

Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners Newsletter



SFEMG Launches Yard Habitat Certification Pilot Program

*Certification focuses on increasing habitat corridors
in the Santa Fe urban area*

By Kathy Haq

The SFEMG has added to its list of community gardening projects with a new Yard Habitat Certification program that will be piloted for about a year before being introduced to the public.

The new project differs from existing SFEMG projects because “We’re actually going to go into people’s yards, to guide and educate them,” said SFEMG President Wendy Wilson, one of the co-project leaders along with Janie Farler, Amy Regalado and Catherine Wygant.

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The certification program was inspired by David Tallamy's book, *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard* and the Xerces Society's Santa Fe Pollinator Trail pilot program. Participants will rely heavily on the Santa Fe Native Plant Project's online publication, [A Guide to Native Plants for the Santa Fe Landscape](#), as well as NMSU publications and other relevant resources such as the [National Wildlife Federation's Native Plant Finder website](#).

The project's mission is "to educate the public in providing habitat and resources to support and restore declining pollinator populations and connect habitat fragments." As greater swaths of land are developed for housing and commercial ventures, pollinators and other animals have to travel farther and farther between the areas where they feed and find shelter and water. The loss of insects and other animals has grave implications for humans over time.

For the first year, master gardeners and interns will go out in small groups and do preliminary certification assessments of yards belonging to others within the SFEMG community. The groups will help fine-tune the training needed for the educators/assessors, the certification criteria and the assessment methodology for the yards they visit.

Soon there will be a new project page on the SFEMG website, and this will include a variety of resources for the community and SFEMG members interested in participating in the project as well as those who want to learn more about enhancing local habitats.

"The focus is not on having a neat and tidy yard but in having habitat," says Wilson. "This often requires less maintenance, which might be welcome news for some New Mexico gardeners," she adds

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Editor: Kathy Haq
Art Director: Jannine Cabossel

Contact us at:
news.sfemg@gmail.com

A Message from SFEMG Board President Wendy Wilson

It's happened again. Spring and summer have flown by and fall is upon us. I love the weedy, wildness of fall gardens, the fluffy seed heads of grasses and goldenrod, the goldfinches greedily plucking seeds from the wild sunflowers and the burnished glimpses of color created as the evenings cool down. And yet, there is always a touch of melancholy too. The later sunrise and earlier setting, the plants that just didn't have quite enough time, the bounty of summer gone too soon.



I hope you all had a productive and enjoyable growing season. In spite of lingering (and resurging) COVID restrictions and voracious prairie dogs, the Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners had a beautiful growing season.

The vegetable, cactus and herb demonstration gardens thrived thanks to their dedicated SFEMG project leaders. Pam Wolfe, Lesley Mansfield and a host of dedicated volunteers have designed and implemented a xeric demonstration area, a pollinator garden and a spectacular reclamation area at the Santa Fe County Extension Office on Rodeo Road. The captured moisture off the roof and parking lots is filtering through native plants and demonstrating the importance of good water and planting stewardship in preserving our land.

Both the Audubon and El Zaguán project leaders are working to introduce more native plants into their historic projects. The result is a loving mix of historic plants and drought-tolerant natives. The gardens are a good place to visit and get ideas of how to create beautiful, pollinator-friendly, bird-attracting, water-wise and climate-friendly gardens.

It is a great time of year to collect, label and store seed for next spring. The Seed Steward Project will be back at the South Side Library next spring (dependent on COVID). Look for upcoming opportunities to donate, package and distribute seeds to our Santa Fe community in 2022.

The Cornell Rose Garden and the Santa Fe Compost Action Team (SCAT) are looking for new project leaders. Located at the corner of Galisteo Street and Cordova Road, the rose garden is one of the most visible SFEMG projects. SCAT is a not-so-sexy but oh-so-important project. They have an established community compost training program, a demonstration area at the Extension Complex and an excellent record of teaching the importance of composting in Santa Fe.

Know that SFEMG master gardeners and interns absolutely can and do make a difference.

I am proud to be a member of this organization.

Wendy

Xerces Society distributes thousands of native plants

Aim of project is to address habitat loss, increase pollinators

Story by Matt Dahlseid

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Linda Churchill, the head gardener at the Santa Fe Botanical Garden, was concerned about something she began noticing around the city earlier this year, as spring turned to summer.

Or rather, what she wasn't noticing.

