

# Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners Newsletter



Planned grazing on a ranch in Mosquero, New Mexico, restores the soil and brings back native grasses. Photo by Isabelle Jenniches.

## Growing Roots: How the Healthy Soil Program Works for New Mexico Farmers and Land Managers

by Christina Allday-Bondy and Isabelle Jenniches

We are at a critical time for agriculture and the environment. The realities of extreme weather events, conflicts over water, the blight of rural communities, and diminishing natural resources are bearing down on all New Mexicans, with farmers and ranchers at the forefront of these serious problems. Economically pushed to the brink, farmer suicides have reached an alarming rate. The average age of a New Mexico farm operator is now 60.5 years, the second oldest average for an industry in the country. Where 25 or so years ago farmers received 70 cents of the food dollar, today they receive 6 cents. We should find these facts alarming. Do you know anyone who doesn't eat?

*cont. on page 2*



*Growing Roots: The Healthy Soil Program—cont. from page 1*

At the same time, awareness that soil stewardship can be part of the solution to the climate crisis has been rising, as reflected in several mainstream-media articles this past year. New approaches, mutually beneficial for agriculture and the environment, are gaining traction. Agriculturalists are looking for ways to improve their soil, but they require know-how, sustained technical assistance, help in overcoming institutional barriers, financial incentives, and risk mitigation. Trying a new approach to growing crops or livestock when the weather is already unpredictable risks that hair's edge of financial well-being most fall within. The New Mexico Healthy Soil Working Group formed in the fall of 2018, with the goal of significantly accelerating soil-health stewardship in the state. By addressing the prime challenges of inadequate soil-health education, lack of financial incentives, and prevailing institutional barriers, we succeeded in passing the New Mexico Healthy Soil Act in the spring of 2019. As authors of the bill, we brought together an extensive coalition of more than a hundred food- and agriculture-related organizations, as well as environmental groups and dozens of farms and ranches. With this supportive network, the bill had bipartisan support in the house, received unanimous backing in the senate, and was signed into law by the governor on April 2.

Based on five proven soil-health principles, the Healthy Soil Act establishes a voluntary incentives program and a robust support system. Land managers are offered access to soil-health testing, education, and training, as well as financial and technical assistance. A research component, a soil-health champions network, and training for technical service providers round out the bill. Implementation on the ground is facilitated through Soil & Water Conservation Districts and other local entities, including pueblos, tribes, and acequia and land-grant communities.

The New Mexico Department of Agriculture is tasked with executing the act, including a comprehensive soil-health education package and a user-friendly grant program,

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## In This Issue

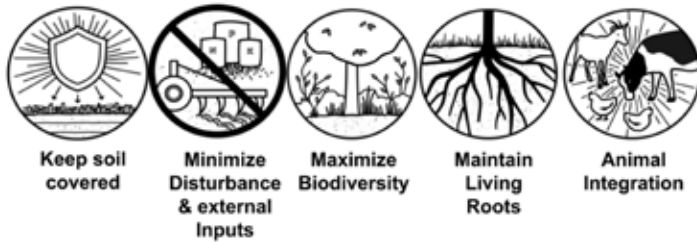
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Editor: Sarah Baldwin  
Art Director: Jannine Cabossel



## SOIL STEWARDSHIP PRINCIPLES



which launched in August 2019. The application period for the first round of farmer and rancher assistance and education programs closed with 84 applications for assistance grants totaling \$1.37 million from an available fund of \$175,000. Data from education and outreach funding has not yet been tabulated.

Moving forward into 2020, we are supporting an increase in state funding to

the Healthy Soil Program, building the soil-health champions network, and continuing to raise awareness of soil-health benefits. Our main focus is to serve New Mexico land managers, as they are key to creating greater soil health on our working lands. To that end, we are collaborating with agricultural advocacy groups and with farmers and ranchers. We are committed to ensuring equity in all our work. The Healthy Soil Program explicitly enables pueblos and tribes, as well as acequias and land-grant communities, to access funding and prioritizes small farms and ranches, young farmers, veterans, and projects that benefit disadvantaged communities.

