

# The Chuparosa

Chapter Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 9 - December 2016



Desert  
Horticultural  
Society of the Coachella Valley

## Water, shelter, and food for wildlife-friendly backyards



A good rock pile provides a place for lizards to bask in the morning sun and warm up. Large crevices between the rocks provide a hideout from predators.

By Dr. Christopher McDonald

In my previous article (Chuparosa October issue) I described how wildlife is everywhere, most likely just a short walk from where you are standing right now. Our backyards and landscapes are capable of supporting an abundance and diversity of wildlife.

The wildlife that we can attract and we most likely want in our urban

and suburban areas is native bees, butterflies and moths, birds and small lizards. These creatures are very mobile, can live in close proximity to people, and do not cause much, if any, damage to structures or property. They are also very easy to attract to our yards. So how do we create a habitat for backyard friendly wildlife? We need to provide water, shelter and food.

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## We skipped a month

Chuparosa readers: We apologize. For a variety of reasons (vacations, holidays, photo issues, surprise work schedules), a November issue has passed us by. We will do our best to continue to produce the Chuparosa regularly. You can expect issues for these months: January, February, March, April, May, June-July, August-September, October, November, and December.

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## Our Next Meeting: Wednesday, January 18 at 6 p.m.

There are many interesting connections between birds and plants in the desert Southwest. People might have many questions when they plan a garden to attract birds. For instance: Should I feed birds? What will happen if I plant sweet acacia in my yard? Why should I avoid trimming my palm trees? How can I attract more bird species to my garden? Which bird field guide is the best?

College of the Desert professor Kurt Leuschner will discuss these questions in his talk about the various relationships between plants and birds.

He teaches courses on conservation, entomology, field ornithology, native plants, and GPS navigation. He has a bachelor's degree in zoology from U.C. Santa Barbara and a master's in wildlife ecology from the University of Florida.

Leuschner also teaches weekend courses and workshops on bird watching, insects, GPS, and backyard habitats for UCR Extension, the Desert Institute at Joshua Tree National Park, the Desert Studies Center and The Living Desert.

**5:30 p.m.** Plant exchange. Bring pups, cuttings, plants to share with others. Even if cannot bring plants feel free to adopt and watch your garden grow.

**6 p.m.** Regular DHSCV meeting with presentation by Kurt Leuschner, professor of natural resources at College of the Desert. Topic: "Birds and Plants: Creating a Backyard Habitat"

**7:30 p.m.** Refreshments

**Where:** Hoover Room, The Living Desert, 47-900 Portola Ave., Palm Desert. Free

## More Upcoming Events

Here's a cache of events and meetings of interest to members of the Desert Horticultural Society of the Coachella Valley and fellow gardening enthusiasts. Read more at [www.deserthorticulturalsociety.org](http://www.deserthorticulturalsociety.org).

### Ongoing Mondays free help:

Through May 2017. Master Gardeners will be at the UC Cooperative Extension office in Indio to answer gardening questions, help solve gardening problems. Free. Drops-ins,

telephone calls, emails welcome. 81-077 Indio Blvd., Suite H. (760) 342-2511, [anrmgindio@ucanr.edu](mailto:anrmgindio@ucanr.edu)

### Ongoing "Ask the Gardener":

Master Gardeners set up tables Saturdays at Palm Springs farmers market; on second, fourth Wednesday at Palm Desert farmers market; on second, fourth Sunday at La Quinta farmers market. 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

### Dec. 7 Water and its Local History:

Workshop with in-class instruction, on-grounds walk. The Living Des-

ert. 9-11:30 a.m. \$20 members, \$30 nonmembers. 47-900 Portola Ave., Palm Desert. [Livingdesert.org](http://Livingdesert.org), (9760) 346-5694

**Dec. 8 Field trip:** 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Sherman Library & Garden, Roger's Garden & Nursery, Corona del Mar, Roger's Garden Nursery, Irvine. ***This event has been cancelled.***

### Dec. 8 Sand Dunes and Sand Lizards:

Talk by Dr. Allan Muth, 6 p.m. UCR Palm Desert. 75-080 Frank Sinatra Drive, Palm Desert. Free.

