

## The SFEMG Cactus Garden: A Spiny Delight

Story by Cactus Garden Project Leader Cullen Hallmark

Photos courtesy Pam Wolfe



Claret Cups (*Echinocereus coccineus*, *E. triglochidiatus*)

In 2012, the Santa Fe Master Gardener Association, a predecessor to the SFEMG, began work on a new demonstration project: the [Cactus Garden](#). With the help of many volunteers, Project Leader Jill Foster designed and built a compact garden at the west end of the larger parking lot at 3229 Rodeo Road. At the time, there were few large cactus gardens in Santa Fe, and her objective was to show how these native plants could enhance a landscape.

Her plan, however, was nearly thwarted by the local prairie dog colony. The “dogs”

were delighted to discover the new salad bar and promptly threatened its viability. Very soon thereafter, the entire garden hastily moved to Jill’s house, where it remained until a new fence could be built. In the fall of 2014, the cacti moved back (nervously) to the new fortress. This time, the prairie dogs found that access had been blocked by not only the upper, visible part of the fence but also a lower underground extension. The fence is (usually) successful at excluding tunneling rodents.

Some rodents go up and over fences. Occasionally, we will find evidence that a packrat is trying to set up housekeeping. That evidence isn’t hard to find; packrats like to snip off pieces of cholla and scatter them around a new burrow to discourage mammalian predators. We have found, however, that if the pieces of cholla are picked up and replanted and if the burrows are collapsed with a shovel or a compacting tool, the packrats generally feel unwelcome and move on. For the last couple of years, our longest guest has been a curve-billed thrasher, which has raised several broods in one of our cane chollas (*Cylindropuntia spinosior*).

A cactus garden isn’t everyone’s cup of tea. Most people would have to admit that a cactus garden is a showcase of textures. But keep your hands to yourself! Every spring, the garden changes from a spiny wonderland to a feast for the eyes and local pollinators. The show begins with the claret cups (*Echinocereus coccineus* and *E. triglochidiatus*). These cold-hardy natives form mounds and put out

**SAVE THESE DATES!**  
**Ask a Master Gardener**

Master gardeners will be in the Botanical Garden on the following dates to answer your gardening questions and discuss good gardening practices:

- **Sunday, June 18 (Father’s Day)**
- **Tuesday, July 4 (Independence Day)**
- **Thursday, August 3 (National Watermelon Day)**
- **Monday, September 4 (Labor Day)**

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Please note: The Calendar section will return in July.

**Our Mission**

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.  
[sfemg.org](http://sfemg.org)

SFEMG is one of more than a dozen county-based master gardener programs run under the auspices of New Mexico State University’s College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences.  
[aces.nmsu.edu](http://aces.nmsu.edu)

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masses of orange-red flowers that last for days. The hot pink of the beavertail prickly pear (*Opuntia basilaris*) can be overwhelming. As the days get longer and warmer, the other cacti wake up and contribute their parts as well. Some are delicate and last but a few hours. Others are completely immodest. The show lasts for weeks. All those flowers draw bees. These bees are not your ordinarily hardworking pollen gatherers. They are instead undignified. They have lost all self-respect and they wallow in the pollen.

Over time, those flowers turn into fruit. In the fall, the purple tuna of the Engelmann's prickly pear (*Opuntia engelmannii*) look like fat plums. Most people miss the tiny fruits produced by the Sneed's pincushion (*Escobaria sneedii*), but they are there among the miniature stems. In winter, many of the prickly pear pads turn purple, and they go limp until the weather warms again.

Compared to places in the Chihuahuan and Sonoran deserts, Santa Fe is not the place to find dozens of diverse species in the wild. But our garden has over 50 different types of cacti. They get no special care, and they are outside all winter. Several of our plants are unusual, and some are actually endangered. We take pride in propagating and spreading some of those rare plants. Although we are constantly experimenting with new species, we make an effort to find plants that will do well in Santa Fe without special treatment. We invite you to visit and to consider growing your own.



