



Las Flores Community Garden

Newsletter

March 2022 - Volume 2, Issue 2

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News from the Garden

From the President's Desk:

What an exciting time of year; spring planting is just around the corner! Who can already taste sweet tomatoes, perfect squashes, and crunchy cucumbers among so many other summer crops!? I hope you all join me for our General Membership meeting on Saturday, March 5th @ 10:00 a.m. I want to do something a little different at the meeting; let's share our best gardening tips and advice! Attending the meeting counts for your March work hour, but we could always use a little more help in the spring. See you at the garden.....Susan

Kiosk White Board

Check out our new white board on the Kiosk. Thanks to Jim for installing it and Martha for maintaining it with fresh content.

FYI - Items left in front of (or on the shelves) of the kiosk are free for any member. Please share only items that can be used in our gardens.

Board of Directors:

- Susan Sundell**
- President
- Diana Lovejoy**
- Vice President
- Jan Fang**
- Secretary
- Debbie Newell**
- Treasurer

Plot Mgmt. Team

- Betty Cruse**
- Leasing
- Taty Valladares**
- Task List
- Jim Hervieux**
- Walk Through

This Issue's Contributors:

Joyce Parker
Margaret Roach (NYT)
Susan Sundell

Thank You!

Susan Sundell - Editor
Roberta Rials - Publisher

Welcome New Members

Please meet and greet the new members of our Las Flores Community Gardens. They will be grateful for your help settling in and will look forward sharing your planting knowledge and experience with them. Happy gardening everyone!

Bethany R - 1

Billy C - 2

Jens K - 3

Shari M - 36B

Mattea N - 36D

Katie M - 47

June S - 48

Catharine J - 49

Laurie M - 54

Nancy M - 74

Mingfei D - 87

Allen D - 97

Cindy K - 130

Carrie M - 155

Upcoming Events

March 5 - Saturday - Workday and General Membership Meeting

8:00 A.M. to Noon - Workday

10:00 A.M. - Meeting

March 19 - Saturday - 9:30 A.M. - Butterfly Habitat Workday

April 2 - Saturday - 8:00 A.M. to Noon - Workday

April 9 - Saturday - 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. Arbor/Earth Day City Event

Thousand Oaks Community Park (adjacent to our High School)

We need 4 members to help hand out brochures and answer any gardening questions

Please see Susan

April 23 - Saturday - 10:00 A.M. to Noon - Watercolor Workshop

Watch for more info about this fun art event

Perimeter Fence Committee:

We are asking for 10 members to be on the Fence committee. This means that every month, your work task is to keep the perimeter fence clean of debris, inside and outside. Get some friends together and it will be fun to do it as a group. Please let Susan know if you are interested.

Drought

California is in its worst drought since 1924. Thousand Oaks City Council adopted Level Two water restrictions as of November 16, 2021. The garden does not fall under any mandates from CRPD or the City because we are an exception under Section IV in Level 2. Here is the ordinance:

<https://www.toaks.org/departments/public-works/sustainability/water/water-use-regulations>

The LFCG Board of Directors, however, are asking all members to conserve water wherever possible. Here are the guidelines:

- NO watering from 12:00-3:00pm
- Check your irrigation systems monthly. Water in the pathways means either over-watering or broken irrigation lines. Fix leaks and over sprays as soon as possible. Timers should be set for morning watering only. Emitters should be close to the soil line.
- Turn off the water at the spigot and release the pressure from the hose. Many hoses are found to be dripping from water in the hose lines.
- Let Susan know if there are leaky hoses/nozzles and they will be replaced.

Tomatomania is here!

If you have never attended Tomatomania, this is an amazing event with hundreds of varieties of tomato plants for sale. **Tomatomania!** Includes classes, sales events, tomato tastings, and impromptu social gatherings at popular nurseries and garden destinations across the state. For specific dates, go to www.tomatomania.com



The Newsletter is a great venue for all the Gardeners to stay in touch. Please share your knowledge, ideas, experience and interesting bits by submitting an article or forwarding info to Roberta Rials at

robertarials@gmail.com

Thank you in advance!

Herb Community Garden

By: Joyce Parker

What's Growing in the Community Herb Garden - Chives

Chives are a close relative to onion, garlic, leeks and scallions. Of these, chives have the most delicate flavor. Chives are easy to grow and form grassy clusters of hollow, tube-shaped leaves that taste like mild onions. They produce small, round purple flowers that are also edible.



Chive foliage can be harvested at any time by snipping off the leaves about one inch from the plant base. This also encourages new growth.



The purple flowers are edible, too. Snip them off and drop into soup, salads, or use as a garnish. The purple flowers float beautifully in soup. Chive flowers can also be added to white vinegar, which will not only add some flavor but will turn the liquid a soft lilac color as well.

Chive leaves give a mild onion flavor to potatoes, eggs, soft cheeses, and salads. They can be added to sour cream on top of a baked potato and to egg salad. It's best to add to dishes at the very end of the cooking process because their mild flavor is destroyed by the high heat.

