

Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners Newsletter

Not from My Garden: O’Keeffe’s Flower Paintings

by Eugenia Parry

In 1940 Georgia O’Keeffe, then 52, wondered whether she was so attached to her own world that she couldn’t see anything else.[1] It was the confession of a visionary. Seeing wasn’t recording. She was referring to an inner vision, permanent and sublime, altering all rational intentions. It had taken her years to recognize that her strength as an artist lay in this ability to see from within. Stieglitz didn’t get it. He told her she was a modernist, an abstractionist. For a long time she believed him. “It was his game,” she remembered, “and we all played along or left the game.”[2]

During the 1920s, when she had to produce an artist’s statement about her flower paintings, she hid behind a battle with the New York public: she claimed people were too busy and had no time to stop and look at anything as lowly and simple as a flower, so she had decided to “surprise” Gotham by making her flowers “big.” Again she sold herself short. Flowers were thresholds of her deepest intimacy with the universe, but she wouldn’t admit it. Her feckless words explained nothing.

We’re used to seeing O’Keeffe’s flower paintings as decorative motifs on posters promoting cultural events, which has dulled the works’ original power. These works are not depictions of plants. The most memorable of them, from the 1920s, are fierce forays into the unconscious. Feeling her way into a flower was an adventure for O’Keeffe. Staring into an anemone or a black iris, she was a wide-eyed child slowly entering a dark wood. Close-up, flowers ceased to be the stuff of nosegays or gardens. They almost ceased to be things and became events. Exploding their frames, they are force fields enacting sublime dramas of the soul. No one had addressed flowers this way.



*Jack-in-Pulpit – No. 2, 1930. Oil on canvas.
National Gallery of Art, Washington.*

cont. on page 2



Not from My Garden: O’Keeffe’s Flower Paintings—cont. from page 1

Describing her flower passion in 1926, she trembled: “You put out your hands to touch it, or lean forward to smell it, or maybe touch it with your lips almost without thinking....” [3] Red cannas, devouring flames of desire, rage and crackle like wildfire. Yellow sweet peas, joined to yellow cactus flowers, twist and grimace. Black pansy vies with pale blue forget-me-not. Black hollyhock spars with larkspur. A white rose encircled by uncanny light is Venus, Georgia’s evening star. White iris sticks out its tongue. A



Red Canna, 1925/28. Oil on canvas.
University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson.

collapsing petunia becomes a pile of purple velvet whose folds start to resemble a canyon. Or chambers of the heart. Poisonous jimson weed is a gyrating dancer. The inner sancta of oriental poppies contain black tarantula faces that seek our attention and want to converse. Jack-in-the-pulpit is a sexual predator. *Black Iris VI* is a gaping death’s head.

Not all of O’Keeffe’s flower paintings behave this way. The definitive illustrated catalog of her work includes plenty of simple, descriptive flower studies, many inert and rather dull, like works dutifully executed in a still-life class. They don’t betray how flowers made her feel, the trouble she took to get to know them, or how their dramas lead us into states of mind. In the best paintings, flowers interconnect with everything else: the seasons, the motions of heaven and earth, the music of the spheres. It’s not surprising that she would float a gigantic flower over an arid mountain landscape, stressing the equation of opposites, how each needed the other.

cont. on page 3

In This Issue

Not from My Garden: O’Keeffe’s Flower Paintings	1
From the Board	4
SFEMG’s Newest Project: Seed Stewardship	5
Reduce Indoor Air Pollution with Houseplants—Part 1: Aloe Vera and Peace Lily	6
SNaPP: Leadplant (<i>Amorpha canescens</i>)	8
Mountain West Seed Summit	9
Ask a Master Gardener	9
New & Noteworthy	10
The Garden Journal Radio Show	11
Calendar of Events	12

.....
Editor: Sarah Baldwin
Art Director: Jannine Cabossel



O'Keeffe made the mistake of thinking that if she made her flowers large enough the public would see what she saw. She never developed this idea in writing.

