

Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners Newsletter

Origins and Lore of Wreaths

by Peggy Rudberg

Traditionally hung on Nordic doorways for Yule, evergreen wreaths symbolize the cycle of the seasons and the winter solstice celebration of the return of the sun. Christians adapted many Yule customs during the 16th century; they interpreted the wreath as representing Christ's crown of thorns and everlasting life. But wreaths have a deeper history.

From time immemorial circles have fascinated humans. Absorbing the warmth of a November sun in Santa Fe, we can appreciate the power it must have had on early man. Many cultures have assembled circular structures—such as prehistoric Stonehenge or the Navajo Bighorn Medicine Wheel—that are aligned to equinoxes or solstices and other celestial occurrences. The importance of seasons to agriculture made these circles crucial to human survival.

Before the development of the written word, mankind communicated by sounds or signals, but these forms extended only so far. To reach those outside their surroundings, humans created markings and symbols on rock walls and in caves. Geometric shapes found in nature became symbols for a variety of objects and concepts. A circle could represent the sun or a shield, or it might express wholeness, infinity, or sanctity, like the circular Puebloan kivas. Spirals in Southwest petroglyphs are associated with migration, or water, or observance of the sun. The ouroboros—an image of a snake eating its own tail, found in ancient Egypt as well as in Norse and Aztec legends—portrays the cycle of renewal. But the significance of any ancient image can be interpreted in different ways depending on who is viewing it.



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Our ancestors also found meaning in plants. From hallucinogens to induce revelations to the apple in the Garden of Eden, plants figure prominently in our mythologies and religions. Since evergreens withstand brutal winters, some people believed trees had spirits, and branches were kept over winter as a reminder of nature's endurance. Eventually branches were formed into circles or wreaths and sometimes given as gifts to wish good health.

Because the circle has implications of power, it became a symbol of status in ancient empires. Bay laurel was formed into circular garlands to honor returning warriors and winning athletes at the Greek Olympics. Even today Olympic medals often have laurel interwoven into their design. Roman emperors and Napoleon wore laurel crowns made of gold. To "rest on your laurels" is to bask in your former achievements, and the word laureate derives from the presentation of laurel wreaths to university graduates. A modern laureate is an honoree of exceptional accomplishments or discoveries.

Early Greeks also made harvest wreaths of fall crop materials as amulets. Other ancient cultures created wreaths as offerings for fall festivals held to protect against disease and crop failure. Wreaths have been worn on joyous occasions such as weddings and placed at burial sites to display sorrow. Egyptian mummies wore garlands of flowers when beginning their journey to the afterlife.

Today wreaths are created from many materials and have many purposes. As the holidays approach, wreaths offer an abundance of opportunities for expression and enjoyment. Find your own way and delight in the celebrations.

References:

- Encyclopaedia Britannica, [Forms of Floral Decoration](#)
Petterson, Rune. [Circles, Triangles and Squares: Sacred Symbols in the Mayan Culture](#)
Wikipedia, [Wreath](#)

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Editor: Sarah Baldwin
Art Director: Jannine Cabossel



From the Board

By Karen Armijo, vice president

Hello, everyone!

As the year comes to a close, we reflect on all that the Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners accomplished in 2019. We successfully transitioned to our new organization and maintained strong working relationships with our partners in the Santa Fe Master Gardener Association. Each year we grow and stretch into new areas and projects in and around Santa Fe. This year

we supported the new seed stewardship project and began a major overhaul of the technology for our organization. These efforts reflect the strength of our membership and its dedication to improving our community.

We wish to extend our gratitude to Tom Dominguez, our county extension agent, who works diligently to guide and support us. A special thank you also to county extension staff members Joy and Rachel for their help in coordinating our many events, activities, and projects.

If you haven't yet reported all your volunteer hours on TIF, please be sure to do so as soon as possible. We are closing in on our 2019 goal of contributing 10,000 hours of community service to Santa Fe, but we want to make sure everyone's work is counted.

Congratulations to those elected to serve on the 2020 SFEMG board; we appreciate your leadership and look forward to growing together. The board asks members to consider volunteering for leadership roles. We still need project leaders, committee members, and board members to do all the wonderful things we do. Working together strengthens the fabric of our group.

Our final social event of the year is on December 6. Details have been sent via email. We hope to see you there.



2020 SFEMG Board

For the Holidays, Go a Little Wild

by Chris Salem



It's entertaining season again. How about surprising your guests with some spirited drinks from foraging guru Ellen Zachos's latest book, *The Wildcrafted Cocktail: Make Your Own Foraged Syrups, Bitters, Infusions, and Garnishes* (Storey, 2017)? Zachos cooked up these inspired and tasty concoctions using foraged ingredients you might still be able to find in your own (or a neighbor's) yard. Any one of them would "spruce up" your holiday get-togethers.

The following cocktail, foraged infusion, and wild syrup recipes are excerpted from Zachos's book with permission. The recipes are a great starting place, but feel free to play wild-crafty mixologist and create your own fun combinations.

If you can't find the ingredients or don't have the time, some of the syrups can be purchased online. And, in a pinch, you can just harvest some juniper berries, toss them into a gin and tonic made with a botanical gin, and garnish with a juniper sprig. Voila!

