



# Gardener's Notebook

Volume 20, No. 2

News, Advice & Special Offers for Bay Area Gardeners

April 2006

## Spring Gardening Issue



vegetable gardens elegant ferns good bug tubs hostas & more!

# The art and science of creating your own Good Bug Tub

Here comes spring and with it the rebirth of the good, the bad and yes, the ugly bug populations that are an integral part of our delicate ecosystem. As we have discussed in past newsletters ("preached" might be a better word at this point), making sure you have a balanced garden with plenty of beneficial insects is the key to gardening success and protecting the environment.

This spring we'd like to introduce



you to a great idea that will not only help balance your garden but beautify it as well. A Good Bug Tub is a cute name for a container full of plants that are good producers of nectar and pollen. The "tub" is designed to attract, feed, and coddle your beneficial insect population so once it has wiped out your garden's bad bugs it sticks around to repel against future invasions.

Good Bug Tubs can be placed on

decks, patios or around the garden. The best container designs include plants that bloom at different times during the growing season. In our early season container shown here, we have a **marquette daisy**, **lemon** and **silver thyme**, **spearmint**, **verberna**, **alyssum** and **parsley**. We've sprinkled in some **California poppy** and **cosmos** seeds that will sprout soon and help keep this beautiful tub in bloom.

Choosing California natives and plants with similar water needs are two tub tips that will help you minimize your watering chores and keep your container looking great.

We've included a list of plants to get you  
*(continued on back page)*

## Gardening Guide

### APRIL

#### PLANT

Load your garden with the season's most colorful plants. Just about everything we offer is budding or blooming!

Vegetable starts and seeds are in great supply. Get your vegetable garden started now. (See page 6.)

Plan ahead and plant perennials to fill your garden with summer color.

#### FERTILIZE

Use **E. B. Stone Organics Sure Start** with all new plantings to help them get established quickly.

Fertilize with **E. B. Stone Organics All-Purpose Plant Food**, and **Citrus and Fruit Tree Food**. See our staff for other plant-specific fertilizer recommendations.

Use **Agricultural Lime** to balance your soil's pH, and add calcium and magnesium to your vegetable and other garden beds.

Lawns are ready for some attention.

Feed them with **GreenAll Pro Formula Lawn Food**.

#### PRUNE/MAINTAIN

Improving the quality of your soil should top your list of spring activities. An optimal loamy soil balance promotes drainage, air and water penetration. Use **Sloat Loam Builder**, **Sloat Forest Mulch Plus** or **Sloat Planting Mix**, which are custom-blended for Bay Area gardens.

Control pests before they gain control of your garden by adding plants to your garden that attract beneficial insects. (See article on this page.)

Prune azaleas and camellias after they bloom.

Continue to control destructive snails that ravage gardens by night and hide during the day. **Sluggo**

**Snail Bait** works great and is the perfect non-toxic alternative to products containing metaldehyde.

Apply **Greenlight Rose Defense** to roses and other ornamental plants at the first sign of fungal and pest problems to control black spot, powdery mildew, rust, mites, aphids and more.



## Root Lab introduces kids to gardening!

We're not sure why or how we all developed an affinity for gardening, but without going out on a limb, it is probably safe to say that our childhood experiences and parental influences enhanced this natural connection.

Treating a child to one of our new **Root Labs** is a great way to expose children to the wonders of the natural world.

This simple growing kit includes a colorful booklet that explains what seeds are, how they travel, germinate, form roots and more.

You'll find a packet of carrot seeds and a great see-through planting container, which allows kids to watch the growing process from start to finish.

The lab is appropriate for children 5 years and older, and is one fun gift that is guaranteed to be appreciated.

Check our stores where we have demonstration labs set up for viewing!



Visit our new store in San Bruno!

# Are scales secretly sucking the life from your plants?

This might be a tough question to answer as this destructive insect goes undetected by many gardeners and clearly wasn't invited to the screen test for Disney's *A Bug's Life*.

Scales are a common garden pest responsible for slow growth, yellow leaves, sooty mold, leaf drop, spoiled fruit, lots of ants and even mortality when they infest a young plant.

They crawl under people's radar because many are tiny and don't move around much during their life cycle. They don't look like insects, either!

Scales are a close relative of the mealybug and aphid and come in many shapes, sizes and colors. These pests are sucking insects as opposed to those that chew. They suck plant juices and in some cases actually inject toxic saliva into plants.

Among their favorite targets are citrus, bays, poplars, oleanders, toyon, and sycamores as well as many fruit trees.

