

Youth Education

Karen Asher

Horticultural education for your child—is it important? I am a little prejudiced, and you who are members of the California Arboretum Foundation must be to some degree or you would not have joined that organization. Maybe if more of us had been exposed to horticulture when we were children our cities would be a little more pleasant to live in today. Certainly an appreciation of healthy growing plants at a young age will help to prevent acceptance of a concrete world as an adult. One of my goals as an instructor is to help students understand the importance of plants in our lives while teaching them how to grow them.

What do your children do when they come to the Arboretum to take a class? In the fall and spring there are four basic gardening and horticulture classes offered: Indoor Gardens, Container Gardening, Vegetable Gardening, and Plant Propagation. In the summer we broaden the program, which I will talk about later.

The Indoor Gardens class is for first and second grade children. This class is our beginning step with the children to introduce them to the world of plants. We discuss, "What is an Arboretum?", "Why are plants important?", "What do plants need to grow?" I have discovered that when students stop to think about these questions they can answer most of them with little help from me. We have three projects in Indoor Gardens: growing succulent cuttings, rooting them and transferring them to a container to be taken home; making a terrarium, which is an enjoyable project for the students and a valuable learning tool, as it vividly

illustrates the water cycle; and planting a tree seed. We discuss where seeds come from. This question stumps the students more than any other. I think it is important they do not simply think seeds come in a packet from the store, which was an answer I received once. Watching their seeds germinate and grow, and seeing the roots produced by their succulent cuttings, excites the students and leads to a good deal of bragging and comparing.

Container Gardening for third and fourth grade children shows the children they do not need a piece of land to have a garden. The projects in this class are all grown in some type of container. Forcing bulbs in the fall is an intriguing project. After we tell the students that soil is one of the essentials a plant needs to grow, we turn around and set miniature narcissus in cups containing only pebbles and water. "Where are the bulbs going to get the food they need?" we are asked. At this time we explain exactly what a bulb is and that it contains the food it needs.

Making a coleus hanging basket has proven interesting to me, for I have learned what a tough little plant this is. The students make their own cuttings, and although they are told to carefully remove the lower leaves and keep three or four leaves at the top of the stem, things do not always work out this way. When we get ready to put the cuttings in the greenhouse they look as if they have been to battle and I cross my fingers and speak gently to them.

Growing flowering annuals from seed is a third project. When the students



Learning how to make terrariums



Hanging Baskets



Harvest!

plant the seed for their container I always have them plant extra seeds for the flower garden next to our building. I have learned to make this point very clear at the beginning of this project. The first time I had the students do this I didn't explain they were planting extra seed, so when it came time to transplant the seedlings everyone wanted to take all of their seedlings home. When I told them what I had planned to do, they went along with it but they were not too happy about it.

The semester-long Vegetable Gardening class is eagerly anticipated by many of the younger students. This course for the fifth and sixth grade student offers them a chance to plant, raise, and harvest their own 50-square-foot vegetable garden. The students learn how to prepare their soil for planting, what makes a good soil, and why these things are important. Planting day arrives and the fun begins. Students are shown how to plant their seed and are advised not to overplant as this makes for a lot of work when it comes time to thin out the seedlings. For some the temptation not to plant every seed in their pocket is too great, and only when thinning time comes do they see the error of their ways. Fortunately our gardens have been relatively insect and disease free so the harvest is plentiful. Sometimes a little too plentiful. After harvesting three or four heads of lettuce two weeks in a row I hear comments like "My Mom says she doesn't need any more lettuce this week."

After the gardens are planted and begin to grow the students soon learn the three steps to a good garden: weeding, watering, and cultivating. Although I get the usual moans and groans when they realize there is work to do, they do a very admirable job and keep their gardens looking attractive and growing well.

Plant Propagation is the culmination of the gardening classes. This class is designed for junior high students who want to go a little deeper into the many methods of propagating plants. As mentioned before, the younger classes learn to make simple tip cuttings; now the students learn to make leaf, stem, deciduous, and evergreen cuttings. They learn how some seeds need to be processed by cold storage (stratification) or have their seed coat roughened in some manner (scarification) before planting to ensure germination.

