

The Chuparosa

Chapter Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 5 - May 2016



Mary Brent Wehrli awarded City of Palm Springs 2016 "Green Citizen" Award



From left to right: Paul Ortega, Robert Musial, Bruce Larson, Tracy Merrigan, Carl Schoenmann, Mary Brent Wehrli, Martin Wehrli, Lisha Astorga. Photos by Mark Astorga

By Lisa Middleton and Bruce Larson

Mayor Robert Moon made the announcement at a standing room only City Council meeting on April 6.

The award was kept a surprise to Mary Brent Wehrli, who thought the City Council was going to recognize the 2016 Garden Tour, and not her long term contribution to

the city of Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley. Needless to say, she was surprised (in her words "shocked") and did not fail to attribute her contribution to others, always the mark of a real leader. Wehrli was chosen from applicants by the Palm Springs Sustainability Commission, which recognizes a

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Note: *The Chuparosa will combine newsletters for the summer season as the publication has done in the past. Watch for June/July and August/September issues in your email inbox.*

Our Next Meeting: October 19 at 6 p.m.

Joshua Tree National Park has been using native plants to restore impacted areas within the park for over 30 years. Seeds are collected within five miles of project locations and used to produce native plant materials in the Park's nursery, called the Center for Arid Lands Restoration. Despite the many success stories, the restoration program faces tough challenges for the future that the park is working to overcome. Neil Frakes will introduce us to the Center and to some of the success stories it has achieved over the years.

Neil Frakes is the Vegetation Branch Chief in the Division of Resource Management at Joshua Tree National Park. He oversees a variety of vegetation based programs at

the park including native plant restoration, invasive plant species management, field botany, climate change monitoring, and rock climbing stewardship. He started at Joshua Tree in July of 2015.

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 Neil Frakes

7:30 p.m. Refreshments

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

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.

Ongoing: Ask the Gardener: Master Gardener volunteers serve "Ask the Gardener" tables at farmer's markets. Palm Springs, 8 a.m.-noon, Saturdays, Camelot Theatre parking lot, 2300 E. Baristo Road; Palm

Desert, 8 a.m.-noon, second and fourth Wednesdays of the month, Chamber of Commerce parking lot, 72-559 Highway 111; La Quinta, 8 a.m.-noon, second and fourth Sundays of the month, Main Street, Old Town La Quinta

July 2, 3 Cactus & Succulent Society of American Annual Show & Sale: Huntington Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino.

Aug 13, 14 31st annual Intercity Show & Sale: Cactus and succulent

show and sale. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. LA County Arboretum, 301 N. Baldwin, Arcadia

Oct. 19 Society meeting with presentation by Neil Frakes: Vegetation Branch Chief in the Division of Resource Management Division at Joshua Tree National Park. 6 p.m., preceded by free plant exchange at 5:30 p.m. The Hoover Room, The Living Desert, 47-900 Portola Ave., Palm Desert

Mary Brent wins 2016 “Green Citizen” of the Year Award, cont’d

Palm Springs citizen who demonstrates exemplary sustainability practices and a passion for “green” living and the environment.

“The City of Palm Springs wants residents to have an opportunity to be recognized for outstanding environmental stewardship,” said Michele Mician, manager of the Office of Sustainability. “We want to honor residents who take those extra steps and serve as role models to the rest of the community with the hope that others will follow in their “green” footsteps and make a positive impact in our city.” The “Green Citizen” Award was inaugurated in 2010, this year marking the 7th annual event.

When Wehrli arrived in Palm Springs in 1999, she could have put her feet up and celebrated a good life well lived. She had taught at UCLA, led non-profits in the Los Angeles area and raised a wonderful family. Instead, she found her passion in desert landscape, sustainable gardens, and the natural flora of the western Sonoran Desert.

We credit Mike Chedester, Glenn Huntington and Paul Ortega as founding fathers of the Desert Horticultural Society of the Coachella

Valley, and we can credit Wehrli as the founding mother. She was not only one of the first members, but also its first secretary, a tireless campaigner for the organization, and since 2013, its president.