While we have focused the Healthy Soil Act on agricultural land managers, anyone who manages property can improve their soil's health, contributing to carbon capture and simultaneously building the soil sponge, simply by following the soil-health principles: 1) keep the ground covered, with plants or mulch, to reduce evaporation and cool the soil; 2) minimize inputs like chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides to prevent damage to the soil's ecosystem; 3) maximize biodiversity by increasing both numbers and types of plants; 4) keep a living root system by encouraging year-round plant life; 5) employ animals, including earthworms, to cycle nutrients.

To learn more, visit our [website](#), where you may also join our mailing list. We will not overload your email, but during the legislative session we will send action alerts. We would sincerely appreciate your support as we seek to increase funding for the Healthy Soil Program. Public voices were key to bipartisan legislative support last year.

*Isabelle Jenniches is a skilled community organizer who worked on the Healthy Soil Program in California and facilitated farmer-to-farmer education. She serves on the board of the NM Food and Agriculture Policy Council (NMFAPC) and is part of the National Healthy Soils Policy Network. Christina Allday-Bondy has been an NMFAPC member for several years. She also serves as an associate supervisor with the Edgewood Soil and Water Conservation District and was appointed to the Estancia Basin Water Planning Committee by Bernalillo County. Both women credit their grandparents for their lifelong interest in agriculture and gardening.*

# Message from the President

by Wendy Wilson

January was busy for Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners. Thirty-seven interns graduated. Barbara Ellis did a fantastic job coordinating their classes, keeping track of their volunteer hours, and shepherding them through the last year. Several of the new grads have already assumed leadership roles.



The newest group of SFEMGs, who graduated in January 2020.  
Photo by Karen Armijo.

Consider becoming a mentor for one of this year's 64 interns. Meet your mentee outside of SFEMG events, perhaps for coffee, a walk around the Cornell Rose Garden, or shopping for fresh produce at the farmers market. Join them at our garden sites for OS credits, and sign-up for PE hours together. Personally invite them to SFEMG social events. The involvement and commitment of our interns is crucial to our organization's work.

On Saturday, January 11, the 2020 board was formally sworn in. There were updates on the new intern class and the budget, and we voted on volunteer hours required for 2020. This year MGs will need to complete 8 continuing education (CE), 6 public education (PE), and 16 operational support (OS) hours to maintain certification. We continue to work on the SFEMG handbook and bylaws.

If you haven't checked out our website recently, do! Jan Christine has been working overtime to revamp our communications systems. She has been posting CE opportunities, calls for volunteers, the sign-up for Master Composter classes, project updates, and NMSU research. On the members-only page there are minutes from the latest board meeting, forms, the SFEMG handbook (being updated), state bylaws, leadership contact lists, the member directory, and the members-only calendar.

The committee organizing the garden *festival* (formerly the garden fair) is in full swing. Bonnie Martin and Holly Henry are heading up this year's event, as they did last year. It will be on Saturday, May 9, with a pre-sale (you know, where you get the chance to buy the best plants first!) on Friday. Committee chairs are needed for vendors, hospitality/volunteers, publicity/social media, education/speakers, and donations/solicitations/silent auction. If interested, please contact Bonnie Martin at [ooleyb12@msn.com](mailto:ooleyb12@msn.com) or Holly Henry at [htabq@hotmail.com](mailto:htabq@hotmail.com).

# “I’m a Friend of Mrs. Bobbs”

by Peggy Rudberg

Santa Fe Living Treasure, philanthropist, and gardener extraordinaire Elspeth Grant Bobbs died on November 26, 2019, at her home, La Querencia (the Beloved Place). She was 99 years old. Her 4.3-acre garden between East Alameda and Canyon Road manifests half a century of labor through which she transformed alkaline, calcic soil into an eclectic collection of specialty gardens she called “funky shui,” mingling features of English gardens with plantings sensitive to our Santa Fe environment.



Flagstone paths meander through the 4.3-acre property.  
Photo courtesy of Cynthia Whitney-Ward.



Mrs. Bobbs in 2013.  
Photo by Jannine Cabossel.

