

Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners Newsletter



Crevice garden at Denver Botanic Gardens. Photo courtesy of Anna Barón.

Gardens on the Rocks

by Pam Wolfe

Many an alpine jewel met its demise among English cobblestones in the 19th century. The lust for exotic plants collected in the mountains of Europe was far in advance of any understanding of their needs under cultivation. It wasn't until the first decade of the 20th century that capable gardeners began to publish sensible guidance for constructing rock gardens and caring for the living treasures planted therein. In 1919 an authoritative, acerbic, and witty text appeared: Reginald Farrer's *The English Rock Garden* quickly became a standard reference for all rock gardeners. Initially modeled after the rock garden at Kew Gardens, rockeries began to appear in public spaces in North America in the 1890s, and the American Rock Garden Society, which later became the [North American Rock Garden Society](#), was founded in 1934.

The classic style of rock garden is situated on a slope, with artfully arranged rocks holding the hill and small alpine, subalpine, and steppe plants nestled in, rambling over, and tumbling down.

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Gardens on the Rocks—cont. from page 1

Properties in the foothills of Santa Fe often have native rock on site and a palette of native plants to start a rock garden. Enthusiasts will, of course, develop and enhance the effect by building access paths, experimenting with soil mixes, and adding troughs or containers for fussy or miniature species.



Antennaria sp. in native rock along the access road above Aspen Vista, in Santa Fe National Forest

Czech-style crevice gardens provide a cool, moist place for roots. They are typically low maintenance. With a judicious selection of regionally appropriate plants, they require little or no supplemental water. Where a slope is lacking, stone can be situated in berms of various heights. Mike Kintgen, senior horticulturalist at Denver Botanic Gardens, has established several crevice gardens on the garden's three-acre site near downtown.



Chinodoxa sp. blooms in April on a cut bank shored up with rock

The new, new thing in rock gardening is reusing broken concrete (urbanite) rather than acquiring stone. The result is an environmentally friendly urban garden. The Santa Fe Cactus Rescue Project recently installed a very chic, post-apocalyptic urbanite cactus garden at the Santa Fe Water Conservation Office, off West San Mateo Road.

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Situated between the Great Basin to the west, the Great Plains to the east, with the Rocky Mountains to the north and the Chihuahuan Desert to the south, Santa Fe has an ideal climate for a diverse array of plant material. But it is high, and it is dry. Robert Nold, who gardens in Denver, has provided an indispensable compendium of experience and wry humor applicable to our growing conditions. His book, *High and Dry*, gives information on soils, siting, maintenance, and plant selection. A full chapter (140 pages) is dedicated to descriptions of rock garden plants.

Rock garden enthusiasts tend to be interested in, or perhaps obsessed with, plants that are difficult to grow and impossible to find. But there are many easy-to-grow plants among the saxifrages (literally “stone-breakers”), sem-pervivums, astragaluses, campanulas, sedums, gentians, cacti, and of course, penstemons that find their way into rockeries.

“I want to admire plants, not minerals.” writes [Robin Magowan](#), chair of the Santa Fe chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS). When asked what advice he would give beginning rock gardeners, Magowan responded, “Read.”

So, I read. But meanwhile my rock garden consists of three rocks and a cactus atop a low berm that slows the runoff from a cut bank.

Look for a follow-up article by Kathy Haq on Robin Magowan’s Santa Fe rock garden in the October issue of the SFEMG Newsletter.

References and Resources

Bohl, Lorrie. [Thriving between the cracks](#) (Digger, July 2015)

Higgins, Adrien. [This unusual garden style could be a sustainable solution for urban landscapes](#) (*Washington Post*, June 5, 2019)

Nold, Robert. *High and Dry: Gardening with Cold-Hardy Dryland Plants* (Timber, 2008)

North American Rock Garden Society, [The History of Rock Gardening in North America](#)

North American Rock Garden Society, [Intro to Rock Gardening](#)

Rudberg, Peggy. [Rock Gardens](#) (SFMGA Newsletter, October 2016)

Photos by Pam Wolfe except as noted



Heterotheca jonesii growing in limestone soil with no organic matter

Classic Garden Styles: French Formalism at the Great Chateaus

by Eugenia Parry

When we lost Eden, we had to search to restore it again.