The paintings say it all. With her nose buried in pollen, she got too close. The forms of her flowers were not only floral; they began to resemble everything in nature that lived and moved. Her patrons couldn't see beyond their own sexual associations—to them, the flowers resembled female genitalia. The idea horrified her, though she was no prude. What she abhorred were simplistic, Freudian accusations. She fumed: they “hang all [their] associations with flowers *on my flower* [emphasis added] and claim that I feel what I don't.”[4]

All this plants the idea that O'Keeffe's “big” flowers are dramatic theaters, mirroring the way we breathe, dance, stare, cower, and weep. They are gorgeous incursions into the secret recesses of many species in the universe they share. She titled a bird-of-paradise painting *Not from My Garden* [5], meaning, I presume, that she hadn't grown it. Her most potent flower pieces aren't drawn from anyone's garden. They're from inside her head. By the 1940s, she described herself as having in her world “more sky than earth.”[6] This recognition explains the majesty of her imagination, for at her best, she was less a painter than a magical image maker. She elevated flowers into oracles. Peering into them, we get a shower of pollen and receive answers to our most heartfelt questions.



Black Iris VI, 1936. Oil on canvas.
Private collection.

Notes:

1. Extracted from the artist's statement in a 1940 exhibition brochure; cited in Barbara Buhler Lynes, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (Yale, 1999), vol. II, appendix I, p. 1099.
2. Cited in “That Memory or Dream Thing I Do,” by Eugenia Parry, in *Georgia O'Keeffe: Visions of the Sublime* (Torch Press/International Arts, 2004), p. 8, note 74.
3. Statement from a 1926 exhibition catalog, as reprinted in Anita Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper: Georgia O'Keeffe* (Simon & Schuster, 1988), p. 189.
4. Statement from a 1939 exhibition brochure; cited in Lynes, vol. II, appendix I, p. 1099.
5. Lynes, vol. II, cat. no. 1506.
6. Statement from a 1944 exhibition brochure; cited in Lynes, vol. II, appendix I, p. 1099.

From the Board

by Tom Dominguez, Santa Fe County Agricultural Extension Agent and SFEMG Program Coordinator

With the start of 2019, Master Gardeners throughout New Mexico are now members of the new Extension Master Gardeners program organized through NMSU's Cooperative Extension Service. This shift in organizational structure is discussed in more detail in a series of questions and answers, which will be sent to members soon. If you have questions about the new EMG that aren't addressed in that document, please feel free to reach out to me by phone (505-471-4711) or email (tdomingu@nmsu.edu).



Photo by Cherry Payne

I'd like to emphasize that despite the change in organizational structure and name, the program will continue much as it has in the past. Its success in years to come will continue to reflect the dedication of members who volunteer their time, knowledge, and energy to help educate aspiring gardeners in Santa Fe County and northern New Mexico. So what has changed?

Beginning this month, there are two distinct Master Gardener organizations in Santa Fe County: the new Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners (SFEMG) and the legacy organization, the Santa Fe Master Gardener Association (SFMGA). Going forward, we will make every effort to distinguish communications from the two groups and ask for your patience as we make our way through this transition.

The electronic assets (including the newsletter), the projects, and the annual events formerly coordinated through SFMGA have been transferred to the new organization. Existing projects and events, including the annual garden fair and plant sale, will continue just as before.

The legacy organization has retained its 501(c)(3) nonprofit status to oversee the disposition of reserve funds. SFMGA has established provisional criteria for dispersing these funds, and the board is committed to keeping members informed about its activities. Apart the 2019 intern class, members of the new SFEMG will retain their membership in SFMGA at no additional cost.

Master Gardeners are still required to complete 30 hours of volunteer service each year to maintain certification, but instead of 6 hours of continuing education, the requirement is now for 10 hours, to be consistent with requirements throughout the state.

In closing, I want to extend my gratitude to the board members of both organizations for their support during this transition. Though we may be two organizations, we have similar goals and will continue to work together, keeping lines of communication open and amiable.

Happy New Year. We wish you all successful gardening and peace in 2019.

SFEMG's Newest Project: Seed Stewardship

by Ann Kissinger

Enthusiasm for our organization's first Seed School Weekend, in November of 2018, led to approval of Seed Stewardship as a new project for 2019.

The weekend opened on a Friday night, with the documentary [Seed: The Untold Story](#) at the CCA. On Saturday, after trying our hands at identifying a series of mystery seeds, we were treated to presentations by SFEMG member Dr. Diane Pratt, certified as a Seed School trainer by the Rocky Mountain Seed Alliance. Topics included the magic and power of seeds; the history and politics of the modern seed industry; seed biology; myths of seed saving; genetics, selection, and plant breeding; and pollination. One takeaway: be sure to buy only non-GMO, non-patented seeds. Someone shared that giving away patented seeds is against the law.



