

Gardener's Notebook

Volume 18, No. 1

News, Advice & Special Offers for Bay Area Gardeners

February/March 2004

Plant these beautiful garden performers now

As we approach spring, the time is right to introduce a number of beautiful and easy-to-grow Mediterranean plants to your garden.

Available at Sloat this month is a selection of plants that can offer you dependable color, low maintenance, drought tolerance and even deer resistance.

As we've discussed in past newsletters, the Bay Area's Mediterranean climate is found in a variety of locations around the world including parts of Australia, South Africa, Chile, and Europe. Plants that are native to this unique climate typically grow and flower during winter, spring and fall and tend to be less active during summer's heat.

Once established, these "native" plants will truly be at home in your garden and will provide you with carefree beauty requiring nothing more than your neglect in order to thrive.

Ceanothus, wild lilac, is an evergreen California native that can be grown as a shrub, small tree, hedge or ground cover. You'll find over two dozen species men-

tioned in *Sunset's Western Garden Book*, a strong testament to its usefulness in Bay



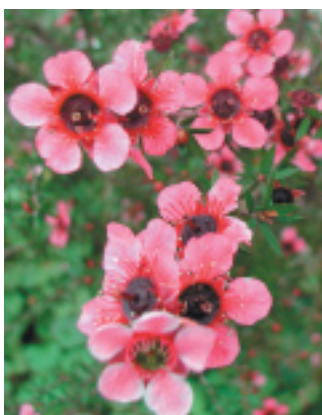
Ceanothus, wild lilac, begins blooming in March.

Area gardens. In the wild, ceanothus grows in full sun on rocky, dry hillsides, so you should gather that it requires little water. Keep it away from sprinklers and irrigation systems. Its flowers,

which appear in March, range from white to a lovely deep purple.

Correa is known as the Australian Fuchsia, but its habit is quite different from the fuchsia most gardeners are familiar with. This plant grows in full sun and is somewhat drought tolerant. Correa is prized for its long flowering period, which can be from November through April. Its hanging bell-shaped flowers can be quite striking depending on the variety (check 'Carmine Bells' with its deep carmine flowers). It works very well as a ground cover.

It's hard to forget **leptospermum**, New



Leptospermum blooms from winter to spring.

Zealand Tea Tree, once you've seen it in bloom. This popular landscape plant puts on a great display from winter to spring with striking white, pink, or red flowers. The shrub has upright stems and dense small leaves that accent the attractive flowers. Growing from one to 18 feet, depending on the variety, this plant's leaves were brewed by Captain Cook to help prevent scurvy. While we understand the tea is far from tasty, you can use leptospermum cuttings to decorate your table at your next tea party!

(cont. on back page)

Euphorbia: mounds of garden interest!

One of the things that makes a garden exciting and inviting is a diversity of plant shapes and colors.

Euphorbia, with its unusual bracts, foliage and mounding habit is sure to add interest to any garden.

One of the most popular species is *Euphorbia characias*, of which we carry several varieties.

This species has wonderful cylindrical clusters of flowers (bracts) that show up in mass in late winter and early spring.

A Mediterranean plant (in Greece there are some 43 species), euphorbia is drought tolerant and deer resistant.

Visit us soon to learn more about euphorbia!



Achieving extraordinary success with your houseplants

Just about everyone appreciates vibrant and lush houseplants as they can not only add beauty to a home but can purify the air we breath.

Houseplants are not difficult to grow, however you must help play Mother Nature's part by controlling the climate and weather.

Here are selection and care tips that will help insure your indoor success:

Choosing a plant.

It is very important to begin with a

healthy plant. Overwatering is a common and deadly problem that may occur even before a plant is taken home. Naturally, we take excellent care of our plants, which is often not the case in a super-market or home store. Our expert staff can assist you in selecting a plant and proper container as well

Location Light. Most houseplants need bright indirect light. A west-facing window is typically too bright and hot and will burn a houseplant. At the other

extreme, a dimly lit corner can cause a plant to drop leaves and become spindly. If you can read a newspaper in the natural light of a room, it is probably light enough for houseplants.

Watering. The key to watering is to check your plants often. The temperature of your home, container size, amount of light, rate of growth and other factors dictate a plant's water needs. You can use your finger to test the soil dryness, but an inexpensive **moisture meter** is a great investment.

A second tip is to use **Soil Moist**, which is comprised of granules that absorb and release water in soil. This product

Gardening Guide

February & March

Plant:

☞ Choose an ornamental tree or fruit tree for your garden and plant it now before spring. Consider a beautiful maples, magnolias, flowering cherries, birches, and much more. (Fruit tree selection is only in our Novato and Danville locations.)

☞ Summer bulbs are a must. Get your gladiolus, dahlias, lilies and begonias in the ground.

☞ Start

spring vegetable seeds indoors or in a greenhouse. Tasty heirloom varieties, seed trays and everything else you need are available at Sloat.