Add chives to butter or cream cheese and mix well. Spread on bagels, toast, crackers and other breads to give them a kick of natural onion flavor. These spreads are perfect for taking on picnics.

Companion Planting: Plant chives alongside carrots, tomatoes, mustard greens, or cabbage. Chives actually repel carrot flies, aphids, and cabbage worms. Those pesky aphids hate chives, so plant chives next to plants and vegetables that aphids tend to feed on. This is a great way to protect those plants without resorting to chemical filled products that can be harmful to people, pets, and the environment.

New York Times - In the Garden

Courtesy of: Margaret Roach (NYT Contributor)- February 16, 2022

Are Your Tomatoes 'Epic'? If Not, Here's What You Should Be Doing

Tomato experts Craig LeHoullier and Joe Lamp'l have some advice for you.

*"We are the luckiest tomato growers in all of history," proclaimed [Craig LeHoullier](#) as he thumbed with dramatic effect through the [Seed Savers Exchange yearbook](#), a hefty index of nearly 12,000 heirloom varieties of the beloved *Solanum lycopersicum*.*

Choosing among such a staggering selection of tomatoes, plus hundreds of modern hybrids not included in that print version of the yearbook, is the first step toward your best-ever harvest — or what Dr. LeHoullier, a retired chemist who has grown perhaps 3,000 varieties, calls "epic tomatoes."

And reaching that goal does not start with just any old tomato that the local big-box store serves up as transplants by the truckload.

"Epic Tomatoes: How to Select and Grow the Best Varieties of All Time" is Dr. LeHoullier's 2014 book, now in its seventh printing, with about 80,000 copies in print. And Growing Epic Tomatoes is the name of [an online course](#) that he teaches with his friend [Joe Lamp'l](#), the host for 12 years of the Emmy Award-winning public television program "Growing a Greener World."

Mr. Lamp'l is no tomato slouch, either. Each year, under lights in his Atlanta-area basement, he sows more than 40 varieties — a total of about 2,000 seedlings. He transplants 60 into his raised-bed garden; the rest go to an annual plant sale that he holds with his younger daughter, Amy.



Dr. LeHoullier recently moved to the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina from Raleigh, where he held a similar annual sale. But now he is paring down, from a peak of 150 varieties a year to maybe 50, with one plant of each grown mostly in straw bales, not garden beds.

"The fruit set is too good here, without so much heat and blossom drop," he said of his new location. "Last year, with 100 plants, I was picking 75 pounds daily for a month."

Yes, there is such a thing as too epic.

New York Times - In the Garden, continued

So Many Tomatoes, So Little Space

Despite their shared passion, these two successful gardeners differ in their choice of gear and the subtleties of their techniques — the methods to their tomato madness. Likewise, they have an ongoing debate about which tomato best anchors a BLT.

Dester, Dr. LeHoullier says emphatically, while Mr. Lamp'l insists on Black Krim.

And for sauce? Whatever is ripe, other than cherry types, they agree. It's too much work to skin so many little guys for a batch.

There's another point on which they concur, as well: Every gardener should dig into the catalogs and explore all the possibilities.

"The diversity of catalogs is where tomato dabblers become the tomato obsessed," said Dr. LeHoullier, who named the popular heirloom Cherokee Purple in 1990. (It came from seed that had been passed down and eventually made its way to him.)

Some of his recommended sources include [Southern Exposure Seed Exchange](#), whose founder tried some Cherokee Purple seed that Dr. LeHoullier shared, and introduced the variety to commerce in 1993. The [Seed Savers Exchange](#), a nonprofit whose catalog showcases heirlooms, is "pivotaly important," said Dr. LeHoullier, who serves as the group's tomato adviser.

[Johnny's Selected Seeds](#) and [Pinetree Garden Seeds](#) also make his list, along with [Victory Seeds](#), which offers all of the varieties from the [Dwarf Tomato Project](#), a breeding effort that Dr. LeHoullier co-founded in 2004, with about 145 varieties. It's "the heirloom experience with short plants," he said, "and no need to deal with suckering."

Dwarfs are perfect for pots or space-constrained gardens — and for gardeners who don't want to repeatedly prune and support a 10-foot vine.

Identify the varieties that match your space and garden conditions, and especially those rated with specific resistance to any [disease pressure](#) you have experienced. Both men grow a mix of hybrids and heirlooms, which are usually considered less resistant, as a hedge against loss.

And while you're browsing, consider what you'll be doing with the tomatoes you grow. Will they be hot-packed in Ball jars, as whole tomatoes? Then Dr. LeHoullier recommends not just the



New York Times - In the Garden, continued

usual suspect, Roma, but any color of Oxheart. But if you're planning to eat them out of your hand, Dr. LeHoullier and Mr. Lamp'l suggest Sun Gold, the popular tangerine-orange hybrid cherry tomato.

