

It's Garden Tour Time – Come On Over!

By Kathy Nunes

Are you looking for a little inspiration or ideas you can implement in your garden? Well, get ready for the 17th annual garden tour hosted by UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne County. On Sunday, June 24th, from 10:30am to 4:00pm, you can tour five very distinct gardens—up to 3,200-foot elevation—in any order you wish.

Last week's article described two of the gardens on the tour: the Tuolumne Community Garden and the master gardener demonstration garden. This week I would like to introduce you to the lovely garden owned by Steve and Ina Belochi. They were raised in Europe and Africa on a farm where they grew crops. Their garden's ambiance reflects their roots, their charming friendliness and contagious enthusiasm. The 2 ¾ acre property, located at an elevation of 2,600 feet, has been their home for two years. The beautiful house is nestled under majestic oak trees prevalent throughout the property. The architecture of the house is the perfect background for the fabulous fountain, formal topiaries, terraced landscape and magnificent boulders.

Established nine years ago, the garden has been expanded and enhanced by the Belochis. They have added five 4' x 12' raised vegetable beds, 16 fruit trees, multiple shrubs and perennials. Landscaping was added in front of the house along with drip irrigation for trees, shrubs and 57 rose bushes. They are connecting the various gardens with natural mulched pathways. A few small patches of lawn help delineate specific areas, but much of the landscape has been left in its natural state to conserve water.

The elegant patio at the back of the house is a peaceful setting for listening to water flowing into the koi and goldfish pond. The Belochis love growing vegetables and started seedlings of peppers and 28 tomatoes indoors on a sunny windowsill. To discourage weeds, Steve mulches around the vegetable beds with cardboard. A battery-operated drip system now waters the vegetable garden.

The Belochi property abounds with wildlife: hungry deer, wild turkeys, squirrels, gophers and an occasional coyote wander through the gardens. Many interesting birds visit and nest there. Garden defenses include the 5½ foot tall fence that surrounds everything except the front yard, another 4' fence surrounding the vegetable garden, bird-netting over fruit trees and gopher-screening in newly planted areas.

Steve and Ina have learned quite a bit from various Master Gardeners who explained the principles of water conservation and the organic approach of not using chemical fertilizers or pesticides. The lesson we can all learn is that even with a large property, using water-wise and organic practices can result in a fabulous, natural environment.

Tickets for the tour are \$10 each (ages 12 and under are free). You can purchase tickets from any Tuolumne County Master Gardener or from the following businesses: in Columbia at Columbia Nursery; in Twain Harte at The Nest in Twain Harte; in Standard at Nature's Whole Food Depot & Nursery; in Sonora at Antiques, Etc., J.S. West Hardware and Nursery and the UCCE office at 52 N. Washington St. Tickets can also be purchased on-line at: <http://ucanr.org/gardentourtickets> and will be available for pick up on Sunday, June 24, at the Master Gardener demonstration garden at 251 S. Barretta Street in Sonora.

Water will be available at all five garden sites and the demonstration garden has available restrooms. Please don't bring strollers or pets, and don't forget your camera or a notepad. You may find yourself

collecting ideas or wanting to implement something you learned for your own garden. Many of the best gardeners are plagiarists, so this is a perfect opportunity to pick up ideas from our foothill neighbors!

Kathy Nunes is a Master Gardener who enjoys gardening in her foothill home.