After viewing a video briefing on the harvesting, cleaning, and storage of seeds, narrated by Rocky Mountain Seed Alliance executive director Bill McDorman, we questioned Bill live, using video-conferencing software Zoom.

We also enjoyed multiple hands-on projects. SFEMG instructor Jannine Cabossel taught us how to ferment and save tomato seeds; she shared her experience with vegetable field trials and even gave us kernels of her new, pink-eared corn. We learned by example how to sprout wheat and record germination rates. Using hand lenses, we ID-ed flower parts. We shelled corn. Outdoors, on a beautiful sunny fall day, we threshed and cleaned beans and rye, both the old-fashioned way—with our feet—and using modern methods.

The whole first day of seed school turned out to be a great excuse for a feast. Our MG committee provided gourmet homemade bread, baked with ancient grains, as well as a variety of soups, salads, fruits, and desserts. Diane Pratt brought raw goat cheese from her own goats.

On Sunday we took a field trip and collected, cleaned, and saved native seeds at the Seed Farm, of the Institute of Applied Ecology. Instructor Victoria Atencio welcomes volunteers in the institute's work.

Mark your calendar for the February 21–23 [Mountain West Seed Summit](#), at IAIA, in Santa Fe. The summit opens with a seed exchange. Also watch [Home Grown New Mexico](#) for the Seed Swap, which usually occurs in March, at Frenchie's Field, on Agua Fria Street.

Resources:

Rocky Mountain Seed Alliance, [Recommended Books](#)
Rocky Mountain Seed Alliance, [Seed School Online](#)

Reduce Indoor Air Pollution with Houseplants

Part 1: Aloe Vera and Peace Lily

by Peggy Rudberg

Since the late 1970s buildings have been made more airtight to increase energy efficiency. Though the resulting energy savings are good for our wallets, indoor air quality has suffered. The [air in our homes and offices](#) may contain from two to five times more pollutants than are found outdoors. And since most people spend the majority of their time indoors, this has become a major health concern.

Synthetic materials used in newer construction, furnishings, and electronics, as well as in many cleaners and other common household products, contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs); the most common are formaldehyde, benzene, and trichloroethylene. While limited exposure to these chemicals may not pose health threats, when they come from multiple sources, the cumulative effect can be dangerous.



Before you pack your bags and head for the hills, consider the simple addition of houseplants. All plants decrease carbon dioxide and increase oxygen levels in the air during photosynthesis, but they are also capable of a process called [phytoremediation](#), in which they absorb and transfer VOCs and other toxins to their associated soil and microorganisms, which in turn convert the chemicals into usable nutrients.

In 1989 NASA released [a now-famous study](#) on the ability of houseplants to purify air in closed environments. They tested 20 common houseplants and found remarkable pollutant reduction. They suggest 15 to 18 plants per 1,800 to 2,000 square feet of indoor space.

cont. on page 7



If you like succulents, [aloe vera](#) is excellent at absorbing formaldehyde and benzene; additionally, juice from the leaves soothes minor skin irritations with its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. The earliest written reference to the plant, in Arabic and dating to the fourth century BC, describes its use as a pain reliever. A member of the lily family, aloe is native to the Arabian peninsula but has been introduced worldwide to hot, dry climates. The earliest-known visual representation of it is from a cave painting in South Africa.

Aloe is very hardy, but temperatures below 40 degrees Fahrenheit will cause damage. It prefers a well-drained, permeable soil and bright, indirect sunlight. Water about once every three weeks, and allow soil to dry completely between waterings to prevent root rot. Aloe reproduces with offsets or clones that you can separate, let heal for a few days, and replant.

If you want a flowering plant, the [peace lily](#) (*Spathiphyllum* “Mauna Loa”) is highly effective at removing all three of the leading VOCs. What appears to be a flower is in fact a leaf bract partially enveloping the spike of tiny flowers on an axis. Despite its name, peace lilies are not true lilies; they are members of the Araceae family, along with *Philodendron*, another superb air purifier. Imported to Europe in 1824 from tropical Columbia, its minimal requirements have made it a favorite houseplant.

Peace lilies thrive in peat-based sandy soil and flower best when slightly root bound. Soak the plant about once a week, preferably with chlorine-free water (let tap water stand overnight) or rain water. Provide good drainage but keep soil slightly moist. In dry climates you may need to mist the plant occasionally. It will wilt when water is needed. It likes medium, indirect light but can survive in darker surroundings. A weak fertilizer during spring and summer growth will promote more flowers. Occasionally removing dust with a damp cloth keeps pores clear and helps prevent pest problems. Propagate by dividing. *Note that peace lilies contain oxalates that can harm pets.*

Look for more air-cleaning houseplant suggestions in upcoming issues of the newsletter.

