

GARDENING WITH FRIENDS: THE PLANT SOCIETY

by Val Myrick

Don't let the word "society" put you off. It just refers to a bunch of plant lovers who enjoy getting together.

If your windows are stuffed with seedlings battling it out for sun and you bore your friends with talk about your favorite rose, penstemon, or native plant, you are a plant society candidate. In Tuolumne County, local chapters of the American Rose Society, the North American Rock Garden Society, and the California Native Plant Society all have monthly meetings.

ROSES: The Golden Sierra Rose Society, founded by Rosemary and Ron Sawyer, meets at 1:30 p.m. the first Sunday of the month at the Tuolumne County Senior Center next to the main library. As with all groups, the standard business meeting and tasty refreshments are followed by the program, which is the highlight. Topics range from plant care and armchair travels to rose show instructions and pointers.

Rose show competitions are a big part of this group. There are frequent "little rose shows" with members competing informally with each other. Once a year, the local chapter puts on a full-blown rose show with out-of-town judges and nice prizes. It is a festive occasion open to the public.

The rose group maintains two rose gardens in public places. One is in Columbia next to the Fallon House Hotel and the other by the Fire Museum across from the Red Church. Call Terry Mingo, 588-8626 for details.

ROCK GARDENS: The Sierra Rock Garden Society was formed 12 years ago after Barbara Henrietta's rock garden was featured on the Master Gardeners' Annual Garden Tour. Many loved her garden showcasing low and unusual plants amid protective rocks. Before long, Barbara and several other women assembled enough members to form an official chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society.

The local group meets at 1:00 p.m. the second Wednesday of the month at members' homes. Touring the owner's garden is a favorite part of the meeting.

Rock Garden members are interested in growing small, ground hugging plants, usually from high elevations or arid landscapes. Because these plants are not commonly available locally, there is emphasis on growing from seeds, divisions, and cuttings. Members take pleasure in sharing these plants and discussing their special growing conditions. It is no surprise that rock gardening attracts wildflower enthusiasts and rock hounds.

The members love garden touring and put on a free, annual, open-to-the-public garden tour and sale. This year's event is Saturday, April 10. Contact Val Myrick, 533-3193, for more information.

NATIVE PLANTS: The Sierra Foothills Chapter of the California Native Plant Society meets at 7:00 p.m. the first Thursday of the month at the Sonora Library. This group, started over 20 years ago by Ginny Hahn, Kathy Burnett, and Peggy Carkeet, encourages conservation of native plants and their use in our landscapes.

During spring and summer, there are field trips to see wildflowers from our low country to the high Sierras. All are open to the public and most do not involve extensive walking.

Each April and October, crowds line up to buy cartloads of native plants at the Society's plant sales. This year's spring sale is at 9:00 a.m. Saturday, April 17, in Jamestown's Rocca Park. Besides the many gorgeous plants, experienced gardeners and printed information are available for instructions to ensure growing success. For details, contact Bob Brown, 928-9281.

Within a few hours' drive, you can also find meetings of the Heritage Rose Society, Cactus and Succulent Society, Bonsai Society, Iris Society, Camellia Society, Daffodil Society, and more. Some groups, such as the American Penstemon Society may get together only once a year for a long weekend in an ever-changing location.

If you love plants, joining a plant group can only increase your satisfaction. Newsletters, seed exchanges, garden tours, conferences, and other events are all opportunities from which members can choose. After all, there is no known cure for the plant addict.

Val Myrick has been a Master Gardener for 27 years. She taught gardening classes at Columbia College and currently works part time at a local nursery.