We study a little more in depth different soil mixes to be used for cuttings, seeds, and potted plants. We work with bulbs learning which to use at what time of year, growing some in containers and some in our gardens here. There are a number of house plants we propagate in the fall and put together in an indoor planter. We do a number of interesting projects which I vary from time to time, and we may put together a sphagnum hanging basket with maybe an asparagus fern we started from seed, or a coleus or juniper started from cuttings. We have also made totem pole planters with pothos or syngonium.

At the present time we do not have a program for high school students. I feel a program for these students would be well received and would help keep them actively interested until they are of age to attend the adult classes. I hope we will be able to put such a program together within the next year.

The four classes I have just discussed are the classes offered during the fall and spring at the Arboretum. The summer session meets twice a week for three weeks, and most planting projects are kept at a minimum due to the time factor.

The classes we are able to offer during the summer depend to a certain degree on the instructors. We try to obtain one

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An Arboretum is for people . . .

Wherever they live — home, apartment, condominium — most residents of Southern California like some kind of outdoor living as part of their daily life. The Demonstration Home Gardens at the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum are designed to show the possibilities in terms of plants, decking, furniture, ponds, fountains, lighting, shade, fencing, and walks. These elements are arranged in various patio settings which can be copied or altered according to individual taste and situation.

And, of course, the horticultural know-how for growing plants in hanging baskets and other containers is available from Arboretum experts.



Southern California Edison Company

BOOKSHELF

New acquisitions to LASCA Plant Science Library:

PROPAGATING HOUSE PLANTS, Arno and Irene Nehrling. Hearthside Press, Inc., Great Neck, New York. 1962, 1971. 292 p. Black and white illustrations.

DWARF RHODODENDRONS, Peter A. Cox. Macmillan Publishing Co., New York. 1973. 296 p. Black and white and color illustrations.

USING WAYSIDE PLANTS, Nelson Coon. Hearthside Press, Inc., Great Neck, New York. 1969. 287 p. Black and white illustrations.

BOUQUETS THAT LAST, Emily Brown. Hearthside Press, Inc., New York. 1970. 175 p. Color and black and white illustrations.

GREENWORKS, Judith Handelsman and Sara Baerwald. Macmillan Publishing Co., New York. 1974. 182 p. Black and white illustrations.

AUSTRALIAN EUCALYPTS, Mervyn Millett. Landsdowne Press, Melbourne. 1969. 112 p. Black and white and color illustrations.

A FARMACOPÉIA TIRIYÓ: estudo etnobotânico, Paulo B. Cavalcante e Protásio Frikel. Belém, Brazil, Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. 1973. 157 p. (Publicações avulsas no. 24)

FATE AND EFFECTS OF TRACE ELEMENTS IN SEWAGE SLUDGE WHEN APPLIED TO AGRICULTURAL LANDS, A. L. Page. Cincinnati, U. S. Environmental Protection Agency. 1974. 98 p.

GROWING BONSAI, Henry M. Cathey. Washington, D. C., U. S. Dept. of Agriculture. 1973. 21 p. Illustrations. (Home and garden bulletin no. 206)

HANDBOOK OF WILDFLOWERS, WEEDS, WILDLIFE, AND WEATHER OF THE PALOS VERDES PENINSULA, Donald Moore-Gales. The Author. 1974. Illustrations.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 18th INTERNATIONAL HORTICULTURAL CONGRESS, 1970. Tel-Aviv. 1972, 5 vol.

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or two extra people to teach classes during this period so we may offer a wider range of classes and can accommodate as many of the applicants as possible. For the past two summers we have offered classes such as Plant Adventures, Experimenting with Plants, Bird Study, Art in Nature, and Life in the Lagoon. In the six meetings we have we manage to put together some nice projects, having fun and learning at the same time.

I feel "having fun" is one of the main reasons I enjoy teaching the classes at the Arboretum. While the children are basically here to learn, they should also have a good time; we know that as long as

they are enjoying themselves they are very receptive to learning.

Teaching these classes can be easy if there are enough projects to keep them entertained. Otherwise, teaching these classes can be very difficult if you want the students to gain some knowledge. I personally feel a great sense of accomplishment when I can see that my students have picked up some basic information or have acquired a greater sense of the plant life around them.

Karen Asher is an Arboretum education assistant who has worked in the youth education section for the past two years.



Asher, Karen. 1974. "Youth education." *Lasca leaves* 24, 98–102.

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