Wehrli has been the enduring champion of the Desert Horticulture Society for a decade. She organizes meetings, recruits new members, tells everyone she meets about the upcoming events, hands out event announcements, all with a nev-

er-ending enthusiasm and never give up attitude.

On Desert Horticultural Society field trips from Phoenix to Pasadena to San Diego, hundreds of Coachella

Valley residents have been inspired and brought back ideas to create more sustainable, desert appropriate Palm Springs gardens. Most importantly, those attending a tour or a class come away inspired and committed to sustainable desert gardens. It was Wehrli who co-wrote a Valley Voice article in “The Desert Sun” that led to the conversion of the Tahquitz Canyon Way median to desert landscape.

Wehrli’s personal garden on Tamarisk Road seems timeless and natural fronting a seven decade old ranch home. Not too many years ago it was a turf lawn befitting 1950’s sense of style and inexhaustible resources. Today her home is not only a garden tour staple and the subject of many newspaper and magazine articles and the setting for classes on low water, sustainable desert gardening that supports local wildlife.

Wehrli is a community treasure who not only talks the talk but walks the walk of environmental stewardship, and is so worthy of the title Green Citizen of the Year.

Garden Tour Was Another Success!



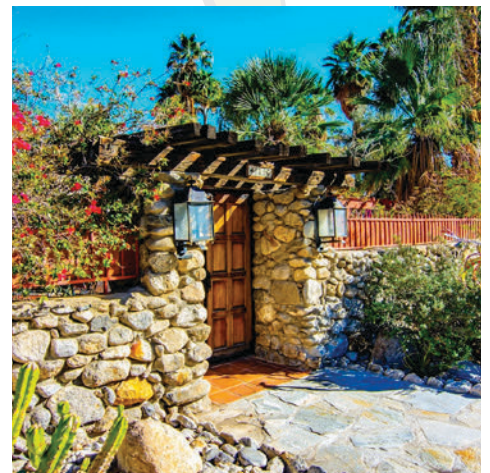
Photos by Mark Astorga

About 900 guests gathered ideas about the best desert gardens at the 11th annual Desert Garden Tour, hosted from noon to 4 p.m. on Sunday, April 3 by the Desert Horticulture Society of the Coachella Valley.

Check-in and ticket sales were headquartered at the Wellness Park in Palm Springs, where Desert Water Agency provided a water truck and DWA, the Coachella Valley Water Dis-

trict and Mission Springs Water District donated reusable water bottles.

Thanks to these Palm Springs residents and groups for letting DHSCV show off their gardens: Dean Willocks and Judy Saenz, Cliff White, Palermo Condo Community, Fritzie Van Jessen and Palm Springs Unified School District.



Garden Tour, cont'd



Plant of the Month: *Calliandra* x *Fairyduster* 'Sierra Starr'

Fairyduster lovers will be happy to know you have a new friend on the street and her name is 'Sierra Starr.' This species is a hybrid between the Sonoran native Fairy Duster, *Calliandra eriophylla*, with its white/pink powder puff-like blossoms and the red, summer flowering species—*Calliandra californica*—that is larger and native to Baja and Mexico.

This hybrid seems to possess the best of both species having a dense, uniform growth habit of about 4-5' tall x 4-5' as wide. The best trait about this new hybrid is that it blooms off-and-on all year long in a show of stunning bright pink/red blossoms, providing appreciated nectar on a regular basis to our hummingbirds.