## Events, cont'd

[PalmDesert.ucr.edu](http://PalmDesert.ucr.edu), (760) 834-0800

**Dec. 14 Plants of the Living Desert:** Workshop with in-class instruction, on-grounds walk. The Living Desert. 9 a.m.-noon. \$20 members, \$30 nonmembers. 47-900 Portola Ave., Palm Desert. [LivingDesert.org](http://LivingDesert.org), (9760) 346-5694

**Dec. 15 Introduction to Geology of the Coachella Valley:** By master gardener Burt Boss. 4:30-5:30 p.m. Cathedral City Library, 33-520 Date Palm Drive. Free.

**Dec. 16 Growing tomatoes in the desert:** By Master Gardeners, 9-10 a.m., La Quinta Wellness Center, 78-450 Avenida La Fonda, La Quinta. Free. RSVP at (760) 564-0096.

**Dec. 17 How to Plant and Water Your Natives:** 10-11 a.m., Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, 1500 N. College Ave., Claremont. Free. [Rsabg.org](http://Rsabg.org), (909) 625-8767

**March 11-12 Overnight bus trip to Arizona:** Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Superior on 3/11; Tucson Botanical Garden on 3/12. \$139 per person, double occupancy includes bus, hotel, one meal.

**March 26 12th annual Desert Garden Tour:** Details TBA. See [www.deserthorticulturalsociety.org](http://www.deserthorticulturalsociety.org) for more information

## This & That

### *DWA plans hike in fees, charges*

Desert Water Agency is proposing to increase rates to cover growth in costs and to replace aging, leaking pipelines.

More than 30 miles of DWA's pipelines, pumps and facilities were installed before 1950, with some reaching as far back as the 1920s. Pipes that are more than 55 years old account for 20 percent of DWA's system, but they are responsible for more than 90 percent of the leaks in the system.

State regulations mandate more costly water testing and sampling and the cost of imported water, material expenses and the cost of doing business have all increased.

The matter will be discussed at a public hearing: Thursday, Dec. 15, 6 p.m., Cielo Vista Charter School cafeteria, 560 S. Paseo Dorotea, Palm Springs.

As a not-for-profit public agency, DWA is required to recover costs through rates and charges customers pay. A rate study conducted by third-party financial experts found that DWA was not charging enough to cover the cost of providing water service.

If passed, the new rates would go into effect on Jan. 1, 2017. The size of meters will determine the new

base rate water charge. The average single family home would see an increase from \$10.75 to \$13.25 to \$14.41 per month. Also, the price per unit of water used would remain the same until July 2017 when it would increase from \$1.57 to \$1.72.

Information: [dwa.org/rates](http://dwa.org/rates)

### *Changes in by-laws*

Three changes in the Horticultural Society's bylaws were unanimously approved at the Oct. 26 membership meeting.

The position of vice president was added, to bring the executive committee to four members: president, vice president, secretary and treasurer.

Membership levels changed. There will no longer be dual memberships. Categories are now adult and student. Dues remain \$10 per person.

The society's fiscal year will now be the calendar year.

### *Tips about desert fan palms*

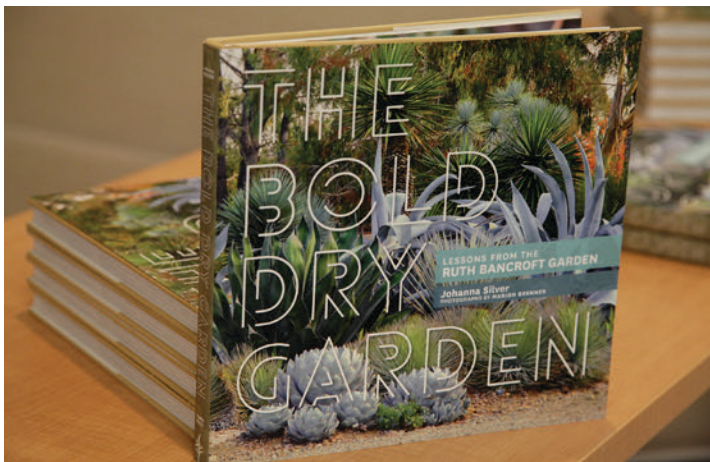
From James Cornett's Nov. 11 "Ecology of the Desert Palm Oasis" class for the Desert Institute, Joshua Tree National Park.