—André Le Nôtre(1)



Eugène Atget, Saint-Cloud, 1921–22, silver print from a glass-plate negative

As I gaze at the failure of my potato crop this year, I'm finding comfort in thoughts of Edenic gardens that seemed to transcend error, where the illusion of perfection was absolute. I'm reflecting on great formal gardens, *à la française*: the vast parks near Paris designed by André Le Nôtre (1613–1700), who over decades perfected a supremely “unnatural” design, with a strict adherence to geometric symmetry, for the royal gardens of chateaus like Versailles and Saint-Cloud.

In the 1920s photographer Eugène Atget (1857–1927) haunted these places. By then they were public spaces and somewhat neglected and overgrown. In early morning, without the tourists, Atget rediscovered their magic. His wooden view-camera, stable on a tripod, held glass-plate negatives with slow, old-fashioned chemistries, a process he preferred—photographing for him was a form of contemplation. Like a marksman, under the dark cloth he sited vast perspectives, sweeping axes, scores of fountains, meticulously manicured plantings, and huge reflecting pools mourned by weeping foliage. He then selectively recomposed these elements into equivalent photographic geometries, as abstract as playing cards.(2)

Atget's sharp eye reminds us that nothing in these gardens was accidental. Superior intelligences that loved to regulate and clarify drove their creation and maintenance. Le Nôtre, super-confident scion of generations of gardeners employed by the state (he grew up in a house in the Tuileries), was hired to devise an original kind of beauty based strictly on compass and rule. To glorify Louis XIV, Le Nôtre drew up plans for the gardens of Versailles that look like sumptuous board games. He converted over 800 hectares into luscious lawns and dizzying

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Eugène Atget, Saint-Cloud, 1915–19, silver print from a glass-plate negative

vistas, bisected by a giant canal, lined with terraces, and punctuated by more than two hundred sculptures of mythological subjects and themes, with particular emphasis on Apollo, to reaffirm the absolute power of the Sun King.

The expense was astronomical. Regiments of gardeners planted and maintained the grounds. Armed with shears, they swiftly barbered any naturally protruding leaves or branches to conform

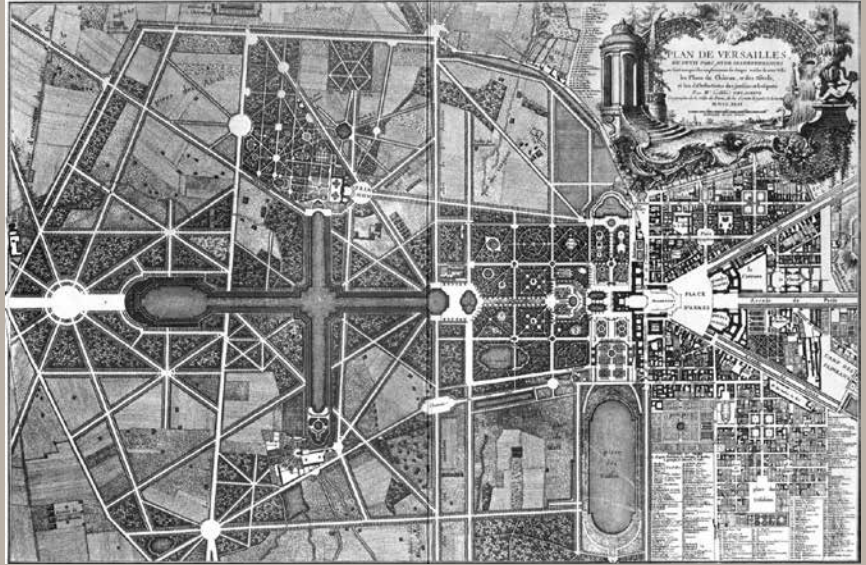
to triangles and circles. Imagine a garden conceived like a chessboard, where the trees are manicured daily to conform to an idea. These gardens had nothing to do with the enjoyment of the French public. In fact, they notoriously drained the national treasury and left the general population starving. The trimmed foliage and raked gravel paths existed exclusively to please, and to exalt the supremacy of, the king and his family, besides providing settings for the famously licentious dalliances of some two thousand powder-wigged members of his retinue.