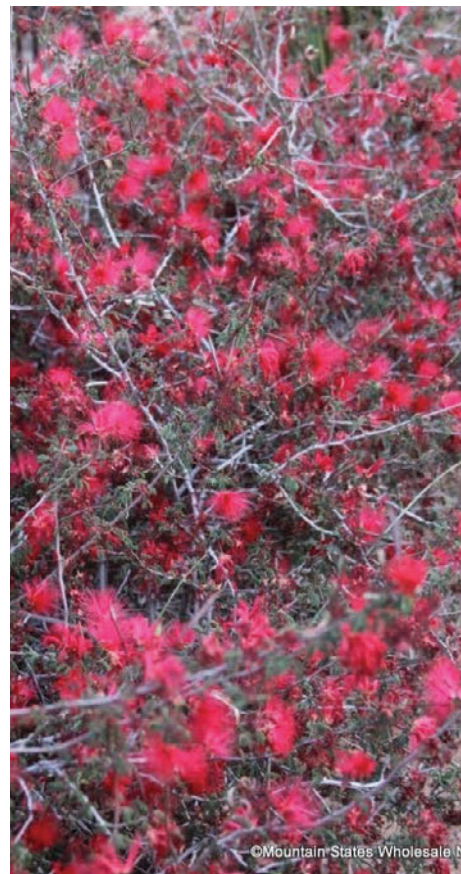
Given its uniform growth habit, 'Sierra Starr' is a perfect, versatile plant lending itself to natural "hedges," rows, masses and borders where a formal, informal, tailored or layered look might be desired in your desert garden. *Calliandra* 'Sierra Starr' is also naturally soft and loose enough to compliment agave, cacti and succulent species.

Lush and green, it is most likely evergreen through the winter, but will molt and lose its yellowing leaving in the late winter as new growth protrudes from the branches.

Hardy to about 15 degrees, it is best

if cut back or thinned after its last bloom of fall, when temperatures start to cool off, so not to impede its blooming frenzy. It thrives in full sun and will tolerate reflected heat and sun off south and west-facing walls, has no known pest problems and is a low/moderate water user.

Note: 'Sierra Starr' will bloom less and have a more woody appearance when given lower water. This desert introduction is a true winner in my eyes, given its hardiness, non-stop blooming period and design versatility.



Insects 101: Desert Blister Beetle



Photos & Text By Brian K. Rolf

Common name:

Desert Blister Beetle

Scientific name: *Lytta magister*

Size:

Adults range in size from 1 - 1.3"

Range: Mojave, Colorado deserts

Desert Blister Beetles are large beetles identified by their dark black wings, red colored head and red legs. They are good flyers and in the spring time adults congregate where they will mate and feed on the flowers and leaves of brittle bush (*Encelia farinosa*) and other desert plants.

After mating, females lay their eggs in holes, small cavities, and depressions in the ground. After hatching, the beetle larvae are will seek out other insects to feed on. In the desert, larvae feed mainly on the larvae and stored food of bumble bees and other ground nesting bees.

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

This & That



CVWD recognizes top water savers

Coachella Valley Water District's (CVWD) Board of Directors honored a local resident and business with conservation awards. Tracey Newton of La Quinta won Most Beautiful Front Yard. She replaced 600 square feet of grass with water-efficient plants and installed a drip irrigation system.

First Bank, Palm Desert earned the Outstanding Commercial Water Saver award. The bank replaced more than 4,000 square feet of grass with desert-friendly landscaping that will save 250,000 gallons of water per year.

Both winners received rebates through

CVWD's turf buyback program.

State releases more water

The Department of Water Resources announced on April 21 that the State Water Project allocation was boosted from 45 to 60 percent. This means the Coachella Valley will have access to more imported water that can recharge our aquifers.

DWA fails to meet state savings goal; fines violators

Desert Water Agency customers saved 15% in March of 2016 compared to March of 2013. The state requirement is 32%. DWA's cumulative savings June 2015 - March 2016 is 26%.

Customers are encouraged to do what they can to save and follow the watering schedule. Watering is allowed only on Monday, Wednesday and Friday before 7 a.m. and after 7 p.m. Water should not be spraying onto your sidewalk, driveway, neighbor's yard, etc.