SANTA FE SUNDOWNER (makes 1 drink)

2 ounces lavender-infused gin
½ ounce juniper syrup
2 ounces seltzer
1 lavender ice cube

Combine the gin and juniper syrup in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a rocks glass, add the seltzer, and finish with a lavender ice cube.

Lavender-Infused Gin

1 (750-ml) bottle dry gin, like Bombay Sapphire or Beefeater
1 tablespoon dried or 2 tablespoons fresh lavender buds

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Combine the gin and lavender buds in a quart jar. After 4 hours start tasting the gin; when you like the flavor, strain out the lavender and rebottle the gin. It's easy to overdo this, so keep close tabs on your time. You won't need to infuse the gin for more than 8 hours total; more than that and the infused gin can be bitter.

Juniper Syrup

3 tablespoons fresh or 1½ tablespoons dried juniper berries
1 cup water
1 cup sugar



Santa Fe Sundowner. Photo by Joe Keller.

Roughly break up the juniper berries in a spice grinder or with a mortar and pestle. Combine with the water and sugar in a saucepan and bring to a boil, whisking to dissolve the sugar. Reduce the heat and simmer gently for 20 minutes. Remove the syrup from the heat, cover, and allow it to steep overnight. Strain the liquid into a glass bottle or canning jar. The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Leave ¼ inch headspace.

Lavender Ice Cubes

Boil enough water to fill an ice-cube tray, then let it cool (boiling ensures a clear ice cube, which doesn't taste better but is prettier to look at). Fill the tray with water, place a lavender flower spike in each cube, cover the tray with plastic wrap, and freeze.

THE MERRY WOODSMAN (makes 1 drink)

3 ounces spruce-tip vodka
1½ ounces spruce-tip syrup
¾ ounce elderflower liqueur
1½ teaspoon wild ginger syrup
1½ ounces seltzer
Young spruce tips for garnish (optional)

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For the Holidays, Go a Little Wild—cont. from page 5

Combine the vodka, spruce-tip syrup, elderflower liqueur, and ginger syrup in a shaker full of ice and shake hard for 30 seconds. Strain into a highball glass, top with seltzer, and garnish with a young spruce tip, if desired.

Spruce-Tip Vodka

1 cup feathery spruce tips
1 (750 ml) bottle vodka

Place the spruce tips in a blender and add just enough vodka to cover them. Blend on high until the spruce is completely pulverized, then pour the green liquid into a quart jar and top off with the rest of the vodka.



Spruce tips. Photo by Mars Vilaubi.

Seal the jar, shake the vodka, and put it somewhere dark to steep. Taste it after 2 days. You want a nice lemony taste, and depending on how old your spruce tips are, this may take 2–4 days. Avoid over-infusing the spruce tips. They can get far too resinous and end up tasting like Pine-Sol. When you like the flavor, strain off the vodka, throw away the spruce tips (thank you, spruce tips), and reseal the vodka in the quart jar.

Spruce-Tip Syrup

1 cup roughly chopped spruce tips
1 cup water
1 cup sugar

Combine all three ingredients in a saucepan, bring to a gentle boil, and whisk to blend in sugar. Remove from the heat, cover, and let the syrup sit overnight. Strain and seal in a glass bottle or canning jar. The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For longer term storage process as for Juniper Syrup.

Wild Ginger Syrup

Follow the [recipe](#) at Zachos's Backyard Forager website or purchase online. The purchased version won't taste quite the same as it's not made with our native, wild ginger, but given that the real thing can't be foraged in winter, it is an acceptable substitute.

SFEMG Membership Dues

If you haven't already done so, be sure to pay your 2020 SFEMG membership dues soon. The fee is \$25 if paid before December 31, \$35 from January 1 to January 31. You can go either to the updated [Members Only](#) page, where you will be connected to a Sign Up Genius (SUG) page, or directly to SUG. From there you fill out a few questions (confirming your address, etc.) and can pay the dues.

2020 SNaPP Course

Registration for the 2020 Santa Fe Native Plant Project (SNaPP) advanced training course is now open to certified SFEMGs. Starting on February 8, classes will be held on six consecutive Saturdays from 9 a.m. to noon, in the small annex classroom (location to be confirmed).

These are the scheduled classes:

1. Ecology/Ecosystem Services
2. Practical Water Harvesting Strategies
3. Native Perennials, Ornamental Grasses, and Cold-Hardy Succulents
4. Woody Natives: Trees, Shrubs, Vines, and Groundcovers
5. The Very Dry Garden: Cold-Hardy Native Cacti and Succulents
6. Designing the Native Garden

Students earn 18 CE hours for the course. Tuition is \$100. Register on Sign Up Genius.

Backyard Bugs

The [bagworm](#) was introduced to New Mexico on nursery stock. Larvae of this species feed on evergreens such as juniper and arborvitae but have also generalized to honey locust, sycamore, and linden. They make the bag with silk and leaf debris for protection while they feed, skeletonizing leaves of the host. When they are ready to pupate, they attach the bag to a twig. Winged male moths emerge in fall to mate with worm-like females. The female returns to her bag to lay eggs in her old pupa case. Eggs overwinter in this cozy sac, which measures 5 cm. Hand pick the bags before the emergence of spring foliage and dispose of them in plastic bags to avoid hatch and escape back to host.



