

# Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners Newsletter

## “Santa Fe Saguaro”

By Peggy Rudberg



Common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) at the Santa Fe Botanical Garden  
Aug. 7, 2020. Photo by Kathy Haq.

While first responses to *Verbascum thapsus* L. vary greatly, all express curiosity when seeing common mullein for the first time. The word mullein may have originated in the French word *mol* or the Latin *mollis*, both meaning soft. I call mullein “Santa Fe saguaro” for its similar columnar shape often with upward bending arms. Saguaro cacti are found only in the Sonoran Desert and are the beloved state flower of Arizona. Mullein is native to Eurasia and the Mediterranean Region where leaves were made into a tea for diarrhea, migraines and a number of respiratory illnesses. The flowers were used to make yellow dye or infused to treat earaches or soothe minor wounds. By the 1700s colonists had carried it to the Americas for medicinal purposes and later for use as a piscicide. Crushed

seeds tossed into slow moving water releases compounds that stun fish, making them easier to catch. This is now illegal in the United States.

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Common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) at the Santa Fe Botanical Garden Aug. 7, 2020. Photo by Kathy Haq.

Mullein spread throughout the U.S. and southern Canada, and Native Americans quickly found uses for the plant. They lined their shoes with leaves to provide warmth. The Hopi smoked dried leaves to treat mental illness. Navajos inhaled smoked leaves for fever and coughs and the Zuni used the roots for rashes and skin infections.

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Editor: Kathy Haq  
Art Director: Jannine Cabossel

Contact us at:  
[news.sfemg@gmail.com](mailto:news.sfemg@gmail.com)



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Common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) at the Santa Fe Botanical Garden Oct. 31, 2020. Photo by Kathy Haq.

Common mullein is a biennial plant in the Scrophulariaceae or figwort family and requires two years to complete its life cycle. In the first year seeds develop into a deep taproot with a lateral fibrous root system and a basal rosette with large gray-green wooly leaves. The second year *V. thapsus* produces a sturdy vertical stalk that can reach over 7 feet tall. On the lower stem alternate leaves growing upward directly from the stalk decrease in size as they climb. Their hairy surface reduces water loss from evaporation. A dense cluster of small five-petaled yellow flowers covers the terminal stalk and open a few at a time. Flowering

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can last throughout the growing season. Each flower stays open for just one day allowing pollination by bees, butterflies and other insects, but can also self-pollinate. After flowering is complete, each plant drops hundreds of seedpods dispersing 100,000 to 240,000 tiny brown seeds, then dies. Seedlings establish best in open settings with sparse canopy often found in disturbed or overgrazed areas or in post fire plant communities. Buried seeds can remain viable for hundreds of years.

When the stalk branches and grows arms like candelabra, it increases its reproductive capacity. Another interesting formation can occur with fasciation. This happens when a mutation occurs in the apical meristem, the plant's growing point, creating abnormal fusion and a flattened bulbous terminal bud. An infectious disease or mere chance may cause this mutation but brings no harm to the plant. This deformity exists in many different species of plants especially cacti and succulents. It is uncommon but often highly valued. Crested or cristate saguaros showing this atypical growth are unusually beautiful.

This intriguing plant could make a fun addition to the wilder parts of your garden. Bees and other insects delight in the flowers and birds eat the seeds. In northern New Mexico it is common winter forage for elk and deer. It thrives in poor alkaline soil like we have in Santa Fe and requires only 3-6 inches of annual rainfall. It loves full sun. Considered a weed or invasive pest in some parts of the country, spread can be controlled by removing unwanted plants before they flower. Less invasive hybrids are also available. Since wild common mullein is abundant here you could harvest local seeds in the fall if done so responsibly.

#### **References:**

[“\*Verbascum thapsus\*,”](#) Fire Effects Information System.

[“\*Common Mullein, Verbascum thapsus\*,”](#) University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Division of Extension.

[Native American Ethnobotany Database search](#)

## A Message from SFEMG Board President Wendy Wilson

Perhaps this is too personal, but I literally had ants in my pants last weekend. I was putting in a little garden outside our casita. While I was planting agastache, lavender, penstemon, hardy geraniums and baptisia, the big red ants were marching up my pant leg (and shirt) and left me with welts the size of golf balls. And yet, I was so happy to be in my garden, touching soil, planting beauty and imagining how I'll enjoy this little pocket garden later this summer.



The process, anticipation and satisfaction of a job well done is certainly an integral part of being a gardener. Our Online Plant Sale, held over Mother's Day weekend, was a culmination of process, anticipation, execution and success. Led by Susie Summers and Bonnie Martin, the organizing committee and more than 100 volunteers filled 326 orders. Santa Ana Pueblo's nursery, Reunity Farms and Waterwise Gardening supplied beautiful plants that will provide valuable food, habitat and protection for pollinators, birds and animals.