In March, Desert Water Agency issued 122 water use violation penalties for customers that did not follow the restrictions. For single-family residents fines are \$50 first violation, \$100 second violation and \$250 third violation. For all other customers the fines are \$100 first violation, \$200 second violation and \$500 third violation.

Wondering what to plant where?

Desert Water Agency has a desert landscaping database.

It does not include all plants that will grow in the Valley, but lists hundreds that are known to perform well here. Readers can learn about almost 400 plants and see more than 900 photos to help them create a water-conserving landscape.

The plants are divided into 9 categories: Trees, shrubs, ground covers, cactus, ornamental grasses, vines, succulents, perennials and annuals.

Go to dwa.org/DesertPlants

Maintenance by the Month, May

By Troy Bankord

Ya'll better be rested up this month so you can take care of your garden business because simply put... There's a LOT goin' on in that little desert garden of yours.

It's Fertilize-Your-Citrus Month!

A well-balanced citrus food is best, but check online or at your local growing centers for more "organically green" options. Be sure the fertilizer contains a small amount of the micronutrients iron and zinc as well as the 3 primary macronutrients: N-P-K.

Dig large wells to hold water around tree root zones. Tree roots extend out to the drip or canopy line and the larger the well, historically the healthier your citrus trees. It is better to really soak the trees when watering, letting them slightly dry out prior to your next watering.

Many sources say that watering every 2 weeks is adequate in our desert. Given my 30 years experience, I note the following: 1. Temperatures have gotten hotter; 2. Annual rainfall is less. The more citrus are watered, the larger, the juicier the fruit. The more regular watering giv-

en to citrus, the less branch dieback.

I find it best to either put citrus on their own watering system or on that with leafy plantings or roses.

Citrus bark is very, very thin. Exposing it to the direct sun will cause blistering. Once the bark starts to

shaded the trunk structure.

Garden maintenance

Wildflowers & seeds: Collect and store wildflower seeds in paper bags to prevent mold or you can shake, shake, and shake your seeds happily around your garden where you'd like them to rear their little heads this fall. Spring-blooming perennials such as Penstemons (*Penstemon* spp.), Brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*), Globemallow (*Sphaeralcea ambigua*), Fleabane (*Erigeron divergens*), and Golden Columbine (*Aquilegia chrysantha*) should be producing seed. Continue deadheading herbaceous perennials to encourage continued flowering.

Annuals: Early May is the best time to replace any annuals in your beds and pots. Remove the up-

per foliage of annuals and let their root systems stay in the soil to let them break down, adding additional compost and nutrients to your soil. Fluffing up your pots with fresh potting soil or compost is a good idea prior to installing seasonal annuals.

Water stress: Watch for shriveled or shrinking stems and/or leaves, pale green to yellow epidermis (skin) and

HEALTHY FOLIAGE	N	
STRONG ROOTS	P	
HEARTY GROWTH	K	

peel, the inner cambium layers start to bake from the outside in, eventually killing that part of the tree and exposing the remaining parts to direct sun and eventual death. Protect the trunks of your citrus with either tree paint (in white and now in bark brown) or wrap them with burlap. The burlap can be removed in October, or once your trees have filled-in adequately enough to have

May, cont'd

in the case of many Prickly-pears (*Opuntia spp.*), wilted or limp stems and fallen pads. Be on your guard for winter-growing succulents that appear to be water-stressed. They are actually going dormant for the summer. If they are overwatered, they may damp or rot off.

Mulch: If you have not applied organic mulch to your vegetable and herb beds, do so now. A layer of composted mulch can help conserve moisture. It's also a great time to mound up 4-5 inches of mulch around the base of rose bushes. This will help keep the root zone more evenly moist and roots cooler.

Leaf molting: Many trees and plants will molt in May. It's just Mother Nature's way of allowing plants to shed their old leaves to allow for the new.

Watering

As the weather warms, it's time to adjust your watering schedule for the summer. Observe plants regularly for signs of water stress. Some signs to look for include: wilting, curling leaves, yellowing or falling of older

leaves and dead stems or branches.