Text and photo by Pam Wolfe



Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)

by Pam Wolfe

As if “low water,” “low maintenance,” and “thrives on neglect” were not adequate selling points, this widely distributed native grass takes its fall colors straight from Wolf Kahn’s palette. Impossible pink, orange, and red highlights mingle with bronze beneath silver-white seed heads that persist into winter. The genus name *Schizachyrium* (skitz-a-KER-e-um) is from the Latin *schizein*, to split, and *achyron*, chaff; *scoparium* (skoh-PAIR-e-um) means broomlike. The common name refers to the bluish cast near the base of the blades.

Planting and care: The straight species and interesting cultivars are widely available in nurseries. One season of regular watering is usually enough to get the plants established. They are best planted in lean soil to avoid flopping late in the season. Divide every three to four years. No serious pests or diseases.

Landscape use: Native to tall-grass prairies, woodland edges, and savannahs, little bluestem is used extensively in prairie restoration and for erosion control. It provides excellent cover, nesting sites, and seed for small birds and is a larval host for several species of skippers and the cobweb butterfly. Its drought tolerance and attractive fall color have made it popular as a garden ornamental, beautiful in mass plantings. Little bluestem’s deep roots and adaptability make it an ideal choice for rain gardens and bioswales.

Propagation: Plants may be propagated by root division; they also spread easily by seed.

Plant type: warm-season bunch grass, upright and slender

Bloom time: late summer

Size: 18–36 inches tall x 12–15 inches wide

Sun: full

Water: low

Soil: any well-drained soil, including clay and limestone

USDA zones: 3–9



Little bluestem flanked by sideoats grama at Santa Fe Botanical Garden. Photo by Pam Wolfe.



Late October color. Photo by Pam Wolfe.

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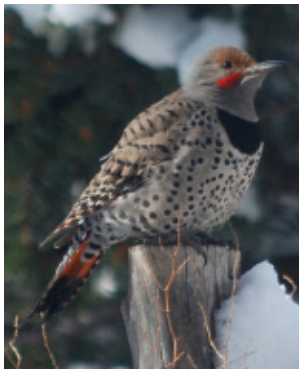
Little Bluestem (Schizachyrium scoparium)—cont. from page 7

References:

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, [Schizachyrium scoparium](#)
Stormwater Magazine, [Stormwater Irrigation: A comparison of soil moisture at curb cuts with and without rain gardens](#), by Aaron T. Kauffman et al.
USDA, [Little Bluestem: Schizachyrium scoparium](#)



Spring and early summer form and color.
Photo from Wikimedia Commons.



Christmas Bird Counts

Begun in 1901 by the National Audubon Society, Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) provide important information about wintering bird populations. The Sangre de Cristo Chapter participates in 10 counts in its area. This year’s CBCs will be held between December 14 and January 5. Novices are welcome and will be paired with more experienced birders. For more information, click [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, and pose your question. Someone will do research and get back to you.



From December through March, there are for many of us three gardens—the garden outdoors, the garden of pots and bowls in the house, and the garden of the mind’s eye.

—**Katherine S. White (1892–1977)**

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.**

The Artful Amoeba (Scientific American), [How a Tiny Pit Decides a Pine Tree's Fate](#), by Jennifer Frazer

Botany One, [Tackling plant blindness: Botany by stealth...](#), by Nigel Chaffey

Edible New Mexico, [Crazy for Crabapples](#), by Ellen Zachos

The Humane Gardener, [These Animals Are Made Possible by Fallen Leaves](#), by Nancy Lawson

The Garden Professors, [Landscape fabric—a cautionary tale](#), by Linda Chalker-Scott

Garden Rant, [Let Natives Be Natives](#), by Thomas Christopher

Gardenista, [10 Things Nobody Tells You About Annuals](#), by Kier Holmes

New York Times, [How Did Plants Conquer Land? These Humble Algae Hold Clues](#), by Carl Zimmer

New York Times, [In the Fight Against Climate Change, Not All Forests Are Equal](#), by Henry Fountain

Santa Fe New Mexican, [Pine cone collectors help in fire-ravaged New Mexico forests](#), by Susan Montoya Bryan

Science Daily, [New data on the evolution of plants and origin of species](#)

Science Direct, [The global effect of extreme weather events on nutrient supply: a superposed epoch analysis](#)

Trendland, [Monarch Butterflies Arriving for Day of the Dead in Michoacán \[Mexico\]](#), by Cyril Foiret

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.

- Dec 07 Santa Fe Botanical Garden edition with host Lindsay Taylor
- Dec 14 SFEMG edition with host Christine Salem and guests Bob Zimmerman and Laurie McGrath on holiday gift ideas for gardeners
- Dec 21 Santa Fe Farmers Market Institute edition with host Carrie Core
- Dec 28 Home Grown New Mexico edition with host Bob Zimmerman, and guest 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, click [here](#).



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