Groups within the SFEMG are conducting classes that teach members, interns and the public how to increase soil nutrition, the proper way to collect and apply water, what plants to select, how to plant and prune them and how to use mulch to enhance the garden and conserve moisture. There are multitudes of classes, both virtually and live, that can be accessed on our website and are listed in the newsletter. Take time to learn something new, refresh your memory and explore the many subjects that make gardening in New Mexico so unique.

Gardening in New Mexico is demanding. We are here to help you!

- Sign up for our excellent [Intern Training Program](#). Registration happens in late fall and the classes run once a week for 15 weeks. Look for information on our website: [sfemg.org](http://sfemg.org).
- Ask gardening questions through our hotline (505.471.6251) or Ask A Master Gardener Online: See "[Have a Gardening Question?](#)" online.
- Visit our Ask a Master Gardener sites, staffed by Master Gardeners and interns: Reunity Resources, 1829 San Ysidro Crossing, 9 a.m.-Noon Saturdays and the Eldorado Farmers' Market, 7 Caliente Road, 3-6 p.m. Fridays Hopefully, as COVID-19 public health restrictions lift, more sites will be available.
- Visit our Demonstration Gardens adjacent to the Santa Fe County Extension Office, 3229 Rodeo Road: herb, cactus, vegetable, compost, and native plant (in development).

### Explore the gardens the SFEMGs maintain:

- [Randall Davey Audubon Center Wildlife Garden](#), 1800 Upper Canyon Road, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Saturday
- [Garden at El Zaguán](#), 545 Canyon Road, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday

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- [Harvey Cornell Rose Park](#), 1320 Galisteo Parkway, 6 a.m.-10 p.m. daily. The Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners are your horticultural education providers in Santa Fe County. We are here to serve you and your garden.

Back to my garden,  
Wendy

## ONLINE PLANT SALE

### A Big Thanks!

The SFEMG's very first Online Plant Sale wrapped up May 9, and I am thrilled to say it was quite successful! Although we missed vendors that we have had at our in-person Plant Sale and Garden Fair in past years, it was great to work with interns and Master Gardeners we haven't been able to see in person for the last year. Many hugs, lots of laughter and plenty of hard work went into making this event a reality.

I especially would like to thank: **Honorary Master Gardener Russ Funk**, who worked tirelessly creating the website for our sale and trained us. We couldn't have done it without him! **Sale co-leader Susie Summers**, who spent hours organizing and selecting plants, to name just a few of her contributions. **Mike McGeary** for leading operations. **Darlene Maestas** for making sure orders were complete. **Pam Wolfe and Sherry Snyder** for their photos and descriptions of plants. **Kathy Haq** for her design of the Online Plant Sale flyer and the many volunteers that gave their time and expertise. It was just what we all needed — to be together again!

Thanks, too, to **Mike Halverson** from Santa Ana Garden Center and Native Plant Nursery, **Janelle Plummer** from Reunity Resources, and **Ava and David Salman** from Waterwise Gardening.

I have heard so many positive comments about our event: "the plants were high quality," "everyone seemed to enjoy themselves," "the customer service was outstanding!" and too many more to include here.

Although no decision has been made as to a future Garden Fair vs. another Online Plant Sale, perhaps it is the way of the future!

My best,  
Plant Sale Co-Leader Bonnie Martin

# Volunteer Requirements Adjusted for 2021

The SFEMG board of directors has adjusted the number of volunteer hours required for Master Gardener certification to reflect the fact that the coronavirus has limited opportunities to engage in outreach and public education. The new requirements are:

- 14 hours of Continuing Education (CE) for Master Gardeners / 4 for interns**
- 2 hours of Outreach and Public Education (formerly PE)**
- 14 hours of Program & Project Support (formerly Operational Support or OS)**

Volunteer hours should be recorded on the New Mexico State University portal accessed via the SFEMG members-only web page. This year's hours should be posted by Nov. 30 to count toward 2022 certification, and it's recommended that volunteers post their hours on an ongoing basis throughout the year.