Plant sunscreen

Years ago, I stumbled onto some little leaf Palo Verde (*Cercidium microphyllum*) that were thinned way too much late in the spring, causing trunk scalding and severe plant stress. I found an

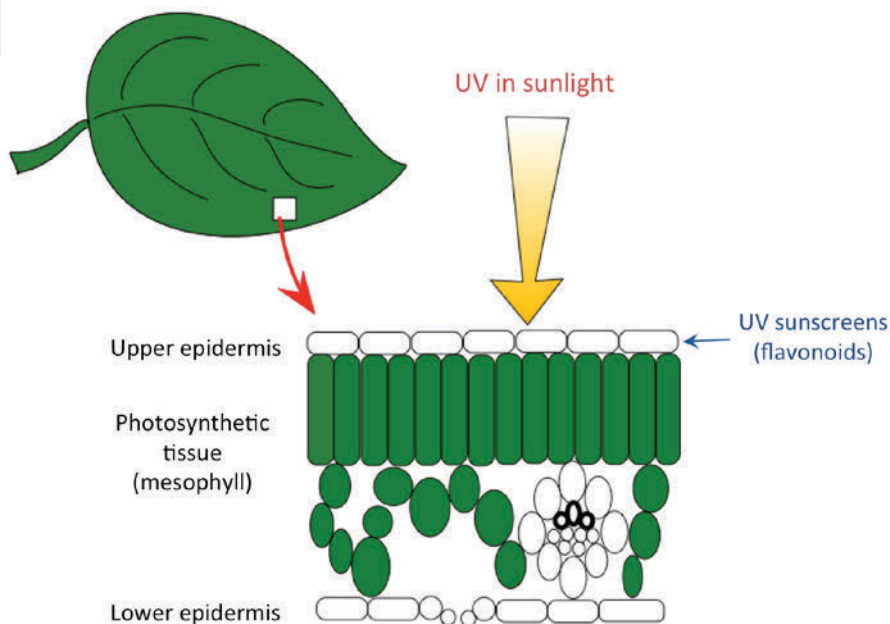
organic sunscreen for plants. (See the internet for various manufacturers.) It is best applied via a tank sprayer during the morning's cooler hours.

simply wears off over a month or two. It should be reapplied at least once during the summer months for better results.

(It's certainly more attractive than stakes, umbrellas, shade cloth and tarps!) I found an Australian-based firm (www.foodforest.au) who had sponsored a YouTube video about plant sunscreens. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TRcK-cjjwqU>) I have found their success on Sago palms and other trees and plants to be very effective during our summer months.

Fertilize

There are two schools of thought about fertilizing desert plants. One is that these plants exist in meager conditions and alkaline soils without fertilizer and hold their own. Or, there is little, if any, nutritional value in our native sandy soils and to have a flourishing desert garden requires regular watering and fertilizing now and again. Fertilizer is a salt and less is always better than more. Where there is salt, water is necessary. Never fertilize anything when it is water stressed or it will simply stress it more. Always



May, cont'd

ensure that your trees and plants have been well-watered prior to applying fertilizer. Most fertilizing should be done by month's end for the duration of our hot summer.

Continue to fertilize your warm-season annuals and herbaceous/woody perennials in containers as well as your vegetable and herb gardens.

Cacti and warm-season succulents in containers should be fertilized at least once during May. (I find ½ strength Miracle Gro effective. Viragro or Epsom salts—used lightly—will also green up your cacti, aloe, agave and succulents.) Do not fertilize any win-

ter-growing succulents such as Live Forever (*Dudleya saxosa ssp. collomiae*), succulent geraniums (*Pelargonium spp.*), Iceplants (*Malephora spp.*, *Drosanthemum spp.*, *Cephalophyllum spp.*), Living Stones (*Lithops spp.*) and crassulaceous plants (*Kalanchoe spp.*, *Cotyledon spp.*, *Echeveria spp.*) as they are in their summer rest.