Born in England in 1920 to an English mother and an American father, Elspeth began losing her hearing at age 11; by the time she was in her 20s, she was completely deaf. She mastered lip reading and read law at Oxford, but “thank God, never had to practice.”

Around 1942, during World War II, she and her parents moved to San Francisco, her father’s hometown. She learned about New Mexico from writings by Mabel Dodge Lujan and fell in love with Santa Fe when she arrived by train in 1943.

Elspeth settled in and befriended Polish physicist Joseph Rotblat, who had been sent to Los Alamos to work on the Manhattan Project. She offered him support and refuge from the stresses of that life. As foreigners, they were both suspected of being spies, a notion that was eventually discredited. “Who has ever heard of a deaf Mata Hari?” she would later quip. After learning the Axis powers did not have the bomb, Rotblat left New Mexico and years later he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his nuclear nonproliferation work.

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*“I’m a Friend of Mrs. Bobbs” —cont. from page 5*



This dragon sits atop an underground wine cellar.  
Photo by Jannine Cabossel.

In 1945 Elspeth met artist and builder Howard Bobbs, whom she married in 1946. They opened a bookshop and gallery on Canyon Road and had three daughters. Some years later they moved to California for better educational opportunities for the girls, but in 1967 the couple returned to Santa Fe and bought the property off Canyon Road. It had an orchard, a burro corral, bindweed, and neglected buildings, which Howard worked on while Elspeth learned to garden. Over time she improved the soil by adding

organic matter and started growing herbs and vegetables, any extras going to neighbors and local nonprofits. She experimented and embellished, learning from her failures and discovering her tastes—“I don’t like prickles and I don’t like pink,” she once proclaimed—and her imagination took off. Captured rainfall and a drip system sourced from her wells provided water.

After Howard Bobbs died, in 1984, Elspeth devoted herself to perfecting her gardens. Those lucky enough to have been to La Querencia have found sculptures and a miniature railroad, a Love Garden full of aphrodisiac herbs, and a Fairy Village hidden under drooping branches, as well as murals, theatrical props, and artifacts placed throughout, along with 100 varieties of roses, one of which is named after Elspeth. During the 2001 drought, lawn was replaced with scientific and mathematical art installations. She called her terraced rock garden “Machu Picchu del Norte.”



Whimsical vignettes like this one are tucked in all around La Querencia.  
Photo courtesy of Cynthia Whitney-Ward.

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"I'm a Friend of Mrs. Bobbs" —cont. from page 6

I was fortunate to visit in August 2007 with a Master Gardener tour and met Mrs. Bobbs, who was generous and playful. In addition to her accomplishments as a gardener, she was a committed supporter of various causes, and in 1999 she was named New Mexico's Philanthropist of the Year. She was honored as a Santa Fe Living Treasure in 1984.

The article's title comes from a bumper sticker produced for Elsbeth Bobbs's 71st birthday.

### References:

Chasing Santa Fe, [In Memoriam: Elsbeth Bobbs](#), by Cynthia Whitney-Ward  
High Plains Gardening, [La Querencia—Elsbeth Bobbs Garden](#), by Angie Hanna  
*New Mexico Magazine*, [The Secret Garden](#), by Kate Nelson  
Voices of the Manhattan Project, [Elsbeth Bobbs's Interview](#), by Cindy Kelly



The leaf base is more rounded and symmetrical than that of most elm leaves.  
Photo by Steve Dewey, bugwood.org.

## What's That Weed? Siberian Elm (*Ulmus pumila*)

by Pam Wolfe

If you google "Siberian elm," you'll find everything from invective to a recipe for a salad featuring the (oh so many) fresh seeds. A native of China, Siberia, Manchuria, and Korea, this plant is listed as a Class C [noxious weed](#) by the New Mexico Department of Agriculture. Siberian elm exhibits all the characteristics of so many species that are now designated as invasive in North America: it's opportunistic on disturbed ground, it's a prodigious seed producer, and it was introduced intentionally to address specific environmental problems (extreme conditions, Dutch elm disease). This [tough tree](#) comprises 13.5 percent of the canopy in the 16 Santa Fe city parks thus far studied by the [Santa Fe Public Spaces Tree Inventory](#).