Like other pests, scales have natural enemies to keep them in check including a variety of lady beetles (aka ladybugs) and parasitic wasps. Many scale varieties are protected from beneficial insects by ants who are attracted to the honeydew that the scales produce.

When scales get the upper hand on your trees and plants you have

several ways to regain control and restore plant health.

Start by

stopping the ants that protect the scales. To do this, use **Tangle Guard**

and **TangleFoot**, two products that work in concert to physically stop ants from climbing up your plants and trees.

Tangle Guard is a wrapping placed around a tree trunk or plant stem. It is used as a platform for applying TangleFoot,

a sticky substance that traps ants.

TangleFoot can also help you discover when scales are at the vulnerable crawling stage of their life cycle by trapping them, too.

A great "must have" organic remedy for scales is **Bonide's All Seasons**. This horticultural oil should be kept handy year 'round as it safely kills scales and other common insects. The key to using this product is timing. Applying it in spring and summer when eggs and/or crawlers are present is very effective. You

must apply it thoroughly as it kills by smothering insects. The ready-to-use spray bottle makes application a snap.



Another time to use All Seasons is just before bud break (when leaves emerge on deciduous trees). At this time it will not only take care of most scale varieties, but kill overwintering mite, aphid and caterpillar eggs.

All Seasons is a superior type paraffinic oil and can be used as a growing season spray, dormant spray (for deciduous plants and trees) or delayed dormant (green tip) spray.

As a horticultural spray during the growing season it will smother and kill aphids, beetle larvae, European red spider mites, fungus gnats, leafhopper, leafminers, mealybugs, mites, scale insects, thrips, and young whiteflies.

Please feel free to bring us a sample enclosed in a bag of any pest problem you are experiencing for a free identification.

## Organic Gardening Expertise

Ready to answer any of your gardening questions.



### EXPERIENCE

Received formal training in organic farming and permaculture.

Worked for several years on farms in the East and Midwest.

### TIPS FOR GARDENERS

Before you spray for pest and disease, remember that more often than not these problems are symptoms, not the cause, of a weakened plant. Consider your watering schedule, soil composition, sun exposure, and plant nutrition. By paying attention to these variables most pest and disease problems can be avoided.

Grow at least one edible plant in your garden. Too many of us have forgotten or have never known the pleasure of eating fruits and vegetables that were harvested just moments ago.

Plant appropriately for our climate. By planting drought-tolerant plants you lighten your work load, ease the strain on your wallet, and reduce environmental impact.

Forgot to plant spring bulbs? We generally have some container plants in bloom to help you out!

### NAME

Michael Anderson

### STORE

Manager, Danville

### SPECIAL INTERESTS

Small space, urban, and suburban vegetable gardening.

Salvias. "I can't get enough of them."

Worm composting.

Creating gardens that provide habitats for birds, butterflies, bees and even spiders.



# The Simple Elegance of Ferns

The Fern's ability to flourish in areas of dense shade and low light intensity has garnered this plant family recognition as the workhorse of the Northern California garden. That being said, there is much more to our local ferns than their steadfast ability to survive in our shady nooks and crannies – they have an innate beauty and simple elegance that is often overlooked.

*Why not create your own shade sanctuary with some of Sloat's most popular and lovely fern varieties.*



## MAJESTIC

### *The Tasmanian Tree Fern*

Probably the most popular tree fern, the Tasmanian has the uncanny ability to

serve as both a feature plant and an instant backdrop. A stable and strong tree, it can even re-grow if the trunk is completely severed. An incredible accent, with a chocolate brown trunk and tropical green fronds,

this fern relishes partial to full shade.



## WHIMSICAL

### *The Ponytail Fern*

Getting its name from the fluffy hair-like branches, this plant is a burst of

bright chartreuse for any garden. The Pony Tail Fern is actually a plant in the lily family whose leaves, called cladophylls, are armed with sharp spines. Showcasing papery pinkish white flowers and vibrant red berries this “fern” is a dynamic addition to a rock garden because it can flourish in full sun to partial shade and requires well-drained soil.



## REGAL

### *The Sword Fern*

This lance-shaped soldier of the fern family is dependable and easy to grow.

The Sword Fern's hardy, arching ever-green fronds create a year-long palette perfect for a container or as a ground cover.

However, do be careful of its invasive manner by confining it with an edging of plastic or metal.



## CHARMING

### *The Australian Tree Fern*

Known for its slender trunk and exquisite canopy of large lacy fronds this fern creates a tropical look even in the corner of a Bay Area garden. This unique shade-loving beauty sometimes looks more like a palm than a fern but with the fiber trunk and the new fronds unfurling from a tip spiral there is no question that it is truly part of the fern family.