**Continued on page 8**



## Scenes from Desert Garden Community Day 2016

*Photos by Caroline Greyschok*





## Scenes from Desert Garden Community Day 2016



Johanna Silver, Sunset Magazine



Ashley Metzger, Desert Water Agency



Al Hollinger, Vintage Associates



Cameron Barrows, UCR



Robin Kobaly, The SummerTree Institute



Susan Krings, UC Master Gardeners



## Scenes from Desert Garden Community Day



Wendy Proud, Mountain States Wholesale Nursery



Troy Bankord, Troy Bankord Design



Scholarship Winners: (from left to right) Joseph Borja, Ulices Cisneros, Edwin Martinez

## Insects 101: Blue dasher dragonfly



Photo & Text By Brian K. Rolf

**Common name:**

Blue dasher dragonfly

**Scientific name:**

*Pachydiplax longipennis*

**Life cycle:** 1 year

**Range:** All of North America except for the Great Basin

The Blue dasher dragonfly is an abundant species that is usually found where there is a still water source. Females will drop as many as 700 eggs into this water after mating with a male.

As with other species of dragonfly, adults of this species have a voracious appetite eating most flying insects, including flies, moths and butterflies just to name a few.

You can see the Blue dasher in our area from March to December.

Brian K. Rolf is owner of Seattle Bug Safari, a traveling bug zoo. [brolf@seattlebugssafari.com](mailto:brolf@seattlebugssafari.com), (425) 829-4869



## Two superb gardens on the coast worth a visit

*Photos & Text By Robert T. Musial*

I had the opportunity to visit an extraordinary garden last November in Montecito. Lotusland is the most visited private garden in the U.S., and has more than 3,000 plants. It has been named one of the ten best gardens in the world.

Madame Ganna Walska, a well-known Polish opera singer and socialite, purchased the estate in 1941 and spent the next 43 years creating Lotusland. The garden is home to several superb plant collections. Around each corner there is the unexpected—a surprise of unique garden design and plant species.

After her death in 1984, Lotusland became a nonprofit botanic garden. It opened to the public in 1993.

Guided tours are offered at 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday, Feb. 17 through Nov. 12. Adults \$45. Advance tour reservations are required at (805) 969-9990.

I also visited the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, which is near Lotusland. A delight in that it is a native plant garden on 78 acres in historic Mission Canyon, it features over 1,000 species of rare and indigenous plants.

The panoramic views to the Santa Ynez Mountains and the Channel

Islands are stunning. There are 5.5 miles of paths leading to featured areas within the garden: the Mission Dam and aqueduct built in 1807 to supply water to the Santa Barbara Mission, an authentic Japanese Teahouse, a Redwood grove and a Meadow Garden filled with native wildflowers in the spring. It is open 7 days a week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. November through February and from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. March through October. Admission is \$10.

My assistant Shanna Winters and I will be putting together an overnight bus field trip to visit these two gardens in the near future. If you cannot wait, a short 4.5 hour car trip from the desert is highly recommended.



## This & That, cont'd

Desert fan palms are the most widely spread tree species on earth in warm tempered regions.

With appropriate water, desert fan palms will grow about one foot a year until they reach maturity. They can live up to 150 years.

Palm Canyon in the Indian Canyons Tribal Park, Palm Springs, contains the largest naturally occurring palm oasis in the world.

Most naturally occurring desert fan palms are found in canyons with water sources and along earthquake fault lines.

Information: "Desert Palm Oasis," by James Cornett

### **From the Nov. 14 board meeting**

The board learned:

The society's new website is expected to go online about Jan.1.

The society has a record-breaking 596 members.

A committee of board members will start looking at gardens to include in the 2017 Garden Tour.

The 2017 Garden Day, set for Oct. 21, will again be held at UCR, Palm Desert.

Board member Lisa Middleton will head a committee to recruit members who would like become future officers.