Versailles' extravagant silliness included children. Presumably to teach Louis XIV's eldest son, Louis of France, the Grand Dauphin, to read, Le Nôtre constructed a labyrinth with 39 playing fountains distributed along the hedged maze. Each fountain displayed a plaque printed with one of Aesop's fables. In this way the boy, and perhaps his siblings and playmates from the court, could follow the pathways and puzzle through Aesop's moral lessons. The outdoor school was short-lived. Water for so many fountains required 250 pumps and 14 waterwheels to transport it over nearly a mile to the site. The dauphin's labyrinth eventually suffered in a flush of economy. It was demolished after five years: too expensive to maintain.

The Sun King poured money into Versailles, ignoring the needs of his subjects, but the real scarcity for him was water. For all the fountains, cascades, reflecting pools, etc., there simply

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wasn't enough. Also, the hydraulic system, taxed to the limit, required constant maintenance. The men in charge, so called "fountainneers," secretly rationed the water and limited use of the system. They wore whistles to signal one another when they learned that the king was about to pass a series of fountains so they could turn them on in succession before he arrived and, as soon as he passed by, turn them off.(3)



Plan of Le Nôtre's gardens at Versailles.

Versailles was in many ways a grand illusion. Its rigid display expressed uncompromising adherence to authoritarianism. All of the vistas were theatrical stages designed to place Louis XIV at the apex. In the end, such places became symbols of punishable waste. With every revolution in France, the people ran to Versailles and slaughtered the trees. At Saint-Cloud in 1871, they burned down the chateau. Nothing to eat. Kill the King! I, holding some very small potatoes, can hardly blame them.

Notes

1. These words were spoken by Le Nôtre's character in the 2015 film *A Little Chaos*, directed by Alan Rickman. In this romantic bit of historical froth, the great designer (played by Matthias Schoenaerts) is so confident of his dominance as principal landscape architect at Versailles that he defies precedent and invites a skilled female gardener (Kate Winslet) to design a cascade in a secondary part of the gardens, thereby adding "a little chaos" of the feminine to parry the strict rigidity of Le Nôtre's geometry.
2. For Atget's photographs of Versailles and Saint-Cloud, see John Szarkowski's and Maria Morris Hambourg's four-volume, fully illustrated compendium, *The Work of Atget*, particularly vol. III, *The Ancien Regime* (Museum of Modern Art, 1983).
3. I am indebted to the well-researched Wikipedia article on the [Gardens of Versailles](#) for some of the anecdotes recounted here.



Golden Currant (*Ribes aureum*)

by Sarah Baldwin

Three seasons of appeal make golden currant an excellent garden plant for our area. Starting in mid-April or earlier, when little else is awake, a profusion of tiny, fragrant, trumpet-shaped yellow flowers cheers the gardener and provides valuable nectar for bees and hummingbirds. Apple green, three-lobbed leaves show up at the same time and remain vibrant-looking into late summer, at which point they start turning shades of burgundy, adding warm tones to the autumn landscape.



The golden flowers of *Ribes aureum* in April. Photo by Sarah Baldwin.

The small, smooth fruits ripen into red or black berries, which can be plucked and eaten right off the shrub (some varieties produce sweeter fruit than others) or used for jams and pies. Eventually, if not eaten by birds first, the berries shrivel into delicious raisins. Native Americans added dried currants to powdered bison meat to make pemmican.

Planting and care: New Mexico horticulturalist and author Judith Phillips classifies golden currant as an “oasis plant,” meaning it thrives in moist, protected niches. Commonly found at stream margins and on damp slopes from 3,500 to 9,000 feet, the shrub is adaptable and can take full sun, but it will look better and require less water in part shade, perhaps near a canale or a gutter. It likes fertile, well-drained growing conditions; keep up a good layer of woody mulch to retain moisture and to increase organic matter in the soil. Once established golden currant does well with a soaking twice a month in summer, monthly the rest of the year. With abundant water it spreads by suckers to form a thicket. Winter pruning results in denser branching. Soft new growth is often attacked by aphids. The plant is also susceptible to blister rust fungus; clean up leaves once they drop to reduce the chance of reinfection.

Landscape use: With its open, somewhat rangy habit, golden currant makes a good background plant in informal and wildlife gardens. It can also be used as a screen or hedge and for erosion control. It is particularly attractive near evergreen trees and with New Mexico privet (*Forestiera neomexicana*), another oasis plant, whose bright yellow fall color complements golden currant’s reddish foliage.