☞ Dormant roses are ready to wake up and fill your garden with fragrance and beauty. Ask about roses specially selected for your climate.

☞ Rhododendrons are budding and blooming. Find a place with filtered shade in your garden for these plants.

☞ You can start planting spring and summer annuals soon. Check with your local Sloat to see what has arrived and is ready to plant.

Fertilize:

☞ Wake up your garden by using fertilizers such as SureStart for new planting, E.B. Stone's Alfalfa Meal and

E.B Stone Organics Azalea, Camellia & Gardenia Food for acid loving plants.

☞ Fertilize houseplants with a time-release fertilizer such as Osmocote.

☞ Apply a lawn fertilizer with a pre-emergent to control crabgrass and other annual weeds.

☞ Stock up on a season's-worth of top quality plant-specific fertilizers from E.B. Stone. The new "Naturals" line is environmentally friendly!

Prune/Maintain:

☞ Snails and slugs are hatching in your garden. Bait with Sluggo (safe and effective) and protect your plants with copper border.

☞ Clean up and prune plants and trees to enhance their appearance and prepare them for spring growth.

☞ Prepare planting beds for spring by amending soil with Sloat Loam Builder, Sloat Forest Mulch Plus, and Sloat Planting Mix. Also, add E.B Stone's Agricultural Lime to your soil, to provide needed calcium to vegetables and fruit.

☞ Protect fruit trees and other deciduous trees from pests and diseases by applying dormant sprays such as Cooke's Sulf-R-Spray and Kop-R-Spray, Polysul, or Ultrafine Oil depending on plant variety.



allows you to water less frequently (Particularly nice for busy people and/or those who are away from home a lot.)

Fertilizing. Light but regular fertilizing is recommended for houseplants. **Maxsea** seaweed fertilizer is a favorite of our staff and is easy to work with. In general, you'll want to fertilize more in the spring and summer when plants are more active, and less in winter. Sloat has a full complement of fertilizers for specific houseplants and has added a fertilizer supplement called **Super Thrive**, which boosts flower and leaf production.

Repotting. Moving overgrown plants to larger containers is a surefire way to give them a new lease on life. Now is the time for repotting as the plants are typically ready to begin an active growth stage. The new pot should only be a few inches wider in diameter than the old pot. Loosen the rootball and add fresh **Sloat Potting Soil**.

Stop by one of our stores for Valentines Day Garden Gifts!

For gorgeous flowers in the shade, count on clivia

Here's a colorful companion for your ferns, hostas and azaleas! *Clivia minniata* is an easy-to-grow member of the amaryllis family that will offer you spectacular flowers along with exquisite green foliage.

Clivia, a South African native, may begin flowering as early as December though many varieties bloom in March and April.

Its magnificent flowers

appear in clusters of orange or shades of yellow, and are set against deep green, strap-shaped leaves.

The plant first gained popularity in the 1800's when specimens were sent back to England from Kwazulu-Natal. Like other particularly striking plants, clivia attracted

breeders whose efforts produced qualities such as red, yellow or apricot coloration, broad leaves, larger flowers and other exciting attributes.



In the wild, clivia, also known as the bush lily, grows in dappled shade, often in large colonies. The soil drains well and is rich in humus. They may be found growing in the fork of a tree as well.

In the Bay Area, the plant will prefer a mild, frost-free climate in the shade. It will not survive in

direct sunlight yet is surprisingly drought tolerant. Clivia can be grown in the ground but does exceptionally well in containers. Its love for shade offers you a great plant that thrives where most plants perish.

Introducing Fun Seeds for kids!

Get your kids connected to the earth at an early age and maybe you've got a shot at disconnecting them from computer and video games in the future!

Gardening with children is great fun when it seems that their interest in plants, bugs and dirt are at a natural peak.

Mr. Fothergill's Fun Seeds are a very cool collection of seeds that we think they will love. The seeds come in bright and intriguing packages designed for little green thumbs.



The Go to Bed Flower (it's gotta be a hot seller), offers sparkling jewel-colored flowers that close up tight at bedtime and don't open up until the sun comes out.

Along with **Jack's Beanstalk** and **Ray of Sunshine** there's **Frightened Plant** and **Eat Me Plant**.

Check them out on your next visit along

with Sloat's selection of gardening tools for children.

The seeds and tools are great gift ideas, too!

SLOAT SEMINARS

Attendance is limited. Please call ahead to the seminar location to reserve a seat. Seminar fee is \$5. (Gardener's Reward Program members are free.)

Indoor Orchids

Join Glen Smith, past president of the Marin Orchid Society, when he discusses successful orchid growing and care as well as techniques for encouraging these wonderful plants to rebloom.

- Feb. 1 - Mill Valley (Miller), Sunday, 10 a.m.
- Feb. 4 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.), Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.
- Feb. 7 - Kentfield, Saturday, 10 a.m.
- Feb. 21 - San Rafael, Saturday, 10 a.m.
- Feb. 28 - Larkspur, Saturday, 10 a.m.

