-3ft wide (or less), facing south-west, steeply-sloping, and difficult to irrigate. I planted it at the base of a *Yucca recurvifolia* with companions of *Manfreda maculata* and *Pelargonium xblandfordianum* (*P. graveolens* x *echinatum*), which was very nice. That was about 5-6 years ago and *P. betulinum* and the *Yucca* remain in their original spots, now surrounded by various lavenders (*Lavandula angustifolia*, *L. stoechas*) with which also combine well.

Pelargonium betulinum is somewhat typical of many species of its genus is that it produces leafy stems which bear flowers for a year or two and then gradually decline in vigor. I routinely cut these stems back to vigorous basal shoots. The plant seems to enjoy this type of care and remains healthy and robust in spite of its age (most references estimate a 3-5 year life-span), growing about 8-12in. high and as much as 16-24in wide.

The leaves are very stiff & leathery, and somewhat in the shape of a birch leaf (hence the epithet) but not at all, to my mind, suggestive of them. The stems are tough, requiring a good set of shears, tearing badly if pruned by breaking the stems by hand (a common method I employ for my other pelargoniums).

My plant grows in a heavy clay soil that has been moderately amended, but it sits atop a well-raised mound in a raised bed, against a stone wall. It receives all the sun there is from mid-morning until evening, and the soil dries out quite well between waterings. As stated previously, this area is difficult to irrigate – I use both a drip hose and occasional overhead hand watering. The soil often dries out excessively and I have to work to get it to accept water again. The lavenders are fairly newly planted and show some signs of stress during these dry-outs, but the established *Pelargonium betulinum* var. *album* continues happily regardless. Seán O'Hara



Spring Garden Tour



Saturday, May 11

at the

UC Davis Arboretum

and a private garden in Davis

led by Warren Roberts

Superintendent, UC Davis Arboretum / MGS Branch Advisory Board

\$15 for members/**\$25** for non-members

Reservations are required and space is limited.

For reservations or membership forms, contact:

Sue Ann Manners - 925/254-0226

63 Davis Road, Orinda, CA 94563.

10: 30 am - Meet at the headquarters of the UC Davis Arboretum and receive tour information and directions.

In the morning we will visit the Ruth Storer Garden, featuring a variety of drought-tolerant plants chosen for their colors and textures. We will also tour the Arboretum's Mediterranean plant collections and Shields Oak Grove, with 80 species of oaks from around the world.

Noon - Lunch on the Arboretum Terrace where you may purchase lunch or bring your own for a picnic on the lawn.

1:00 pm - In the afternoon Warren Roberts will take us to visit another garden in the Davis area.

The Davis Arboretum specializes in plants adapted to a Mediterranean climate, with hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters. Established in 1936, the Arboretum occupies about 100 acres along the banks of the old north channel of Putah Creek, in California's Central Valley. Unlike the Pacific Coast, which has a very mild climate where most plants flourish, California's Central Valley has a climate of extremes. Temperatures in Davis range from 14°F to 118°F, and average rainfall is only 19 inches per year. The Arboretum is the main source of horticultural information for inland California.

Directions: From Hwy 80 take the UC Davis Exit. Proceed north toward the main campus past the Visitor Information kiosk on Old Davis Road. Turn left, stop at the sign and proceed straight ahead across the bridge and bear left. Parking on right opposite the headquarters of the Arboretum (Temporary Building no. 32).

Hosts & Hostesses Wanted for the Fall

What exciting news that the MGS AGM will be held this year in California! The first time this meeting has ever left the Mediterranean Basin! But what is a visit to California without coming north to the Bay Area? To make attendance at the AGM more interesting and attractive to our foreign members, we'd like to be able to offer the possibility of staying with a local person or family during some part of their visit.

If you would be willing to provide "bed and breakfast" hospitality for one or two visitors from abroad for a few days in late September or after October 3, please contact:

Nancy Swarengen - (510) 547-2548

nswarengen@hotmail.com

MGS Annual General Meeting

October 1-3, in the Los Angeles area

Mediterranean Garden Society around the world are invited to the eighth Annual General Meeting, to be held in the Los Angeles area on October 1st, 2nd and 3rd, with optional garden tours on September 30th and October 4th.

The program organized around the AGM will include: a cocktail reception in the Chinese courtyard garden of the Pacific Asia Museum, visits with experts to Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, The Arboretum of Los Angeles County, La Casita del Arroyo, the Norton Simon Museum, the gardens at The Huntington Library, The Getty Center, and selected private gardens.

Cost: \$30.00 per person non-refundable registration fee. An estimated \$140.00 per person fee for the cocktail reception, garden visits and lunches, including all bus transportation, entry fees, and various refreshments. Hotel accommodation at the Doubletree Hotel in Pasadena, (at a special double occupancy rate of \$110.00 nightly, plus 12.23% tax) or other arrangements are possible.

Reservations should be made directly with the hotel, by June 15th, by calling +1 626.972.2727 and asking for the rate for The Mediterranean Garden Society or by sending a fax (+1 626.795.7669). The Southern California branch will seek hosts for anyone wanting overnight accommodation in private houses. Shuttle service from major airports is available.

Those wishing to attend the AGM should send their \$30 per person registration fee in United States dollars to Sharon Yonashiro at 1067 Linda Glen Drive, Pasadena CA 91105, U. S. A.

Those wishing a detailed schedule or other information should contact George Brumder by phone (+1 626.795. 0315), fax (+1 626.577.7097) or E-mail (brumder@earthlink.net). Information about the AGM also appears on the Society's Web site, while www.pasadenacal.com contains excellent information about Pasadena, its climate and its other sites and amenities.