Santa Fe city code (14-8.4) prohibits the planting of the tree—as well as Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*), tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), and salt cedar (*Tamarix* spp.)—but a permit is required to remove one with a diameter greater than 12 inches. While some residents consider it a [fine shade tree](#), plumbers, park managers, and the Santa Fe Watershed Association want it gone. Seedlings are usually easy to pull and make good forage, but mature trees are notoriously difficult to kill. An environmentally friendly method is to girdle the tree and leave it standing. Birds, bats, and beetles will enjoy the [snag](#) for years to come.



Seed bank or salad? Photo by Steve Hurst, bugwood.org.



# Native Plants at Risk

by Laurie McGrath

We frequently hear or read about the importance of including native plants in our gardens to support pollinators, beneficial insects, and local ecosystems. The Santa Fe Native Plant Project (SNaPP) was founded with those goals in mind. But in addition to incorporating these plants in home landscapes, it's useful to keep in mind the various factors that lead to native-plant population losses in the first place.

The Forestry Division of the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) is charged, by statute, with evaluating and monitoring the status of plant populations in the state. In that capacity it is responsible for developing the list of endangered plant species in New Mexico. According to their website, there are [37 plant species](#) listed as endangered in the state; 13 of those are also federally listed. Add to that 35 species listed as sensitive by the Bureau of Land Management and another 75 species listed as sensitive by the Forest Service and the numbers begin to loom large.



Aztec gilia (*Aliciella formosa*).  
Photo by Daniela Roth, EMNRD, Forestry Division

How do plants become endangered, at risk, or rare? Many causes may seem obvious, others less so. Residential and commercial development is a fairly obvious contributor: land is cleared and mass plantings and paving replace native habitat. Often those mass plantings, part of a landscape design that may be well-intentioned in terms of water conservation or owner preferences, include invasive species that out-compete native species.

Industrial development also contributes to losses. An example is the Aztec gilia (*Aliciella formosa*). With small populations in an area of expanding energy exploration, off-road vehicle use, and other disturbances, this plant is now considered rare. The [Pecos sunflower](#), a wetland species with populations in various areas of west-central and eastern New Mexico, is subject to groundwater withdrawals that threaten its survival. Some plants are simply unable to survive in altered habitats.

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*Native Plants at Risk—cont. from page 8*

Programs to remove plant growth along roadways often overlook the damage to native-plant communities. Indiscriminate weed removal can be systematically damaging a native-plant population's ability to thrive and reproduce. A large mower is not able to identify, let alone circumnavigate, a patch of prairie coneflower or blue flax. And speaking of mowing, the popularity of lawns further contributes to the problem by replacing native species with non-native grasses.

Another growing concern is the over-harvesting of native plants for medicinal use. The [species at-risk list](#) of United Plant Savers, based in Rutland, Ohio, includes several plants familiar to those of us who garden in Santa Fe County, such as echinacea, Oregon grape (*Mahonia* spp.), and yerba mansa (*Anemopsis californica*). Osha (*Ligusticum porteri*), a common regional medicinal, is also on that list.

Author [Richo Cech](#) says many herbs are at risk because they are “in-demand and deemed hard to grow.” But it's worth trying. Many native plants, not just medicinal ones, are fairly easy to grow from seed. As our climate changes (another factor influencing the status of native plants), gardeners can adopt the noble goal of helping native-plant species spread, reestablish, or adapt.

## Become an Ace Composter!

The Santa Fe Compost Action Team (SCAT) has provided home-composting education in a variety of settings since 2013. As an advanced certification group of Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners, we teach the art, science, materials, methods, and benefits of home composting. Whether or not you are a Master Gardener, you can become a master composter by participating in 24 hours of lectures, demonstrations, hands-on experience, and field trips. We offer two options:

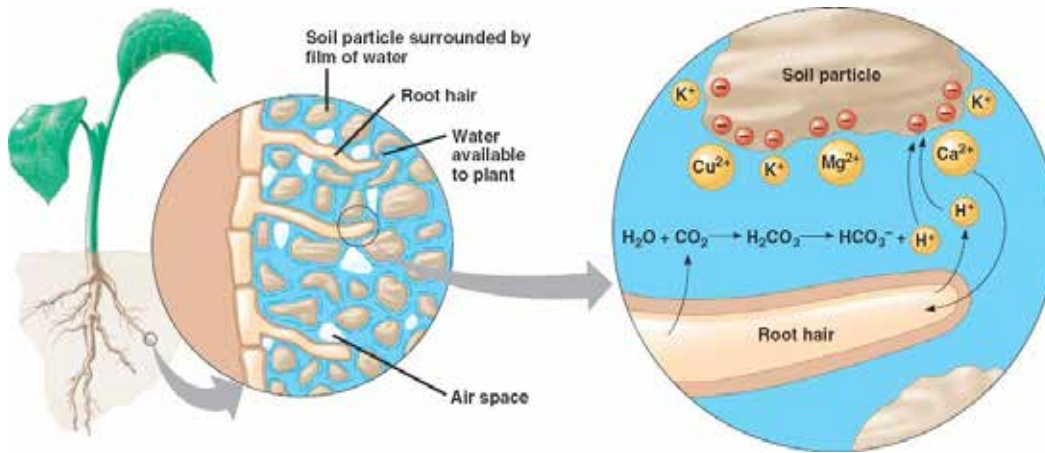
**Track I:** Join SCAT as a Certified Master Composter, with volunteer hours required.

**Track II:** Become a master home composter, without certification and volunteer requirements.

Classes are on four consecutive Saturdays, March 28 through April 25, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., at the Santa Fe County Fairgrounds. SFEMGs and interns earn 24 CEs for completing the training. The cost for both Track I and Track II is \$75. 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.



## Get the Dirt on Your Dirt

by Sandy Powell

Getting to know your soil is the single most important thing you can do to be a successful gardener. This month and next SFEMG is offering two free workshops to look at the physical and chemical properties of soil, how to determine these properties, and how to make improvements.

The first workshop, on February 23, focuses on the soil nutrients essential for good plant health and how to keep those nutrients available in the root zone. Soil texture is also emphasized as it determines the amount of nutrients the soil can hold, how much watering is needed and how often, and how easily the soil can be worked. Participants will be taught a method of determining their own soil texture and what it means.

We will offer detailed instructions on how to take samples from your soil for laboratory testing. You'll learn where, when, and how to take samples, how many to take, what tools to use, and how to package the samples. Examples of previous test results will be discussed so you can determine which tests you'd like to get. We'll provide a list of soil laboratories and talk about how to fill out forms.

The second workshop will be held several weeks later, on March 15, to give people time to obtain lab results of their own soil. This workshop is an opportunity to have your results discussed and to learn about options for any needed soil amendments. Use and availability of organic fertilizers, cover crops, green manures, and other options will be considered.

**Workshop I:** Sunday, February 23, 9 a.m.–noon

**Workshop II:** Sunday, March 15, 9 a.m.–noon

Both workshops will be held at the Santa Fe County Fairgrounds, at 3229 Rodeo Road.

# 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](mailto:news.sfemg@gmail.com)) and we'll include the information in the next issue. **Note that some of these sources have paywalls.**

Atlas Obscura, [Why Trees Are the Most Reliable Historians of Early America](#), by Isaac Schultz

*The Atlantic*, [How a Guy from a Montana Trailer Park Overturned 150 Years of Biology](#), by Ed Yong

*Edible New Mexico*, [New Mexico's Native Hops](#), by Ellen Zachos

The Garden Professors, [Fail to Plan or Plan to Fail? Planning for a year of garden success](#), by John Porter

*The Guardian*, [Lab-grown food will soon destroy farming—and save the planet](#), by George Monbiot

*New York Times*, [Bumblebee Vomit: Scientists Are No Longer Ignoring It](#), by Cara Giaimo

*New York Times*, [The Secret Jailhouse Garden of Rikers Island](#), by Richard Schiffman

*New Yorker*, [The Past and the Future of the Earth's Oldest Trees](#), by Alex Ross