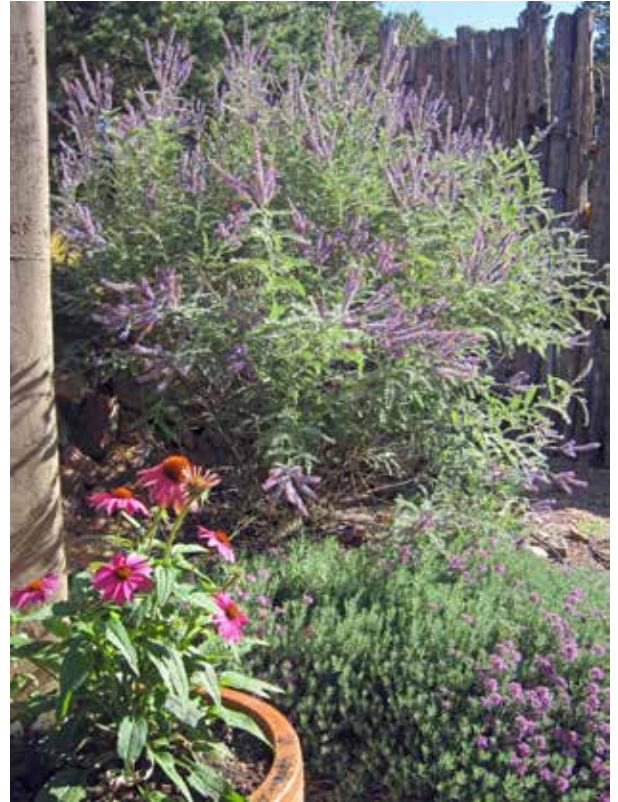


Leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*)

by Joy Mandelbaum

Probably my favorite native shrub, leadplant has delicate compound leaves that belie its hardiness in our climate. Where did it get its name? Superstition holds that it was an indicator of the presence of lead in the ground. But more likely it comes from the lead-colored leaves, which are covered in silver-gray hairs. Leadplant is in the legume family and services the soil by being a nitrogen fixer. Being deep rooted, it can survive prairie fires and drought. Those deep roots made plowing difficult for pioneers, who dubbed it “devil’s shoestrings.”

Planting and care: Leadplant is found on plains at elevations of 5,500 to 7,000 feet; planting it with native grasses in your garden makes it feel right at home. My plant is happy on the northeast side of the house, probably because it prefers less intense heat. Long-lived and cold hardy, it is flexible about soil but requires good drainage. Once established its water needs are moderate.



Landscape use: Used for prairie restoration, leadplant is an indicator of healthy, well-managed range areas. Its deep roots help with erosion control. When in bloom, the spikes of fragrant indigo flowers with tiny orange stamens make a splash, especially with pink/purple-flowering plants like hyssop (*Agastache cana*) or purple coneflower (*Echinacea angustifolia*). An insect magnet, it attracts native butterflies and bees and is a caterpillar host, making it a good selection for native pollinator gardens. Birds and small mammals go for the small, one-seed pods that follow the blooms.

Flower type: deciduous subshrub

Bloom time: June to July

Bloom color: indigo

Height: 2–4 feet

Width: 3–4 feet

cont. on page 9

Leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*)—cont from page 8

Exposure: full sun, but will tolerate part shade

Soil moisture: low-medium, deep watering

Soil: not too picky but does need good drainage

Other advantages: Native Americans used the leaves to make a tea and sometimes as medicine.

References:

Philips, Judith. *Growing the Southwest Garden* (Timber, 2015) and *Plants for Natural Gardens* (Museum of New Mexico, 1995)

SNaPP, [A Guide to Native Plants for the Santa Fe Landscape](#)

USDA/NRCS Plant Fact Sheet, [Leadplant](#)

Photo by Joy Mandelbaum



Mountain West Seed Summit

Rocky Mountain Seed Alliance presents the second Mountain West Seed Summit: Reunion of the Radicles, at the Institute of American Indian Arts, in Santa Fe, on Friday, February 22, and Saturday, February 23, with a special field trip to amazing seed and historic sites on Thursday, February 21. Join local, national, and international seed stewards working toward keeping seeds in the hands of the people. There will be celebration, education, a seed exchange, a seed poetry slam, and more! Register [here](#).