**Photos top to bottom:**

**Beavertail Prickly Pear (*Opuntia basilaris*)**

**Sneed's Pincushion (*Escobaria sneedii*)**

**The endangered Santa Fe Cholla (*Cylindropuntia veridiflora*)**

## **CELEBRATION OF LIFE**

**John "Obie" Oberhausen  
Cactus Rescue Project Co-founder**

11 a.m. Sunday, June 4  
Eldorado Community  
Improvement Association  
1 Hacienda Loop, Santa Fe, NM 87508



## A Message from SFEMG Board President Anne Rivas

Our 2023 plant sale has wrapped up. Thank you to all the volunteers who made it a success, especially Wendy Wilson who led us in a well-organized, well-run operation. This was my first SFEMG plant sale. I wrote plant descriptions for last year's online sale but had no idea of the scope and depth of organization it took to order the plants, inventory, pack and handle distribution as people came to pick up their orders.

This year's sale was in person, and we underestimated the excitement and enthusiasm people would have for shopping in person. Many of the plants sold out on the first day. We ordered more plants this year than we did last year, and it's obvious that we will want to order even more plants for next year's plant sale.

We have two Let's Grow events for the public this month. At 9 a.m. Saturday June 17, the Santa Fe Native Plant Project will present "Garden with Native Plants." This presentation at the County Extension Campus Native Plant Demonstration Gardens will focus on ways to successfully grow colorful, drought-tolerant, low-maintenance plants. The southwest courtyard garden provides inspiration for a small front yard, patio or courtyard garden filled with colorful and long-blooming native plants. The native grassland restoration to the west of the Extension Office demonstrates how a formerly compacted, nutrient-poor plot can be converted into a beautiful meadow with native grasses, legumes, annuals and perennials. The pollinator garden on the east side of the Extension Office is planted with grasses, perennials, and annuals that provide a habitat and food source for bees, butterflies, and other beneficial creatures. The Extension Office is located at 3229 Rodeo Road, Santa Fe, NM 87507. Onsite parking is available.

Join us from 5-7 p.m. Friday, June 30, at the Garden at El Zaguán, for "Gardening for the Past, Present & Future." Learn how the historic garden was created in the mid-1800s, changes in its landscaping in the last 170 years and how climate stresses and sustainability goals are driving new plant choices and gardening practices. The Garden at El Zaguán is located at 545 Canyon Road, Santa Fe, NM 87501. Parking is on neighboring streets.



### **We are here to help!**

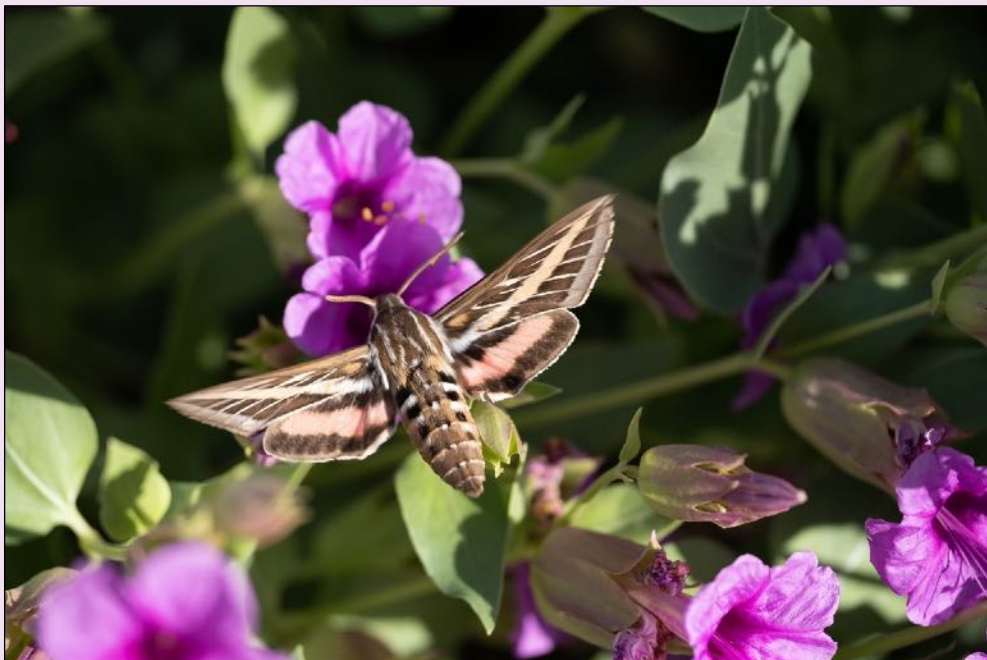
If you have gardening questions, Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners are available to help.