There were no aphids on the roses at the botanical garden. No bugs on windshields. No moths fluttering around lightbulbs in the evenings.



Kaitlin Haase / Photo by Kathy Haq

“People were saying, ‘Oh, it’s so nice. There are no bugs around.’ And I was saying, ‘Are you kidding?’” Churchill said.

“It felt just like the science fiction books about when the world ends,” she added. “People have been saying for years that when the insects go, we’re all going to go, and it felt like that this spring. It was really scary.”

Churchill said she saw insects start to reappear when the monsoon rains arrived and eased the extreme drought conditions that had plagued the region. But the scare she experienced drove home the importance of a new program she and the botanical garden are now taking part in.

In early September, the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation distributed 11,550 native plants to residents and organizations throughout the city as part of its Santa Fe Pollinator Trail program. The aim of the project is to address habitat loss in the city by introducing new pockets of climate-resistant plants.

Pollinators such as bees, butterflies and moths have been in decline globally in recent decades. Climate change, habitat destruction and the improper use of pesticides are three of the most likely culprits, said Kaitlin Haase, Southwest pollinator conservation specialist for the Xerces Society.

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Through the involvement of local residents and organizations, Haase hopes the pilot program raises awareness of the issue and helps people approach landscaping and gardening in a way that's much more beneficial to pollinators than installing heat-trapping rock lawns.



Pollinator habitat signage / Photo by Kaitlin Haase

“I know it’s kind of paralyzing to think about all the environmental problems in the world and climate change,” Haase said. “This is just one little thing that we can all do as a community, to be part of a movement to change our landscapes to be resilient with climate change and support not only pollinators, but birds and wildlife that depend on the plants that they pollinate.”

The Xerces Society purchased the plants for the program from the Santa Ana Native Plant Nursery, which is owned and operated by Santa Ana Pueblo and specializes in producing low-water, pesticide-free plants that are native to the Southwest.

With the help of volunteers from the Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners, 350 kits of 33 small transplants were handed out to about 230 residents and 20 organizations that have been selected to participate in the program.

The kits were distributed at the Santa Fe County Fairgrounds at no cost to the participants, who have committed to establishing the plants in yards, gardens and public spaces.

Two types of kits were distributed. The low-water kit included plants such as pale evening primrose, plains prickly pear and blackfoot daisy. The low- to medium-water kit contained varieties such as Rocky Mountain penstemon, white prairie clover and blanketflower.

Haase said each kit included plants that bloom at different times of the year, allowing the small habitats to support pollinators that are active from spring through fall.

The Santa Fe Botanical Garden was among the organizations that received kits in September. Others include the Santa Fe Children’s Museum, the Railyard Conservancy and the Randall Davey Audubon Center.

Churchill said the plants in the kits are not typical of what is found in most Santa Fe residents’ gardens, which commonly have compost mixed in to create a rich soil that’s frequently watered.

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“Native plants want what’s there to begin with,” she said. “They don’t necessarily want a fertile soil.” Adding pesticides is also a no-no.

Pam Wolfe is a Santa Fe Extension Master Gardener, meaning she’s been trained in horticulture by the New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service and shares her knowledge with the community.

She said pesticides tend to do more harm than good when it comes to pollinators.

“Oftentimes, these broad spectrum pesticides end up making things worse in the long run and repeated use tends to engender resistance in the target pests,” Wolfe said, “so they become less effective against the target and they wipe out a lot of the beneficials in the meantime.”

There are plenty of resources to help guide gardeners through the process of establishing their native plants.

The Xerces Society has posted webinars and sent out literature, and the Master Gardeners have an online form to answer any questions related to home gardening.

Haase came to Santa Fe in May 2020 to establish a presence for the Xerces Society in the Southwest. She’s found the community to be ahead of the curve in terms of being friendly toward pollinators.

In June, Santa Fe was certified as a Bee City USA affiliate. An initiative of the Xerces Society, the designation means a city has committed to providing pollinators with healthy habitats free of pesticides and full of native plants.

With the Pollinator Trail program, Haase hopes to keep the momentum rolling.

“Santa Fe is really quite a dream to work with because there are so many people that really are concerned and care,” she said.

More information

To learn more about the Pollinator Trail program and find forms to participate next year, visit: xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/habitat-kits/santa-fe

To request kit information announcements in 2022, email Kaitlin Haase at kaitlin.haase@xerces.org.