Politico, [How a closed-door meeting shows farmers are waking up on climate change](#), by Helena Bottemiller Evich

Science Daily, [Finding common ground for scientists and policymakers on soil carbon and climate change](#)

Southwest Yard & Garden (NMSU), [Pruning Dos and Don'ts](#), by Marisa Thompson

*Washington Post*, [A climate change solution beneath our feet](#) (content from UC Davis)

University of Delaware, [Restoring Nature's Relationships](#), presentation by Doug Tallamy

# 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.

- Feb 01 Santa Fe Botanical Garden edition with host Lindsay Taylor and guests
- Feb 08 SFEMG edition with host Christine Salem and guests Kathy Morse and Vicki Jacobsen on the upcoming Santa Fe Compost Action Team (SCAT) certification training
- Feb 15 Santa Fe Farmers Market Institute edition—Food, Farms & Friends—with host Carrie Core
- Feb 22 SFMEGs Christine Salem and Pam Wolfe with Doug Tallamy, author of *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard*
- Feb 29 Home Grown New Mexico edition with host Christine Salem 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. To listen to previous broadcasts, click [here](#).

## MASTER GARDENER HOURS



**2019 Recap**  
**Goal: 10,000 hours**  
**Total: 9,581 hours**

**HOURS**  
**JANUARY thru**  
**MARCH**

**HOURS**  
**APRIL thru**  
**JUNE**

**HOURS**  
**JULY thru**  
**SEPTEMBER**

**HOURS**  
**OCTOBER thru**  
**DECEMBER**

## Membership Report

Dear members and interns,

As of January 1, 2020, I took on the role of membership coordinator, replacing Tammy McLellan. Tammy has worked diligently this past year keeping our membership roster accurate. We wish her success in her ongoing Master Gardener life.

In 2019 SFEMGs reported a total of 9,581 volunteer hours, as follows: Organizational Support (OS), 6,236 hours; Continuing Education (CE), 1,755 hours; and Public Education (PE), 1,590 hours. Congratulations to all MGs and interns for contributing so much to our community.

We currently have 195 members, including 37 graduates from 2019. This month a new group begins classes.

Our biggest goal in 2019 was to solidify the organizational transition to SFEMG. While progress has been made, we still have work to do. Accordingly, in 2020 we will retain last's year volunteer-hour goal of 10,000. Members will be required to do 16 OS, 8 CE, and 6 PE hours to maintain certification.

Please note our new, dedicated email address for membership matters: [members.sfemg@gmail.com](mailto:members.sfemg@gmail.com).

Here's to a wonderful gardening year!

Gail Dodge  
Membership Coordinator

## Calendar of Events

All events are open to the public. Visit our [website](#) for a complete list of garden-related activities and classes with times, locations, and registration information. Note that “phc” stands for “per hour of class time.”

DATES	EVENTS	CREDITS
Feb 11	Xeriscape Gardens, 7–9 p.m. (SFCC)	2 CE
Feb 13	Lecture: Columbines, Color, and Co-Evolution, 3–4:30 p.m. (SFBG)	1.5 CE
Feb 15	Simple Greywater Systems, 9 a.m.–noon (SFCC)	3 CE
Feb 21–22	NM Organic Farming Conference, full days (NMOFC)	1 CE phc
Feb 23	Soil-Testing Workshop, Part I, 9 a.m.–noon (SFEMG)	2 CE
Feb 25	A Rose by Any Name Is Easy to Grow, 7–9 p.m. (SFCC)	2 CE
Feb 27	Lecture: Supporting Resilient Trees, 3–4 p.m. (SFBG)	1 CE
Feb 27	Weed ID and Management, 6–8:30 p.m. (SFCEO)	2.5 CE
Feb 29	Arid Land Restoration, 9 a.m.–noon (SFCC)	3 CE

**NMOFC:** [New Mexico Organic Farming Conference](#); conference at Hotel Albuquerque

**SFBG:** [Santa Fe Botanical Garden](#); lectures at the Udall Building, 725 Camino Lejo

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

**SFCEO:** Santa Fe County Extension Office, 3229 Rodeo Rd., 505-471-4711

**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*