You can pose your questions online [here](#). We'll do some research and get back to you.



## Desert Four O'Clock (*Mirabilis multiflora*)

By Pam McFarland



*Hyles lineata* on *Mirabilis multiflora* | Courtesy Brian Hagenbuch

As I approach a certain portion of my yard in the summer and early fall, I hear the unmistakable sound of white-lined sphinx moths (*Hyles lineata*) making their way to my main Desert Four O'clock patch. They feed on the copious nectar of the showy magenta tubular flowers measuring 2 inches across and 2 to 3 inches long. The females lay eggs on the leaves and the caterpillars feast on the leaves before dropping to the ground and pupating underground, emerging in two weeks as the next generation of *Hyles lineata*.

My romance with *Mirabilis multiflora* started with a few specimens planted in an area of my yard with severely disturbed lean soil. The next winter the plants died back and the plant skeletons broke off at ground level and rolled down the slope, dropping hundreds of peppercorn-sized seeds in the disturbed soil. The next spring dozens of *Mirabilis multiflora* popped up — a welcome addition to the once bare hillside.

The Latin name *Mirabilis multiflora* translates to "wondrous multi-flowered plant." It is native to the Southwest and northern Mexico, growing in gravelly and sandy soils in sun and partial shade.

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The plants form dense dark green clumps up to 2 feet tall by 3 feet wide, and from June to September the plants are covered with magenta flowers that open on cloudy days and in late afternoon, hence the common name Desert Four O'Clock. The plants have a famously deep tap root measuring up to 4 feet long and 4 inches in diameter.

**Landscape use:** *Mirabilis multiflora* is extremely dense and perfect for smothering out weeds. The sphinx moths and hummingbirds visiting the flowers provide endless entertainment.

Because *Mirabilis multiflora* produces many seeds, it is ideal for informal portions of your yard. You may prefer it in the more formal areas of your yard; seedlings are easy to pull the first year before they form deep tap roots.

**Planting and care:** *Mirabilis multiflora* plants can be transplanted in spring when daytime temperatures are above 75 degrees. They prefer well-drained, lean soil; in the wild the plants often cluster around the base of juniper and piñon trees. They are easily grown from seeds — cold stratify the seeds for two months and sow ½-inch deep in the spring, or sow seeds in fall for the next year. Once established, the plant needs no supplemental irrigation although the foliage and flowers are more lush if deeply watered every 3 to 4 weeks.

**Plant type:** herbaceous perennial

**Bloom time:** summer to fall

**Size:** 2 feet tall by 3 feet wide

**Sun:** full sun to part shade

**Soil:** any soil, even sand or clay

**Water:** xeric, no supplemental water once established

**USDA zones:** 4–8

**Elevation:** 2,500-7,500 feet

**References:**

Phillips, Judith. "New Mexico Gardeners Guide. Cool Springs Press, 2005.

[Mirabilis multiflora](#), Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center Plant Database.



***Mirabilis multiflora* as edging and groundcover | Courtesy Pam McFarland**

## Backyard Bugs



*Pepsis* sp. nectaring in a patch of Chinese forget-me-nots (*Cynoglossum amabile*).  
Although the sting is painful, these solitary wasps are not aggressive.  
Photo courtesy Brian Hagenbuch

### Tarantula Hawk Wasp *Pepsis* spp. (family Pompilidae: Spider Wasps)

By Pam Wolfe

With a body length up to 1.75 inches and a wingspan about twice that, these wasps are easy to spot foraging among blossoms in your garden. Although they prefer milkweed (*Asclepias* spp.) both males and females will nectar on a wide range of flowers. The larvae, however, are not vegetarians. The female wasp hunts on the ground and will lurk outside a tarantula burrow waiting for the resident to emerge and then subdue the spider. She will then drag her prey to a burrow (sometimes its own) and lay a single egg on the paralyzed spider. The wasp larva will feed on the still-living spider, pupate and emerge as an adult after several weeks. The wasp's sting is notoriously painful to humans.