'Insurance in a Small Footprint'

Timing is another point on which they agree. To determine when to sow tomatoes indoors, count back eight weeks from your final spring frost date, when it's usually safe to transplant seedlings outdoors. ([Calculate when to sow](#) for your location.)

Then try their "four-week, four-week routine," sowing into cells in an 18-cell flat or a flat fitted with 18 three-and-a-half-inch-square pots. Into each compartment, they thickly sow seeds of a different variety. Dr. LeHoullier calls this "dense sowing" — in his plant-sale days, he sowed up to 100 seeds in each compartment. Mere tomato mortals will probably do more like a half-dozen in each cell.

The idea is space efficiency. For those first four weeks, the little thicket that sprouts in the community pot or cell won't take up much room under your lights. Peppers and eggplants can be sowed this way, too.

"Even if you only sow six seeds of each desired variety to a cell," Mr. Lamp'l said, "you get insurance in a small footprint."

After four weeks, Phase 2 begins. "Take that rootball out, tease the tiny plants apart and put them in their own cells," he said.

But first, let's back up a bit. Working with a sterile, fine-textured germinating or seed-starting mix is essential. Dr. LeHoullier fills his cells with dry mix, then moistens everything with a small watering can before sowing the seeds. He sieves a bit more dry medium on top with a spaghetti colander, to barely cover the seeds, then mists the surface.

Seed must stay moist to germinate. Cover each flat with a clear plastic dome or with plastic wrap (Dr. LeHoullier's preferred method) laid right on the surface. Flip the sheeting every day to minimize excess moisture buildup that could harbor disease.

Heat applied to the bottom, from a germinating mat placed under a just-sown flat, speeds germination from about a week to three or four days. But remember to remove the germinating mat as soon as the seedlings poke through, along with whatever humidity cover you used, or you'll risk having weakened seedlings.

New York Times - In the Garden, continued

Another common mistake: fertilizing too soon. Resist the urge, the two men agree. Seeds come packed with what they need to get started.

"I seldom fertilize when they're inside, under lights," Mr. Lamp'l said. "It can lead to seedlings that are leggy and floppy."

Light Up Their Leaves

By the time Dr. LeHoullier's seedlings reach their first four-week transplanting, he daringly takes advantage of outdoor light instead of relying on grow lights. But he keeps a frost blanket at the ready, just in case.

Mr. Lamp'l's indoor seed-starting room has the look of a laboratory, fitted with metal shelving and all manner of grow lights, from fluorescent T5 high-output types to the latest dual-band LEDs that glow with a color known as burple. He enjoys experimenting and comparing results. And for all of his garden adventures, he uses the [Day One](#) journaling app to record data and photos.

Once the seeds germinate, Mr. Lamp'l lights them for 16 hours a day. Each fixture hangs on ratchet pulleys, so it can be raised as the plants grow. At first, he follows each light manufacturer's guidelines for recommended positioning; then, based on the plants' response, he adjusts.

The Remedy for Overenthusiasm

Oops — you started too soon. Or maybe insufficient light pushed your beloved seedlings past the ideal stocky stature to leggy. Tomatoes are forgiving, though, and there are two possible workarounds.

At outdoor transplant time, remove the bottommost pair of leaves, then plant the seedling extra-deep, so two or three pairs of leaves remain aboveground. Tomatoes have the ability to form roots along an entire stem, including that newly buried part.

Or cut the top six inches off a too-tall plant and root the cutting in water on a bright windowsill. After roots form, pot the cutting up to grow for another couple of weeks under lights. Then gradually acclimate it to the outdoors — as you would with any seedling experiencing sunshine and open air for the first time — before transplanting it into the garden.

New York Times - In the Garden, continued

"Take it slow when hardening seedlings off," advised Mr. Lamp'l, who starts with a half-hour of outdoor exposure and adds an hour daily over an eight-day period. "Even strong grow lights might only be 10 percent the intensity of outdoors."

Once the seedlings are in the ground, Mr. Lamp'l's homemade "ultimate tomato cages" go up around each plant. Two portions of wire mesh are cut with a bolt cutter from a four-by-16-foot livestock panel of 4-gauge wire with openings of about six by eight inches. The resulting pieces are then bent into L shapes, each providing two sides of a square cage.

"Makes me smile every time I bring them out from storage and put them in the bed," he said. "They're it."

What makes Mr. Lamp'l — and Dr. LeHoullier, as well — smile even more: summer's first ripe tomato.

Among the non-cherry types, the heirloom Mortgage Lifter is most likely to win that race in Mr. Lamp'l's garden. At Dr. LeHoullier's, Kimberly and Taxi usually come in first.

The prize for most prolific harvest? Polish at Dr. LeHoullier's; Cherokee Purple and Black Krim at Mr. Lamp'l's.

No two gardens, or gardeners, are alike, in tactics or tastes. But there is a tomato and then some for everyone.

Margaret Roach is the creator of the website and podcast [A Way to Garden](#), and a book of the same name.