Rose Pruning & Care

What better way to learn how to grow and care for roses than to learn from some of the most experienced and dedicated rose growers in the Bay Area! Join members of the Marin Rose Society (MRS) and S.F. Rose Society (SFRS) at their annual seminars at Sloat.

- Feb. 8 - Novato, Sunday, 10 a.m.
- Feb. 11 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.), Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.
- Feb. 29 - Mill Valley (Miller), Sunday, 10 a.m.

Camellia Pruning

Camellias should be pruned and shaped often as these plants grow vigorously and the layering of foliage can hide their wonderful lines. Join local expert Julie Gates when she discusses how to prune this malleable shrub, train it to grow on an espalier, and more.

- Feb. 8 - Kentfield, Sunday, 10 a.m.
- Feb. 14 - Danville, Saturday, 10 a.m.
- Feb. 15 - Mill Valley (Miller), Sunday, 10 a.m.
- Feb. 25 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.), Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.

Tool Maintenance

Here's help getting all your hand tools ready for spring and the rest of the year. Join Sloat's Rob Benson who will show you how to sharpen and care for pruners and more.

- Feb. 18 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.), Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.

Cutting Gardens

One of the greatest joys of gardening is bringing fresh cut flowers from your garden into your home. Learn how to plant a cutting garden including selecting a site, choosing flowers, and caring for your garden with expert advice from Sloat's Dustin Strobel.

- Mar. 3 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.), Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.

Conifer Pruning

Learn the important benefits of pruning conifers while they are young along with techniques for shaping these trees into hedges and screens. Presented by local arborist Julie Gates.

- Mar. 6 - Kentfield, Saturday, 10 a.m.
- Mar. 7 - Mill Valley (Miller), Sunday, 10 a.m.
- Mar. 13 - Danville, Saturday, 10 a.m.
- Mar. 17 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.), Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.

Beginning Bonsai

Learn how the ancient art of bonsai gardening can enhance the beauty of your home and garden while adding pleasure to your life. Presented by Greg Lum.

- Mar. 21 - Mill Valley (Miller), Sunday, 10 a.m.
- Mar. 31 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.), Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.

Nine Locations in San Francisco, Marin & Contra Costa

Richmond District
3rd Avenue between
Geary & Clement
752-1614
Sunset District
2700 Sloat Blvd.
46th & Sloat Blvd.
566-4415

Novato
2000 Novato Blvd. at
Wilson
897-2169
San Rafael
1580 Lincoln Ave.
just off Hwy. 101
453-3977

Larkspur
279 Doherty Drive between
Redwood High &
Downtown
924-7390
Kentfield
700 Sir Francis Drake at
Wolfe Grade
454-0262

Mill Valley
657 E. Blithedale at Lomita
388-0102
401 Miller at La Goma
388-0365
Danville
828 Diablo Road
(925) 743-0288

Open 7 days a week
8:30 am to 5:30 pm

**Garden Design
Department**
401 Miller, Mill Valley
388-3754

Visit Sloat on the Web: www.sloatgardens.com



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Great plants and great advice to help them grow!

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Is this essential tool missing from your garden shed?

A digging fork (also called a border fork) is simply one of the most versatile gardening tools you can own. Take a moment to consider its usefulness and we think you'll get the point . . . or points.

A digging fork can be used just like a shovel when the soil is somewhat compact. It is especially useful when digging clay as the tines can penetrate compacted soil more easily than a shovel. This benefit alone should excite most Bay Area gardeners, but look what else it can do:

1. Turn and amend soil.

Great for mixing Sloat Loam Builder or Planting Mix into

your existing soil.

2. Remove roots and large debris.

3. **Dig up plants.** Perfect for dividing perennials. Causes less root damage than a shovel

4. **Aerate soil.** When pushed deep into soil and rocked back and forth, it can loosen soil, improve drainage, and add air without turning the soil over. It can even be used on a lawn.

Sloat introduced its own stainless steel digging fork last year. It is a beautiful and excellent quality tool that will last for generations. The fork has a special long neck that attaches firmly to the wood handle to allow forceful leveraging without fear of breaking the tool.

Garden Performers *(cont. from front page)*

Another great performer from the other side of the world where over two hundred species are found is **grevillea**. This Australian native is a full sun, super drought tolerant plant that doesn't need water in the summer. Grevillea pleases gardeners with its fine, textured foliage and long slender curved flowers in dense clusters. An evergreen shrub, it is often used as a ground cover and some varieties ('Canberra') are fast growing and can quickly fill a large landscape.

Get to know grevillea and these other Mediterranean plants now. Our staff of experts is ready to guide you on selecting these ideal Bay Area plants.

Note: Now through spring is a great time to visit **Strybing Arboretum and Botanical Gardens** in Golden Gate Park as it has an incredible collections of Mediterranean plants.