[Bugguide.net](http://bugguide.net) lists 14 species of *Pepsis* separated into seven groups. Coloration varies from iridescent blue to blue green to blue violet; wings are usually orange. The animal is difficult to identify to species. *Pepsis formosa*, now *P. grossa*, was declared the official state insect of New Mexico in 1989.



Let's Grow is a **free public education series** for home gardeners and the garden-curious who want to learn about soil, compost, native plants, creating habitat for pollinators and more! Mark your calendars! No registration required.

## JUNE

### **9 a.m. Saturday, June 17 | How to Garden with Native Plants**

Classroom presentation in the Large Annex of the Exhibit Hall followed by a stroll through the Native Plant Demonstration Gardens, Santa Fe County Cooperative Extension Campus, 3229 Rodeo Road  
Learn how to successfully grow colorful, drought-tolerant, low-maintenance native plants.

### **5-7 p.m. Friday, June 30 | Gardening for the Past, Present & Future**

*Garden at El Zaguán, 545 Canyon Road*

Learn how the historic garden was created in the mid-1800s, changes in landscaping over the last 170 years and how climate stresses and sustainability goals are driving new plant choices and gardening practices.

## JULY

### **9 a.m.-Noon Saturday, July 8 | How to Remove (deadhead) Spent Rose Blooms Properly**

*Harvey Cornell Rose Park, 1315 Galisteo Parkway*

Proper deadheading stimulates new growth and offers the opportunity to shape the bush.  
Instruction from 9-9:30 a.m., hands-on pruning from 9:30 a.m.-noon.  
Bring hand-held pruners, gloves, drinking water and a light container for cut rose canes.  
Wear long-sleeved clothing. Hats and sunscreen recommended.

### **1-2:30 p.m. Saturday, July 29 | A Plethora of Plants for Plentiful Pollinators**

*Randall Davey Audubon Center & Sanctuary classroom, 1800 Upper Canyon Road*

Join Kaitlin Haase, Southwest Pollinator Conservation Specialist with the Xerces Society, for a presentation on planting for pollinators in Santa Fe. Kaitlin will discuss which native plants support New Mexico's diverse pollinator species and how to promote a year-round pollinator-friendly landscape. With a focus on drought-tolerant, resilient plants that provide blooms from early spring to late fall, this presentation will review the numerous plants that are essential to supporting native wild bees, butterflies and other pollinators. Following the presentation, the group will walk through the Audubon gardens to observe plant and pollinator interactions.

## AUGUST

### **9-11 a.m. Saturday, August 12 | Landscape Design Basics: Revitalizing a Flower Bed**

*Garden at El Zaguán, 545 Canyon Road*

Learn to create site-appropriate, sustainable and stunning gardens using a historic property as an example. Discover how style, water access, soil, microclimates, color, structure and seasonality shape plant options and placement, and how climate change and biodiversity are inspiring innovative designs and gardening.

### **1-3 p.m. Saturday, September 30 | Save Seeds & Contribute to the Resiliency of Santa Fe Gardens**

*Under the Exhibit Hall portal, Santa Fe County Cooperative Extension Campus, 3229 Rodeo Road*

Learn the basics of harvesting, processing and storing a variety of seeds, and experience hands-on demonstrations with materials covering basic seed-saving methods for vegetables, herbs and flowers.  
Presented by Santa Fe Seed Stewards and Master Gardeners Diane Pratt and Susie Sonflieth.