The next board meeting will be at 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 10 at the Rancho Mirage Public Library

### **CVWD adopts day-of-use irrigation restrictions**

From Dec. 1 through March 31, Coachella Valley Water District domestic customers will not be allowed to outdoor water on Mondays and Thursdays. This temporary restriction for irrigation aims to further encourage conservation.

The irrigation schedule is in addition to ongoing water-use restrictions that include: No irrigation during or within 48 hours after measurable rainfall; Broken sprinklers must be repaired within 24 hours of notification; Applying water to outdoor landscapes that causes runoff to adjacent property, roadways, parking lots, etc. is prohibited; Using a hose to wash an automobile, windows, solar panels, and tennis courts, except where the hose is equipped with a shut-off nozzle, is prohibited; Applying water to any hard surface including, but not limited to, driveways, sidewalks, and asphalt is prohibited.

Homeowners' associations or community service organizations cannot block, stifle, or threaten homeowners

from reducing or eliminating the watering of vegetation or lawns during a declared drought emergency.

As a result of water-use restrictions and customer conservation efforts, water use is down significantly. The rolling average since June is a 23.4% decrease in water use when compared to the same period in 2013.

[www.cvwd.org](http://www.cvwd.org)

### **Frost alert!**

Anyone with a vegetable garden or frost sensitive plants may have trouble remembering when they need to protect their plants with cover. No more excuses, there is an app for that!

You can create a reminder that will be sent to your smart phone any time frost is in the forecast by using the free app IFTTT. This app can be used to send yourself a myriad of notifications on many different non-gardening related things, but the weather function sure can come in handy for gardeners.

Use the app to create your own IF-TTT (if this, then that) function, or "Applet", by selecting "weather" and the weather condition you would like to be notified about.

(Courtesy member Kelley Bachli)



## Wildlife gardens, cont'd

All wildlife needs water and some desert animals need to drink regularly. Luckily, it's relatively easy for wildlife to drink water in your yard. This can be as simple as a depression in a large rock, a birdbath or a small decorative stream. Any water should be cleaned and emptied or dried out every few days. This prevents mosquitoes from breeding.

Also, more water means a greater upkeep and a greater chance for mosquitoes to breed if the water is left unattended. Irrigation usually provides enough soil moisture for ground and soil dwelling insects to thrive.

Second, we can provide shelter for backyard-friendly wildlife. The more diversity of shelters we provide, the better the odds of attracting wildlife. Lizards bask on large rock piles and hide from predators in the crevices. Bee blocks are good at attracting tunnel-nesting bees. Bees that burrow in the soil prefer bare and undisturbed soil. Ground dwelling insects are attracted to mulch and leaf litter.

Placing small diameter shrub or tree clippings under shrubs and trees is helpful and will also provide a natural mulch layer. Birds prefer a variety of structures to perch on, hide in, eat insects off of, and a safe place

to build a nest. Having a variety of small herbaceous plants, shrubs and trees is usually sufficient to meet their needs.

The last and more difficult task to create a vibrant backyard habitat is to plant native plants. Native plants are the base of the food web for backyard wildlife. Butterfly and moth caterpillars need leaves to munch on. Native bees need pollen and some nectar for



The entrance tunnel for a ground-nesting bee is about the size of a pencil eraser. The nests can be found by looking for the excavated soil that has been spread.

their young. Lizards need to eat small insects. Birds need small insects to eat as well as seeds and berries.

Many of the plants used in urban landscapes are not native to Southern California. Lantana, aloe, bougainvillea, bird of paradise and butterfly bush are from different parts of the world and not the California desert. In order for wildlife to thrive in our backyards it needs to eat plants or they need to eat herbivores that eat plants.

Unfortunately, many ornamental plants are not palatable to our plant-eating insects. Exotic plants often have a variety of chemicals that leave a bad taste in the mouth of a caterpillar. The same goes with humans, only a few species of leaves are really tasty. When we transport a plant from a different part of the world to Southern California the local herbivores most often cannot eat it. While this is good for keeping an ornamental plant looking pristine all year long, it is not good if we want to provide food for wildlife.

In order to provide food for wildlife we need to provide native plants so that herbivores can eat. Our local wildlife has been living with local plant species for many generations and they are able to eat native plants.