The Southern California Branch looks forward to welcoming you at an exciting AGM in Southern California this fall!



These optional events are available (at extra cost):

Monday, September 30th, tour to Santa Barbara, to visit **Lotusland**, as well as several outstanding private gardens.

Friday, October 4th, hike in the **San Jacinto Mountains** among California's native flora or join the Gardening Under Mediterranean Skies Symposium's tour of selected private West Los Angeles gardens.

You may also wish to attend the **Gardening Under Mediterranean Skies** Symposium at the Strybing Arboretum in San Francisco on September 27th, 28th and 29th or at The Arboretum in Arcadia on October 4th, 5th and 6th – see the web site: www.PacificHorticulture.org.

Review of:

"Our Mediterranean Climate:

What Does It Mean and Why Should We Care?"

Seminar given by Seán O'Hara at the San Francisco Flower and Garden Show, March 24, 2002

Those of us who chose to stay in the Bay Area instead of trekking down to San Luis Obispo for the joint Northern and Southern California meeting last month had the opportunity to attend Seán O'Hara's talk at the San Francisco Flower and Garden Show. In the seminar, Sean introduced local gardeners to the challenges and advantages of gardening in a mediterranean climate, showed inspiring photos of mediterranean gardens and plants, and presented information about the Mediterranean Garden Society, particularly this chapter.

While I found myself nodding in agreement at nearly every sentence and slide, I found some of Seán's talk particularly noteworthy. I hadn't realized that the quality of light that brought Impressionists to the south of France appears here and in other mediterranean climates, too. I was interested to learn how the mediterranean regions differ from each other, and why--for instance, that the Mediterranean region is further from the equator than any other similar climate because the Mediterranean Sea is warmer than bodies of water adjacent to the other regions. I enjoyed seeing photos of chapparel, maquis, and matorral next to each other, emphasizing how similar our native ecosystems are. I appreciated Olivier Filippi's method of establishing plants by planting in the fall with no

irrigation, thus preventing overgrown plants and root problems. As a designer, I appreciated Seán's summary of mediterranean garden design elements, which include:

- ⇒ an outdoor living space to take advantage of the climate
- ⇒ sheltered, intimate gardens and courtyards
- ⇒ paving such as stones pounded into mud on Corfu
- ⇒ shade structures--pergolas, arbors, and gazebos--to escape the heat of the day
- ⇒ water, celebrated due to its preciousness, in the form of fountains, rills, and reflecting pools

A few other garden show seminars also touched on mediterranean climate topics. John E. Bryan talked about The Floral Kingdom of South Africa. Laurie Olin showed slides of La Foce in Tuscany. As part of the Pacific Horticulture Symposium on New & Cool Plants, Don Ellis--recently head of horticulture of Gamble Garden in Palo Alto, but not a member of MGS--described the mediterranean plants that have done best in the Gamble mediterranean garden. Don listed seventeen plants that he considers to be particularly successful in the garden, a planting in Palo Alto adobe soil that has had no amendments, receives no fertilization, and is watered minimally via drip irrigation. Among the plants he mentioned, Don highlighted the restio family, several euphorbias (currently in exuberant bloom at Gamble), and unfamiliar (to me) species of familiar genuses such as *Nepeta (N. tuberosa)* and *Tanacetum (T. niveum)*.

Cheryl Renshaw

Pelargonium betulinum (L.) L'Herit.

(painting from Sid T. Edwards, Curtis' Botanical Magazine, March 1791)

This member of the *Geraniaceae* (Cranesbill Family)

is known by these common names:

- **Birch-leaved pelargonium**
- **Camphor-scented pelargonium**
(from a crushed leaf)

in Afrikaans:

- **Kauferblaar** (referring to the camphor scent)
- **Maagpynbossie** (used medicinally for stomach pain)
- **Suurbos** (referring to the sour taste of the leaves)

A native to coastal winter rainfall regions of South Africa, from Yzerfontein on the west coast to Knysna on the east coast of the Western Cape, on sandy dunes and flats. Flower color is variable from purplish to pink to white, all with purplish to ruby streaks on the upper petals. This species was grown in Holland around 1738 and introduced to England in 1786. It has been grown as a bedding plant both there and in South Africa for many years. This species is exceptionally wind and drought tolerant, and hardy to 23°F (-5°C). Readily propagated from softwood tip cuttings which are allowed to air dry in a cool spot for a few hours. Planting should be done in a gritty, well-drained medium with a moderate addition of humus. Well rooted plants should be allowed to dry out well between waterings.



See an article about this plant inside this newsletter,
as well as information about the
Spring Garden Tour and Annual General Meeting!

Payment of dues for the Mediterranean Garden Society includes you in this Branch if your address is within our range or if you specify branch inclusion directly on the membership form. Dues are for a calendar year. Memberships are available at any of our events, or they may be sent in separately. For membership forms, contact Sue Ann Manners, (925) 254-0226, or visit the MGS web site: www.MediterraneanGardenSociety.org

This newsletter is produced periodically to announce the events and news of the Northern Calif. Branch of the MGS. Newsletter submissions should be made to the editor, Seán O'Hara, via e-mail: sean@support.net, or fax: (707) 667-1173, as far in advance as possible.

With all the Exciting
Things that are
Happening this Year,
Be Sure to Renew
for 2002!

MGS annual memberships are for the calendar year, so if you haven't already, it is time again to renew your membership (unless you are a Life Member). Annual membership are ~~\$30~~ (Life is ~~\$300~~). Send your personal check or credit card info to:

**The MGS Secretary
Sparoza, P.O.Box 14
GR-190 02 Peania,
GREECE**

(International letter postage is ~~80€~~)

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