## 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. The articles were published in 2023 unless otherwise indicated. **Note that some of these sources may have paywalls.**

[“Highlights From The World’s Greatest Gardening Event, The Chelsea Flower Show”](#) by Joanne Shurvell, *Forbes* (May 26)

[“My Secret Lawn: Confessions of a Drought-Conscious Gardener”](#) by Michelle Slatalla, *The Wall Street Journal* (May 24)

[“Bringing Your Food Full Circle,”](#) U.S. Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service (May 24)

[“Stella D’Oro Daylily Is a Resilient Garden Star”](#) by Lori Vanover, *Birds & Blooms* (May 23)

[“Time is of the Essence: 100 Years of Data Identify the Right Time to Regenerate Perennial Grasses”](#) by Maribel Alonso, U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Center (May 22)

[“USDA Climate Hubs Go Global,”](#) U.S. Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service (May 22)

[“Scientists Say Gardening Could be the Secret to a Healthy Heart”](#) by Stefani Sassos, *Good Housekeeping* (May 21)

[“Garden Designer Jay Sifford Is At Peace Among The Plants”](#) by Steve Bender, *Southern Living* (May 19)

[“Pepper Types,”](#) The National Gardening Association, *Garden.org* newsletter (May 20)

[“Volunteers help city of Santa Fe spruce up Amelia White Park”](#) by Margaret O’Hara, *Santa Fe New Mexican* (May 18)

[“How to Use Banana Water for Plants to Make Your Garden Flourish”](#) by Lauren Landers, *Birds & Blooms* (May 18)

[“Alan Titchmarsh sparks debate about rewilding, ahead of the Chelsea Flower Show”](#) by Cara Laskaris, *Country Living* (May 18)

[“Swallowtail Butterflies: Everything You Need to Know”](#) by Kenn and Kimberly Kaufman, *Birds & Blooms* (May 16)

[“How to encourage green-fingered kids”](#) by Hannah Stephenson, *Independent* (May 15)

[“Canada: images of felled ancient tree a ‘gut-punch,’ old growth experts say”](#) by Leyland Cecco, *The Guardian* (May 11)

[“Norton Requests Display of Marijuana at U.S. Botanic Garden,”](#) U.S. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton press release (May 10)

[“Grow Red Hot Poker for a Flock of Pollinators”](#) by Lori Vanover, *Birds & Blooms* (May 9)

# The Garden Journal Radio Show



Every Saturday  
10 to 10:30 a.m. on KSFR 101.1 FM

## June 3: Slow Food Santa Fe Outloud Edition

Hosts Lissa Johnson and Nina Rosenberg interview Graham Dodds, executive chef and owner of NOSA Restaurant located in the Ojo Caliente River Valley. NOSA is an acronym for NOrth of SAnta Fe.

## June 10: SFEMG Edition

Host Alexa Bradford talks with Mori Hensley, executive director of the Santa Fe Watershed Association.

## June 17: Food, Farms and Friends: Black Health New Mexico Edition

Join host Sunshine Muse and producer Carrie Core, featuring discussions on food, diet, traditions, culture and equity through the lens of the Black experience. This new "Garden Journal" edition is a conversational plate of intentional food for thought. You may never look at history, the present, or the food you eat the same.

## June 24: Giant Veggie Gardener Edition with Jannine Cabossel, "The Tomato Lady"

Chris Salem hosts Jannine Cabossel to hear tips and techniques for backyard vegetable gardening and a to-do list for July. See more at Jannine's Blog: <https://giantveggiegardener.com/>

You can find past episodes of The Garden Journal here at [sfemg.org](http://sfemg.org).

**The Santa Fe Botanical Garden is celebrating  
its 10-year anniversary on Museum Hill!**  
Our theme is Growing Traditions: Celebrating a Decade  
on Museum Hill, and we have 3 days of events!

**Events are selling out, so register soon!**

**June 15:** *Garden Conversations with breakfast and Garden tour by SFBG landscape architect W. Gary Smith at Museum Hill Café.*  
Waiting list only

**June 16:** Gala Anniversary Reception with music by Ronaldo Baca and Gypsy Magique, delectable hors d'oeuvres by Walter Burke Catering, our signature "Garden Sunset" cocktail by Altar Spirits, local wines, beers and non-alcoholic refreshments, and gift bags.

**June 17:** Lecture on Piñon-Juniper Woodlands with lunch and a private tour by ecological restoration specialist and owner of Ecotone Landscape, Jan-Willem Jansens.

*Please visit our events page at [SantaFeBotanicalGarden.org/Explore](http://SantaFeBotanicalGarden.org/Explore) for tickets and more event information, or call 505.471.9103*