We Are Here to Help!

If you have a gardening question, Santa Fe Master Gardeners are available to help. Go to our [website](#), click on the Garden Questions? link in the bar below the photo, and pose your question. Someone will do research and get back to you.



New & Noteworthy

Have you recently read a plant-related article, visited a horticultural website or blog, listened to podcast, or seen a nature show or documentary you think other gardeners would enjoy or find useful? Send a link to the newsletter (news.sfemg@gmail.com) and we'll include the information in the next issue.

Atlas Obscura, [How Close-Up Glamour Shots Are Generating Buzz for Bees](#),
by Jessica Leigh Hester

Atlas Obscura, [When Cactus Destruction Is Imminent, These Rescuers Come Running](#),
by Leslie Nemo

BBC News, [The secret life of plants: Ten new species found this year](#), by Helen Briggs

The Guardian, [Scientists identify vast underground ecosystem](#), by Jonathan Watts

New York Times, [How to Recycle Your Christmas Tree](#), by Steph Yin

New York Times, [One of Nature's Smallest Flowering Plants Can Survive Inside of a Duck](#),
by Veronique Greenwood

Santa Fe New Mexican, [Tiny New Mexico bird playing big role for science](#), by Andy Stiny

Washington Post, [The horticulture industry's age problem is bigger than you think](#),
by Adrian Higgins

The garden communicates what it shows to you but you also contribute to the garden some of what you are seeking in terms of your own life, your own state of being. One reason a garden can speak to you is that it is both its own reality and a manifestation of the interior life of the mind that imagined it in the beginning.

—Stanley Kunitz (*The Wild Braid*, 2007)

The Garden Journal Radio Show

Every Saturday

10–10:30 a.m.

Live from the Farmers Market



Tune in to KSFR 101.1 FM on Saturday mornings from 10 to 10:30 to listen to a lively, entertaining, and informative gardening show.

To listen to previous broadcasts online, visit [this section](#) of our website.

- Jan 05 Santa Fe Botanical Garden's Clayton Bass and Lindsay Taylor with the coming month's SFMG news and events
- Jan 12 Rocky Mountain Seed Alliance's Bill McDorman and Lee-Ann Hill on the upcoming Mountain West Seed Summit, in Santa Fe, at AIAI, February 22–23
- Jan 19 Santa Fe Farmers Market Institute's "Live at the Market," with Carrie Core and guests (a new monthly feature)
- Jan 26 Jannine Cabossel, the Tomato Lady, with tips and techniques for next month's veggie garden; more gardening info at [Giant Veggie Gardener](#)

Schedule subject to change. Check [here](#) for updates.

Calendar of Events

All events are open to the public. Visit the [events calendar](#) on our website for a complete list of garden-related activities and classes with times, locations, and registration information.

Note: phc stands for “per hour of class time.”

DATES	EVENTS	CREDITS
Jan 08	Botanical Book Club, 1–2:30 p.m. (SFBG)	NA
Jan 13	Birding Trip: Rosy Finches at Sandia Crest, 9 a.m. (SCAS)	NA
Jan 13	Lecture: Singular Butterfly, 1–3 p.m. (SFBG)	2 CE
Jan 16	Native Shrubs and Trees for Waterwise Landscapes, 6:30 p.m. (NPSNM)	1 CE
Jan 17	Saving the Santa Fe Cholla, 6:30 p.m. (SFCSC)	1 CE
Jan 28	Clean Energy Conference, 2–8 p.m. (SCRG)	NA

NPSNM: [Native Plant Society of New Mexico, SF Chapter](#); Christ Lutheran Church

SCAS: [Sangre de Cristo Audubon Society](#); contact Tom Jervis, 505-988-1708

SCRG: [Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter](#); conference at Temple Beth Shalom

SFBG: [Santa Fe Botanical Garden](#), 715 Camino Lejo, 505-471-9103

SFCSC: Santa Fe Cactus & Succulent Club, cactusdata@msn.com; Christ Lutheran Church

Members Only: For a complete list of Master Gardener projects and to sign up, please visit Sign Up Genius, a link to which is in the [Members Only](#) section of the website. To log hours worked and to see year-to-date totals, visit Track It Forward in the same location.



Mission Statement:

Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners is a non-profit volunteer organization whose mission is to learn, teach, and promote locally sustainable gardening through reliable, current research-based practices