## FAITHFUL

### *The Leatherleaf Fern*



The glossy evergreen fronds of this fern protrude from a central clump producing an ornate and bold visual texture. Often used in floral arrangements the triangular fronds have a unique staying power and are one of the more common native ferns. With all its strength and beauty the Leather Leaf Fern is a magical cover-up for unsightly fencing, concrete, or anything else you might want to disguise.

## DAINTY

### *The Autumn Fern*



One of the few ferns to have seasonal color, this variety's new growth showcases coppery red color, which slowly matures into delicate dark green foliage. Dainty by appearance this fern is one of the more hardy ferns and can survive with little or no attention – there aren't even any pests of concern. Use this frilly fern to dress the bare patches of your shade sanctuary and then relax and let it add color to your afternoon.

## GRACEFUL

### *The Mother Fern*

Just like the name implies this fern produces bulbils on its fronds. Graceful in every way, new growth emerges from this fern's gently arching crowns. The contrast of the new baby green foliage against the existing textured fronds creates a dynamic image that is beautiful with your lounge furniture or under the shelter of your porch. Just make sure that the Mother Fern is protected from the sun and wind that will dry it out.



## Redecorate Your Outdoor Environment with Sloat's New Furniture

Our furniture is made of a hardwood called "Meranti", which is similar to Mahogany. Often used for furniture and boat building the wood will weather similar to Teak.

This season we are featuring a wide variety of options including a reclining **Steamer Chair** (see photo to the

left) and a **Loveseat**, pictured below, which boasts a detachable center and

an umbrella hole. **Entertaining sets** include chairs, tables and benches - all you need are the margaritas. Lastly, we have chosen 3 distinct **Bench** styles which include a canopied swing seat for those lazy summer Sundays when all the weeding and weekend chores are done - or not.



*Stop by and we will help you create your backyard retreat.*

# Vegetable gardening in containers: A tasty proposition

If you love home-grown produce, but lack the space or energy for a vegetable plot, we'd like to remind you that just about all vegetables and herbs can be grown very successfully in containers.

Anyone with a porch, deck, patio, rooftop, windowsill, or balcony ought to consider not only the possibilities, but the considerable benefits of this method of vegetable gardening.

First consider that most vegetables require full sun. Plants grown in containers can be moved to follow the sun, which can extend their growing season.

Equally important to any plant is the condition of its soil. While in-ground gardeners may need to work to improve their soil, container gardeners can simply open a bag of **Sloat's Organic Potting Soil**. The big benefits of utilizing a premium, weed-free growing medium that is blended to grow vegetables needs no explanation.

Growing in containers is a lifestyle decision as well. Being able to tend a vegetable

garden without kneeling, shoveling, weeding, or battling gophers has a certain attraction that could have an increasing number of in-ground gardeners rotating their crops into containers - especially with our ever busy and aging population.

Selecting vegetables for containers is easy. The best choices are those that have a bush-type habit. For tomatoes, try 'Tumbling Tom,' 'Small Fry' or 'Spring Giant.' You'll find we have a great selection of vegetable starts and seeds including heirloom and specialty varieties. (See article on back page).

Sloat has many containers that are ideal for vegetables including **half barrels, cedar planter boxes, plastic pots, and beautiful ceramic and terra cotta pottery.**

Size does matter when it comes to choosing containers and selection is governed by root needs. A small 6 to 10-inch container is appropriate for plants such as onions, parsley, and lettuce while a 5-gallon con-

tainer should be the minimum size for tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, cucumbers and other deep-rooted vegetables.

Many container vegetables such as tomatoes, beans, peas, squash and even mini cucumbers and pumpkins can and should be supported with cages and trellises.

Sloat has a great collection of square- and fan-shaped wooden trellises along with a variety of metal cages that will support your plants and help you increase your harvest.

One of our hanging baskets made with an easy-to-use **Angel Moss Basket Liner** is a great choice for cherry tomatoes.

Proper watering and fertilization are very important in container gardens, a fact that is as much a problem as it is an opportunity. Because soil in containers dries out faster than ground soil, in many cases every-other-day watering is a must.

You can choose to apply a diluted mixture of **E.B. Stone Fish Emulsion** with your water to keep your

vegetables well fed.