Webinars

NOTE: You can access previously-aired New Mexico State University “Ready, Set, GROW!” webinars [here](#) and those offered by the Xerces Society on the organization’s [YouTube channel](#). Note that “phc” stands for “per hour of class time.”

Oct. 7

[Stress and Resilience in a COVID World: Manage Chance and Build Resilience through Self Nurture](#)

NMSU Stress and Resilience Team

1 CE

Oct. 8

[Conversations with Great American Gardeners: Karen Washington](#)

American Horticultural Society

1 CE phc

Oct. 14

[Stress and Resilience in a COVID World: Healthy Work Life Balance](#)

NMSU Stress and Resilience Team

1 CE

Oct. 19

2021 Natural Areas Conference

[Life from the Ashes: Exploring the Impact of Prescribed and Natural Fire on Insects and Other Invertebrates](#)

1 CE phc

Oct. 20

[Ready, Set, GROW!: Healthy Soils](#)

NMSU

1 CE phc

Oct. 20

[Protecting Monarchs and Other Pollinators in Your Community](#)

Xerces Society

1 CE

Oct. 21

[Climate Change and Land Use Change Impacts on Pollinators](#)

Xerces Society

1 CE

Oct. 21

[Stress and Resilience in a COVID World: Healthy Habits, Nutrition](#)

NMSU Stress and Resilience Team

1 CE

Oct. 28

[Stress and Resilience in a COVID World: Healthy Habits, Physical Activity and Sleep](#)

NMSU Stress and Resilience Team

1 CE

Backyard Bugs

Black Swallowtail Butterfly

(*Papilio polyxenes*)

by Pam Wolfe

Check your herbs for this handsome animal. Larvae of the Black Swallowtail butterfly feed on many members of the rue family (Rutacea) and the carrot family (Umbelliferae): dill, parsley, celery, fennel and carrots (of course) — even poison hemlock (reported by [Bug Eric](#) in Colorado Springs). They absorb toxins from the plants and are thus



Papilio polyxenes larva feeding on dill at Santa Fe Botanical Garden, August 22, 2021
Photo by Pam Wolfe



Adult female Black Swallowtail nectaring on a Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia davidii* 'Nanho Blue')
Photo by Kathy Haq

unpalatable to most bird predators. The larvae change color with each molt; newly hatched caterpillars resemble bird droppings (clever disguise) while the last instar appears in fashionable green with black bands and orange or yellow spots. Overwintering [pupae](#) are green or brown, depending on local conditions. Mating occurs in spring and there will be two or three generations per year depending on latitude. [Black Swallowtail](#) is common throughout North America east of the Rocky Mountains. This member of the “blue-and-black” swallowtail complex has a wingspan up to 11 centimeters.

We are here to help!

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





Scarlet Gaura/Scarlet Beeblossom

By Stephanie Burns

Oenothera suffrutescens

(pronounced ee-no-THEE-ruh suf-roo-TES-ens):

the genus, *Oenothera*, means “wine-scented;” the specific epithet means “somewhat shrubby.” A former name, *Gaura coccinea* (pronounced GAH-ra kok-SIN-ee-uh) comes from the Greek *gauros* meaning “superb, majestic, showy, proud” and the Greek *kokkos* meaning “scarlet-colored.”

A member of the Evening Primrose family, Scarlet Gaura is widespread throughout the West. The plant thrives in a wide range of habitats that include roadsides, open areas, disturbed sites, desert grasslands and scrub as well as piñon-juniper forests. Coincidentally, as I was preparing this article, I went walking with a friend on the well-trod [Arroyo de los Chamisos Trail](#) where I spotted quite a few patches.



Photo courtesy of Wynn Anderson,
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

A multi-stemmed, mounded perennial, Scarlet Gaura grows 8 to 16 inches tall and features branching clumps of stiff hairy stems with small gray leaves. Its tiny fragrant flowers are reminiscent of honeysuckle. They occur along a 2- to 6-inch-long, spike-like inflorescence that blooms from the bottom to the top, only one ring at a time. The short-lived, bright white blossoms open from late afternoon to evening, attracting night-flying moths, the plant’s main pollinator. The flowers then fade to pink, finally drying to scarlet the following day. The Navajo used this plant for an infusion to soothe children’s nausea.