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Golden Currant (*Ribes aureum*)—cont. from page 7

Propagation: According to Phillips, seeds should be moist-prechilled for three months before sowing on cool soil. The plant can also be propagated with hardwood cuttings, which root readily in spring or fall.

Plant type: deciduous shrub

Bloom time: early spring

Size: 4–6 feet tall x 4–6 feet wide

Sun: part shade

Moisture: low to medium

Soil: adaptable but prefers well-drained, sandy loam

USDA zones: 2–7



Golden currant berries and late-summer foliage.
Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

References:

Carter, Jack, et al. *Common Southwestern Native Plants: An Identification Guide*, 3rd ed. (Colorado Native Plant Society, 2018)

Phillips, Judith. *Plants for Natural Gardens* (Museum of New Mexico, 1995)

U.S. Forest Service, [Plant of the Week: Golden Currant \(*Ribes aureum*\)](#), by Walter Fertig

2020 SFEMG Board Nominations

Attention SFEMG members: the board is seeking members for the Nominating Committee to help review nominations and to develop and certify the ballot for the 2020 SFEMG elections. The committee will meet at least twice to prepare the ballot. Elections will be held in October, and results will be certified within 24 hours.

Exciting opportunities are available for Master Gardeners on the 2020 board. Nominees are need for Education Director, Secretary, Treasurer, and President. Co-officers are welcome. We are also seeking four members-at-large; being an at-large member is a great way to learn about board activities. The Nominating Committee can provide job descriptions.

If interested in serving in any of these roles or on the nominating committee, please contact Karen Armijo (kebrowne@hotmail.com, 505-690-7654) or Stephen Schmelling (stepenschmelling@comcast.net).

New & Noteworthy

Have you recently read a plant-related article or book, visited a horticultural website or blog, listened to a 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. **Note that some of these sources have paywalls.**

Botany One, [What a plant learns. The curious case of Mimosa pudica.](#), by Monica Gagliano and Michael Marder

Desert Blooms (NMSU), [Pollinator or pest? When to draw the line with the Lepidoptera order \(moths and butterflies\)](#), by Alissa Freeman

Desert Blooms (NMSU), [Tomato Flavor: Where Did It Go and How They're Bringing It Back](#), by Marisa Thompson

The Guardian, [Houseplant with added rabbit DNA could reduce air pollution, study shows](#), by Nicola Davis

The Guardian, [Global heating: ancient plants set to reproduce in UK after 60m years](#), by Patrick Barkham

Mabey, Richard. *The Cabaret of Plants: Forty Thousand Years of Plant Life and the Human Imagination* (Norton, 2017)

New York Times, [Seeking a Culprit When Bumblebee Carcasses Pile Up](#), by JoAnna Klein

New York Times, [This Carnivorous Plant Invaded New York. That May Be Its Only Hope.](#), by Marion Renault

Pasatiempo, [Life and Limb: Sean Cavanaugh's arboreal art](#), by Michael Abatemarco

Santa Fe New Mexican, [Beetles munch through endangered Southwest bird habitat](#), by Felicia Fonseca

Santa Fe New Mexican, [Wilderness rangers, preserving New Mexico's forests](#), by Robert Nott

Science Daily, [Global change is triggering an identity switch in grasslands](#)

Register Now for Seed School Weekend

The Second Annual Seed School Weekend is set for October 25–27 at IAIA. This year’s program will be even bigger and better. We kick off Friday night with a screening of the film *Seed: The Untold Story*, followed by a panel discussion. Seed School is all day Saturday, with lectures and hands-on activities covering the history, genetics, botany, breeding, and techniques of seeds and seed-saving, taught by Diane Pratt. Sunday is a field trip led by the Institute of Applied Ecology to collect native seeds; then we’ll move to their Seed Studio and use various equipment to clean the collected seed. If you can’t commit to the entire weekend, you can register for just the film and panel discussion. Seed School Weekend is presented in partnership with the Santa Fe Botanical Garden. Register [here](#).

We Are Here to Help!

From April through September, Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners are available to answer gardening questions on Mondays and Thursdays from 1 to 3 p.m. at the SFEMG office (at the fairgrounds, 3229 Rodeo Road). These folks can answer your questions and share their experiences with what does and does not work in our environment. Drop by to chat about gardening challenges and to get suggestions.