The native bees will recognize the pollen from native plants as edible, the caterpillars will be able to break down any toxic chemicals in the leaves and grow into butterflies and wildlife can thrive in your yard. I'll finish up this series next month with a list of native desert plants that can help attract wildlife to your yard.

*Dr. Christopher McDonald is an Inland and Desert Natural Resources Manager at the University of California Cooperative Extension. [cjmcdonald@ucanr.edu](mailto:cjmcdonald@ucanr.edu)*

## What to do in your garden in December

*By Staff reports*

December is a great month to take advantage of mild winter weather and tackle major garden projects. Here's what the new revised edition of "Lush & Efficient: Desert -Friendly Landscaping in the Coachella Valley" says desert gardeners could do this month.

Install a drip irrigation system complete with smart irrigation controller. With the water you save, it will pay for itself.

Plant perennials and accent plants such as cacti, succulents and ornamental grasses in place of beds of annuals.

Develop a wildlife garden in corner of the yard to attract birds, hummingbirds, bees, butterflies and small critters.

Grow plants in colorful pots you decorate yourself to give as holiday gifts.

If your landscape has drainage problems, create a drainage swale, and if possible, a retention basin. Or build a simulated creek bed with rocks and boulders to channel and disperse runoff.

Make a rock garden on a natural-shaped flowing mound to serve as a landscape feature. Plant nooks and crannies with flowering perennials, groundcovers, ornamental

grasses and accent plants.

Reduce the size of large lawns, especially in front yards. Install a border for the smaller lawn area. Plant the remaining perimeter with water-efficient shrubs, grasses and groundcovers.

Build a raised bed garden to grow a vegetable, herb or color garden. Incorporate ample amounts of organic matter into the soil to provide your plants with optimum growing conditions.

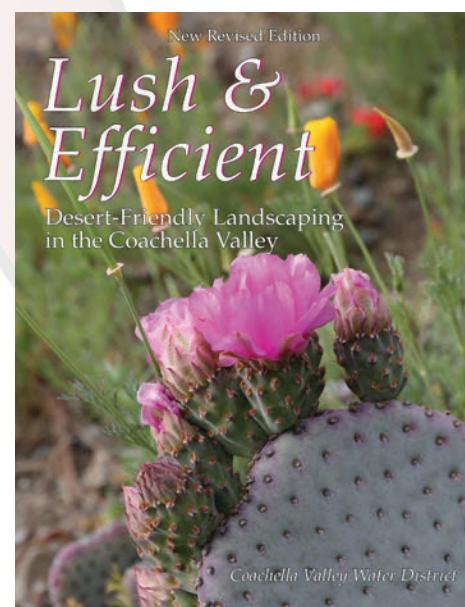
If you have an old garden with woody hedges and overgrown plants, give it a face lift. Remove old, tired plants and bring new ideas into play with colorful, water-efficient, low-maintenance plants.

If you have a large expanse of gravel or other nonliving groundcover surrounding your home, replace some areas with low-water use groundcovers and shrubs. Position plants at the base of structures to cut down on reflected heat and light, reducing cooling costs inside.

In "Growing Vegetables in Drought, Desert and Dry Times" author and desert resident Maureen Gilmer has a suggestion for December. First, she reminds us that the "low desert has its own unique seasons that stymie gardeners from other regions because the winters are so mild. Areas such as Palm Springs

and Tucson are technically tropical desert without much cold and only a few mornings of brief dawn frost.

Tip: December is the best time to start warm-season crops indoors to prepare for late January or February outdoor planting opportunities.



Sources: Lush and Efficient: Gardening in the Coachella Valley, by CVWD, The Desert Gardener's Calendar by George Brookbank



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## Want to Get More Involved?

*We have so many opportunities for members to become more actively involved with the Desert Horticultural Society of Coachella Valley. Jump in!*

## Send Us Your Photos & Favorite Websites!

We like to show off photos of gardens or plants that horticulture society members have collected. Please send your jpeg photos at full size attached to an email with your name, where the photo was taken and information about the photo subject.

And, have you come across online gardens, educational sources or conservation links you like? Email links and photos to Jamie Lee Pricer at [jlp6@hotmail.com](mailto:jlp6@hotmail.com). We'll share them in future newsletters.