## Webinars, Etc.

[Conserving Water Together — Techniques for Home, Yard, Farm & Ranch](#). A Webinar Series presented by NMSU's Cooperative Extension Service. 6-7:30 p.m. Thursdays (1.5 CE)

### **June 3**

Water Cycle of New Mexico / Water Conservation in the Yard

### **June 10**

Soil Health / Water-Wise Vegetable Gardening

### **June 17**

Water Conservation and Management on New Mexico Farms / Soil Moisture Sensors for Precise Irrigation / Alternative Water Sources for Landscape Irrigation

### **June 24**

Managing Groundwater: An Invisible Resource / Water Conservation on the Ranch

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### **June 5**

Let's Grow Series: Gardening With Native Plants

10 a.m. via Zoom

[Sign up here](#)

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# Backyard Bugs

## Silver-spotted Tiger Moth (*Lophocampa argentata*)

by Pam Wolfe

[Silver-spotted tiger moth](#) (*Lophocampa argentata*) is the defoliating caterpillar of a moth from the genus of tussock moths that includes the black and orange caterpillars we call ‘woolly bear.’ In Oregon the major host is Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), occasionally true fir (*Abies* spp), spruce (*Picea* spp) and pine (*Pinus* spp). Its range is Canada to northern Mexico and most states west of Texas. In the piñon-juniper woodlands around Santa Fe, the caterpillars have been seen feeding on one-seed juniper (*Juniperus monosperma*). They apparently began feeding last fall, overwintered in the caterpillar form in sheltering webs, and started feeding again this spring. Adults will emerge in summer, mate, and lay eggs in July and August. The caterpillars’ feeding damage is reported to be cosmetic. One caterpillar in captivity since March is still feeding, while a second has pupated. Images of the adult moth (not yet seen) will help verify the species of this pest.



Photo credit: Caterpillar collected by H. McIlvaine Lewis.  
Photo by Pam Wolfe



Photo credit: Pupa formed in captivity. Look for these in junipers now. Remove with implement or wear protective gloves; the small hairs are venomous. Photo by Pam Wolfe

## We are here to help!

If you have a gardening question, Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners are available to help. Go to [sfemg.org](http://sfemg.org) and pose your question. Someone will do research and get back to you.







## Blanketflower (*Gaillardia* spp.)

by Ann Caudell

Blanketflowers consist of nearly a dozen species native to the Rocky Mountains, northern plains and inland Northwest. They are characterized by bright colors ranging from yellows, mixes of orange and yellow, and reds. The flowers begin as rosettes of pale-green leaves roughly an inch wide and 4 or more inches long; they are rough in texture, hairy and irregularly lobed. Flowers are 3 inches in diameter with tip-notched petals.



*Photo credit: Courtesy R. W. Smith, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center*

Many bloom throughout the spring and summer and attract a variety of wild bees such as green metallic sweat bees (*Agapostemon* spp.) and leafcutter bees (*Megachile* spp.). In addition to bees they also attract other pollinators such as butterflies and moths. They have nectar value for pollinators including the gaillardia flower moth and the bordered patch butterfly.

Blanketflowers are found in sandy soils on roadsides, in fields, Ponderosa woodlands and piñon-juniper forests between 3,000 and 6,000 feet in elevation.

### **Landscape use**

Blanketflowers are used for rangeland and pastures, pollinator nesting material, wildflower meadows, prairie restoration and caterpillar host plants.

### **Planting and Care**

Blanketflowers should be planted in dry, sandy, well-draining soil in full sun. Although they are drought tolerant, they should be watered at least once weekly and to a depth of 1 foot in normal soil, to a depth of 2 feet in sand or silty soil when temperatures are 80 degrees Fahrenheit or above. They are ideal for xeriscaping. During cooler temperatures, they can tolerate monthly watering and do not require fertilizers. To keep plants in bloom, trim spent flowers prior to their going to seed. If left untrimmed, they will self sow.

### **Propagation**

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Blanketflower seeds can be sown in fall or spring. They are known for being very easy to establish; simply rake the seeds into the topsoil and allow them to germinate before mowing or cleaning up the area in fall.

**Plant Type:** The genus contains annual, biennial, and perennial species.

**Bloom Time:** Spring and Summer

**Size:** Variable, depending on species

**Sun:** Full

**Soil:** Sandy, well-draining

**Water:** Low

**USDA Zone:** 1-8

**References:**

100 Plants to Feed the Bees: Provide a Healthy Habitat to Help Pollinators Thrive. 2016. The Xerces Society. Storey Publishing. Pgs. 34-35.

Landscaping with Native Plants of the Southwest. 2016. George Oxford Miller. Voyageur Press. Pg 133.

Gardening for Butterflies. 2016. The Xerces Society. Timber Press. Pgs 126 & 217.

New Mexico Gardener's Guide-2nd Edition. 2004. Cool Springs Press. Pg 110.