Master Gardeners and interns staff Ask a Master Gardener tables at various locations during the growing season. Below is this season’s last AAMG event:

Sep 22 Santa Fe Botanical Garden 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

You can also pose your questions online by going to our [website](#) and clicking on the “Garden Questions?” tab; someone will do research and get back to you.

A natural garden calls for paths, whether hard or soft, to allow the user to wander and make discoveries, so that all is not revealed at first glance.

—John Brookes (1933–2018)

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.

- Sept 07 Santa Fe Botanical Garden edition with Lindsay Taylor and guests Tallie Segal and Mollie Parsons on upcoming workshops and classes at the garden

- Sept 14 Host Christine Salem with members of the Santa Fe Seed Stewards on the upcoming Seed School Weekend, presented by SFEMG in partnership with the Santa Fe Botanical Garden

- Sept 21 Santa Fe Farmers Market Institute edition with Carrie Core and Food, Friends & Farmers

- Sept 28 Home Grown New Mexico edition with Jannine Cabossel, the Tomato Lady, offering tips and techniques for next month's veggie garden; more info at [Giant Veggie Gardener](#)

Schedule subject to change. For updates and to listen to previous broadcasts, visit [this section](#) of our website.

Free!

2019 Compost Clinics



Learn how to compost your yard and food waste from the Santa Fe Extension Master Gardener Association!

Saturday, April 13 1PM—3PM *Hands on*

Saturday, May 4 9AM—1PM *During the 14th Annual Garden Fair*

Saturday, June 15 9AM—11AM *Part of our Let's Grow Series*

Saturday, July 20 9AM—11AM *Hands on*

Saturday, August 17 9AM—11AM *Hands on*

Saturday, September 14 9AM—11AM *Hands on*

Saturday, October 19 9AM—11AM *Hands on*

CE hours available for Extension Master Gardeners

Bring hat, gloves, sturdy shoes, water & a pitch fork if you have one!

These hands-on clinics will teach proper techniques for building a thermal pile, turning, finishing, and screening compost. In addition there is a straw bale worm bin on site for vermicomposting.

All clinics will be held at the Master Gardener Demonstration Gardens at the SF County Fairgrounds: 3229 Rodeo Road, Santa Fe

For more information, visit sfemga.org and please LIKE US on Facebook



If you are an individual with a disability who is in need of an auxiliary aid or service, please contact County Extension Office at 505-471-4711. NMSU is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer and educator.

SANTA FE
EXTENSION
**MASTER
GARDENERS**

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.

DATES	EVENTS	CREDITS
Sept 05 & 07	Seasonal Wildflower Identification, eve class and day hike (SFCC)	3 CE
Sept 06	Native Grasses of Santa Fe, 10 a.m.–noon (SFBG)	2 CE
Sept 07	The New Mexico Apple, 1–4 p.m. (SFBG)	3 CE
Sept 07	Herb Garden Harvest, 8:30–11:30 a.m. (NMWC)	1 CE, 2 OS
Sept 08	Placitas Garden Tour, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. (PGT)	NA
Sept 10	Botanical Book Club, 1–2:30 p.m. (SFBG)	NA
Sept 14	Compost Clinic, 9–11 a.m. (SFEMG)	2 CE
Sept 14	Simple Greywater Systems, 9 a.m.–noon (SFCC)	3 CE
Sept 19	Lecture: Utilizing Feature Plants, 3–4:30 p.m. (SFBG)	1.5 CE
Sept 26	Lecture: The Mycorrhizal Symbiosis, 3–4:30 p.m. (SFBG)	1.5 CE
Sept 28	Fall Bee Workshop, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. (SFBG)	3 CE
Sept 28–Oct 12	Master Gardening Sampler, Sat 9 a.m.–1 p.m. (SFCC)	NA

NMWC: New Mexico Wildlife Center, between Pojaque and Española; event sponsored by [SFEMG](#)

PGT: [Placitas Garden Tour](#); see website for details

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

SFCC: [Santa Fe Community College](#), 6401 Richards Ave., 505-428-1676

SFEMG: [Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners](#), County Fairgrounds, 3229 Rodeo Rd.

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

New Mexico State University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer and educator