Once a

week you

should

flush your

containers

with straight

water to leech

out any excess

fertilizers, salts and other

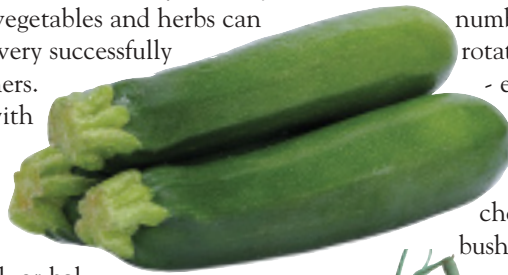
minerals.

Two natural products that we highly recommend are **E.B. Stone Tomato & Vegetable Food** and **E.B. Stone Agricultural Lime**.

The food is formulated to produce even growth without promoting

excess foliage. Apply it when you plant and then every 30 days.

Agricultural Lime offers important calcium and magnesium to your plants and neutralizes soil acidity. Add it to your containers and beds at planting time.



## Good soil for great gardens!

If you begin each growing season by focusing on your soil first, you can expect better looking and healthier plants, higher yields from your vegetable garden, and an all-around more rewarding gardening experience.

**Sloat Planting Mix, Sloat Loam Builder** and **Sloat Forest Mulch Plus** have all been custom blended to amend the dominant soil types found in the San Francisco Bay Area. By using these products, you'll increase plant performance by improving soil structure, moisture retention, aeration and water penetration. These soil products are especially effective in helping to tame heavy clay soils!

For your vegetable and herb gardens use **Sloat Organic Potting Soil** or **Sloat Organic Planting Mix**. These mixes contain fir bark, composted mushroom soil, cottonseed hulls and other ingredients that are an excellent growing medium for vegetables and other plants.



Only at Sloat Garden Centers



## Big and bright ideas for your shade

If you've got shade, we've got a sensational collection of plants for you!

Hostas are one of the absolute best solutions when seeking plants that grow

extremely well in the shade. Also known as the plantain lily, hostas have beautiful giant leaves (designed to capture light) that come in

an expanding variety of shades and colors.

The place to start when shopping for hostas is with some of the most popular and best performing varieties. **Hosta 'Francee'** with its beautiful heart-shaped, dark green leaves and **Hosta 'Patriot'** which offers bold, dark green foliage with a bright 1-inch margin are two excellent choices.

You'll also want to consider some of the newer hosta introductions from our grower **Monrovia Nursery**.



**MONROVIA**  
HORTICULTURAL CRAFTSMEN SINCE 1926

**Hosta x 'Hottsy Tottsyt'** is a new selection with dramatic golden-yellow foliage. (See photo!). It makes a great border plant, groundcover or patio container

plant. Grow it in partial to full shade. Its pale lavender flowers will appear in June or July.

**Hosta x 'June'** was voted Hosta of the Year in 2001 by the American Hosta Growers Association. Its distinctive

heavy gold leaves with irregular blue-green margins make 'June' a stand-

out in shady woodland settings. Look for pale lavender flowers to appear in summer above its mounding foliage.

Our newer varieties may be in short supply this first year, but there will be plenty of our other hostas to go around. Please check our website for the May 2002 *Gardener's Notebook* archive for more details about growing these wonderful plants.

## New Instant Water Gardens



Starting or rejuvenating a water garden just got a whole lot easier thanks to our new pre-planted water garden collections from **Simple Pleasures**.

Each **Instant Water Garden Collection** contains three water plants with either a lovely red or pink water lily as a centerpiece. The package comes complete with pebbles in a specially designed mesh pot with fertilizer tabs and

environmentally friendly cocoa fiber.

The fiber allows the plants to grow and root while keeping the water clean.

Just drop the pot in a pond, half barrel or pottery container, fill it with water and in no time you'll be enjoying water lilies and other water garden favorites.

To learn more about water gardens, please ask a member of our expert staff.

## 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.)

### EXPERT ROSE CARE

Dawn Smith, who worked for Bay Area rose grower Rayford Reddell, will discuss how to get the most from your roses. She will provide valuable information on fertilizing, deadheading and solutions to common rose problems.

Apr. 9 - Sonoma, Sun., 11 a.m.  
Apr. 12 - Novato, Wed., 6:30 p.m.

### FOOD GARDENING IN OUR MEDITERRANEAN CLIMATE

Get the most from your Bay Area food garden by learning about our wonderful Mediterranean climate and its seasonal rhythms with Pam Peirce. Peirce is one of the best known authorities on gardening in our climate and her book *Golden Gate Gardening* is a great local resource.

Apr. 12 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.), Wed., 6:30 p.m.  
Apr. 23 - Mill Valley (Miller Ave.), Sun., 10 a.m.