Landscape use: Spreading by extensive rhizomes, Scarlet Gaura will form dense colonies, so it’s better suited to informal garden areas. Very tolerant of dry conditions, it’s also an excellent candidate for xeriscaping. It is considered to be hardier than *Oenothera lindheimeri*, which is carried by many nurseries.

Planting and care: Extremely easy and carefree. Grows in a wide variety of conditions, but does

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best in light, well-drained soil in full sun. If sited in really fertile soil, the foliage will be robust but fewer flowers will form. Very hot summer weather may cause plants to stop flowering briefly so provide irrigation during hot spells. Plant, sow seed or divide plants in spring or fall. If allowed to set seed, established plants will usually self-sow. Before flower stems develop in spring, volunteer seedlings can be transplanted easily. Like all Evening Primroses, flea beetle can be a problem.



Scarlet Gaura growing wild along the Arroyo de los Chamisos Trail
Photo by Stephanie Burns

Pollinators: moths, insects

Propagation: seed, soft-stem cuttings, division

Plant type: perennial

Bloom time: summer (May-August)

Size: 8-16 inches tall x spreading

Sun: full sun

Soil: most any well-drained soil

Water: very low

Elevation: 3,500-7,500 feet

References:

[Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)

[Wildflowers of New Mexico](#)

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

Wildflowers of the Northern and Central Mountains of New Mexico by Larry J. Littlefield and Pearl M. Burns. (University of New Mexico Press, 2015)



“On Aug. 25, the [New Mexico] Regulation and Licensing Department began accepting online applications from would-be cannabis producers: Within 10 days, 1,222 applications had poured in. ‘We’re driving the car as we’re building it,’ said John Blair, deputy superintendent of the RLD.”

– From “[Growing pains](#),” a story about water rights and the state’s new cannabis industry, reported by Annabella Farmer for *Searchlight New Mexico* (Sept. 9, 2021)

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: Fall garden preparation”](#) by Laurie McGrath, shared with permission from *HOME/Santa Fe New Mexican* (September 2021)

[“All the medal winners from the 2021 Chelsea Flower Show,”](#)
House & Garden (Sept. 21, 2021)

[“Flowers release their perfume in response to electricity of bee’s touch”](#) by University of Bristol (Sept. 21, 2021)

[“4 horticultural trends predicted to be huge in 2022”](#) by Lisa Joyner (née Walden),
Country Living (Sept. 20, 2021)

[“When to Cut Back Ornamental Grasses”](#) by Luke Miller, *Birds & Blooms* (Sept. 17, 2021)

[“Stop Bindweed From Taking Over Your Garden”](#) by Melinda Myers, *Birds & Blooms*
(Sept. 16, 2021)

[“A masterclass in city garden design by Tom Massey”](#) by Clare Foster, *House & Garden*
(Sept. 16, 2021)

[“Top 10 Edging Plants for Three Seasons of Color”](#) by Melinda Myers, *Birds & Blooms*
(Sept. 15, 2021)

[“Growing pains / New Mexico’s new cannabis industry pits growers against communities, both needing a precious commodity: water.”](#) Annabella Farmer, *Searchlight New Mexico*
(Sept. 9, 2021)

[“Why cutting down on digging the garden can actually be good for soil”](#) by Clare Wilson,
New Scientist (Sept. 8, 2021)

[“How to Create a Reading Nook in Your Garden”](#) by Nashia Baker, *Martha Stewart Living*
(Sept. 6, 2021)

[“This unassuming item releases 10.9 billion tonnes of carbon every year”](#) by Marisa Stone, David Lindenmayer, Kurtis Nisbet and Sebastian Seibold for the *World Economic Forum*
(Sept. 6, 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

October 2: Slow Food Santa Fe edition

Anna Farrier, executive director of Cooking with Kids, joins hosts Lissa Johnson and Nina Rosenberg.

October 9: SFEMG edition

Santa Fe County Extension Agricultural Agent Tom Dominguez hosts agricultural experts from New Mexico State University.

October 16: Food, Farms & Friends edition

Host Carrie Core presents more Soil Stories.

October 23: SFEMG edition

Host Christine Salem explores pressing water issues in northern New Mexico with conservationist and writer William DeBuys.

October 30: Home Grown New Mexico edition

Jannine Cabossel, "The Tomato Lady," shares her hard-earned vegetable gardening wisdom and a to-do list for November. More info at [Giant Veggie Gardener](#).

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



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.