**“You see,” Father Worm began, “Harriet loved Nature. But loving Nature is not the same as understanding it. And Harriet not only misunderstood the things she saw — vilifying some creatures while romanticizing others — but also her own connection to them.”**

From “There’s a Hair in My Dirt! A Worm’s Story” by cartoonist Gary Larson. “Who better qualified to explain ecology than the madcap sage of the biological sciences whose extravagantly admired cartoons already festoon laboratory bulletin boards across the land?” Edward O. Wilson asserted in his foreword to this 1998 classic.

## New & Noteworthy

Have you recently read a gardening-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 try to include the information in the next issue. **Note that some of these sources may have paywalls.**

[“The Master Gardeners: Translocation – Good for whom?”](#) by Pam Wolfe, shared with permission from *HOME/Santa Fe New Mexican* (May 2021)

[“The Master Gardeners: Advice you can count on”](#) by Laurie McGrath, shared with permission from *HOME/Santa Fe New Mexican* (April 2021)

[“Touch and Grow: Herb Appeal”](#) by Marisa Thompson, p. 38 *edible New Mexico*, May/June 2021 issue

[“What to Know About Hay Bale Gardening”](#) by Lisa Meyers McClintick, *Family Handyman* (May 18, 2021)

[“Dutch tulip farmers are hoping for a post-pandemic boom”](#) by Muhammed Muheisen, *National Geographic* (May 13, 2021)

[“Rare plants to be reviewed amid New Mexico oil and gas fight”](#) by Susan Montoya Bryan, *AP News* (May 12, 2021)

[“America’s electric cars need lithium so badly it may wipe out this species”](#) by Matt McFarland, *CNN Business* (May 10, 2021)

[“Balconies in bloom! Chelsea Flower Show will recognize veranda displays for the first time after flat-dwellers discovered gardening during lockdown”](#) by *Daily Mail Reporter* (May 9, 2021)

[“These ant ‘portraits’ reveal how diverse and beautiful these insects are”](#) by Douglas Main/photographs by Eduard Florin Niga, *National Geographic* (May 4, 2021)

[“Trees Talk to Each Other. ‘Mother Tree’ Ecologist Hears Lessons For People, Too”](#) by Dave Davies, *NPR’s “Fresh Air”* (May 4, 2021)

[“NASA Astronaut Paints a Picture of Success Growing Plants in Space”](#) by Jim Cawley, NASA’s Kennedy Space Center (April 27, 2021)



# The Garden Journal Radio Show

**Every Saturday  
10-10:30 a.m.**



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. Show host: Christine Salem

**June 5: Slow Food Santa Fe edition**

“What is Organic?” Hosts Lissa Johnson and Nina Rosenberg talk with Dave Chapman of the Real Organic Project.

**June 12: SFEMG edition**

“People in Relationship with Plants.” Aubrey Streit Krug with The Land Institute joins host Christine Salem.

**June 19: Food, Farms & Friends edition**

Host Carrie Core presents “Soil Stories.”

**June 26: Home Grown New Mexico edition**

Jannine Cabossel, “The Tomato Lady,” offers vegetable gardening to-dos, tips and techniques for July. More info at [Giant Veggie Gardener](#).

Schedule subject to change. To listen to previous broadcasts, click [here](#).

# May Calendar of Events

We do not know when face-to-face events will be viable again, but please continue to check the SFEMG website and the websites of other organizations to see what's being offered. Note that "phc" stands for "per hour of class time."

## June 6

[Veggie Gardening In Our Santa Fe Area](#) (HGNM) 2 CE

## June 9

[Best of Perennials from the Colorado State University Perennial Trials](#) (CSU) 1 CE phc

## June 11

[Container Gardening in New Mexico](#) (BCE) 1 CE

## June 17

[Human Dimensions of Pollinator Conservation](#) (XS) 1 CE

June 20

[Grain Trials Field Day](#) (HGNM) 2 CE

## June 25

[Water Saving for Backyards — Sponges, Swales and Mulching](#) (BCE) 1 CE

## Aug. 20-22

[Native Plant Society of New Mexico Annual Conference](#) (live/virtual) 1 CE phc

## Sept. 12-17

[2021 International Master Gardener Conference](#) (virtual) 1 CE phc

**BCE:** [NMSU Bernalillo County Extension Office](#)

**CSU:** [Colorado State University Extension](#)

**HGNM:** [Home Grown New Mexico](#)

**NMSU:** [New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service](#)

**XS:** [Xerces Society](#)

See next month's SFEMG Newsletter for more Continuing Education options.

**Members Only:** For a complete list of Master Gardener projects and to sign up, please visit SignUpGenius, a link to which is in the Members Only section of the SFEMG website. To log volunteer hours worked, visit the NMSU tracking site that you can link to from the same location.



### **Mission Statement:**

*Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners is a nonprofit 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.*