### MOSS BASKET WORKSHOP

Mary Te Selle, Linda Alexander, and Dawn Smith will demonstrate how easy it is to create your own hanging basket. Take your creation home the same day! Materials fee: \$45, Gardener's Reward Members \$35

Apr. 15 - Mill Valley (Miller Ave.), Te Selle, Sat. 10 a.m.  
Apr. 15 - Danville, Alexander 10 a.m.  
Apr. 26 - Novato, Smith, Wed., 6:30 p.m.

### REPOTTING ORCHIDS

Join local orchid expert Glenn Smith from the Marin Orchid Society when he demonstrates how to repot cymbidiums. These plants with their long-lasting blooms can make a wonderful addition to your garden and home. Smith will also discuss how easy it is to grow these treasured plants and answer all your orchid questions.

Apr. 19 - Novato, Wed., 6:30 p.m.  
Apr. 26 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.), Wed., 6:30 p.m.  
Apr. 29 - Mill Valley (Miller Ave.), 10 a.m.

### SPECTACULAR CLEMATIS

Don't miss this opportunity to meet and learn for Raymond Evison, world-renowned clematis grower from Guernsey, England. His RHS Clematis Collection and Patio Clematis were introduced to Sloat gardeners last year in our *May Notebook*.

May 3 - Kentfield, Wed., 11 a.m.  
May 3 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.) Wed., 6:30 p.m.

### BUTTERFLY GARDENS

Mary Te Selle will discuss how to design a beautiful butterfly garden that you can enjoy all year long.

May 10 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.) Wed., 6:30 p.m.  
May 13 - Mill Valley (Miller Ave.), 10 a.m.

## Locations in San Francisco, San Bruno, Marin, Sonoma & Contra Costa

**Richmond District**  
3rd Avenue between  
Geary & Clement  
752-1614

**Sunset District**  
2700 Sloat Blvd.  
46th & Sloat Blvd.  
566-4415

**San Bruno**  
675 El Camino Real  
(650) 869-6000

**Novato**  
2000 Novato Blvd. at  
Wilson  
897-2169

**San Rafael**  
1580 Lincoln Ave. just off  
Hwy. 101  
453-3977

**Mill Valley**  
657 E. Blithedale at Lomita  
388-0102  
401 Miller Ave. at La Goma  
388-0365

**Kentfield**  
700 Sir Francis Drake Blvd.  
at Wolfe Grade  
454-0262

**Sonoma**  
23566 Arnold Drive  
(707) 939-9400  
Hours: 9 am to 6:30 pm

**Danville**  
828 Diablo Road  
(925) 743-0288  
Hours: Mon.-Sat. 8 - 6:30  
Sun. 9 - 5

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

Visit Sloat on the Web: [www.sloatgardens.com](http://www.sloatgardens.com)

**Open 7 days a week 8:30 am to 6:30 pm**

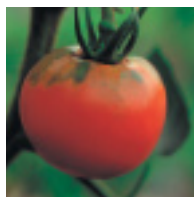
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## Great plants and great advice to help them grow!

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### New Japanese, Chinese and Italian vegetable seeds!

As a general rule we try to help gardeners break new ground as often as we can by tempting them with some exciting and uncommon plants.

This spring we are offering you an international gardening (and culinary) experience with vegetable seeds from Asia and Italy.

**Kitazawa Seed Company,**

founded in 1917, has one of the most extensive selections of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese veg-

etable seeds found anywhere in the U.S.

From exotic cabbages to snow peas, you can enjoy your favorite Asian recipes using the freshest produce direct from your garden.

**Larosa Emanuele** is one of Italy's most famous seed companies and its dedication to quality has earned it an international reputation.

From basilico to zucca (basil to squash), you'll find a great selection of common and uncommon vegetables to try in your garden and kitchen this season.

Both the Italian and Asian seeds are available at our location on Sloat Boulevard. The

Italian varieties can also be found at our Novato and Sonoma stores.



### Good Bug Tub (continued from page 2)

started (since you are now motivated, right?) and you can always count on help from our staff of gardening experts.

Get to know your new "neighbors" with one of our Mac's Field Guides called: *Good and Bad Garden Bugs of California.*

### Host Plants for "Beneficials"



Alyssum	Yarrow
Annual Baby's Breath	Mustard
Annual White Clover	Parsley
Aster	Cilantro
Bachelor Buttons	
California Poppy	
Cosmos	

*About this Newsletter:* The Gardener's Notebook is published bimonthly by Sloat Garden Center for the education and enjoyment of Bay Area gardeners. Information is collected from Sloat's expert staff, current horticultural publications and Sunset's Western Garden Book. Send address corrections to: 420 Coloma Street, Sausalito, CA 94965.