What to plant

You can still plant desert-adapted trees, shrubs, groundcovers, vines, ornamental grasses, perennials, cacti and succulents. The earlier in the month the better, giving roots time to establish before summer

heat. Most yuccas (*Yucca spp.*) can be planted in May, except Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*). When planting native and desert-adapted plants, it's best to add a slow-release fertilizer high in nitrogen and phosphorous rather than soil amendments, vitamins or rooting hormones.

For 30 years, Troy Bankord of Palm Springs has been creating 'Places of Peace' through connective landscape and interior design. He was named 'Master of the Southwest' by Phoenix Home & Garden Magazine in 2006. www.troybankorddesign.com, <https://www.facebook.com/TroyBankordDesign>

CVWD tells customers about proposed rate increases

CVWD has begun mailing Proposition 218 notices to customers about proposed rate increases and rate structure changes.

CVWD staff has proposed a five year plan for domestic water rates. A public hearing for the board to consider and vote on the proposed rate changes for domestic water customers has been set for 9 a.m. June 14 at the Steve Robbins Administration Building at 75-515 Hovley Lane East in Palm Desert. If approved, the new rates would go into effect on July 1.

Some of the proposed changes include:

Decreasing the indoor portion of the water budget to reflect industry standards based on today's water-efficient appliances.

Tighten the outdoor portion of the water budget to promote conservation. Previously, the budgets were designed to allow enough water for 100% grass. The new budgets will be designed to accommodate 50% grass and 50% desert-friendly landscaping.

Slightly increase the irrigation efficiency factor for outdoor budgets.

The overall impact of these proposed changes is a reduction in water budgets of approximately 25%, which is

less restrictive than the temporary drought budgets.

A key component of the water budget is the weather. It allows the water budget to increase during hotter months and decrease during cooler months. CVWD is proposing to change from actual weather to historical, thereby allowing for water budgets to be calculated in advance and providing a monthly target for customers.

Other changes proposed for domestic water customers include consolidating five rate areas into one and increasing the fixed rate. Four separate classes have been proposed for fixed rates: single family homes, multifam-

Rate increase, cont'd

ily residences, commercial customers, and dedicated landscape meters.

For more information about the proposed water rate changes and dates of upcoming public workshops and Board of Directors meetings: cvwd.org/ratechanges

Editor's Opinion of the Proposed Changes

These are the opinions of Jessyca Frederick, not of the Desert Horticultural Society of Coachella valley

For the most part, CVWD's proposed budget changes are an excellent step in the right direction. Here are some thoughts I have based on the proposed changes.

Reliable indoor water use statistics are hard to come by, but 50 gallons per capita per day is likely high for the modern era. A bigger issue is that our indoor budgets assume there are four people in a home, but as we know many of our homes are unoccupied much of the year and many homes only have one or two occupants. It's easier to decrease everyone's indoor budget than it is to start keeping records of seasonal use.

I cannot agree more that an assumption of 100% grass in landscaped areas needs to change. The concept of 50% grass and 50% desert-friendly landscaping is a good place to start, but I wonder if homeowners and con-

tractors know pools use about the same amount of water as the grass (by the square foot) and should be considered in the former 50%.

The irrigation efficiency factor should, at the very least, reflect the standard set in the recently updated California Model Water Efficiency Landscape Ordinance, which now states efficiency needs to be 75% for sprinklers. Efficiency measures how much of the water used is actually applied to the landscape where it was meant to go. Achieving 75% effectively means no more spray heads, as they are never more efficient than 70%.

A significant change not mentioned in the article is how the new water budgets will be calculated based on historical climate patterns and not actual weather activity. I firmly disagree with this change. I know why they changed it, customers were complaining that they couldn't know what their water budget was until they got their bill, because it was based on actual weather data, not some fixed amount to be known in advance. This argument misguidedly assumes people know how much water they're using—which they almost never do—so it shouldn't have been lent much credence.

Unfortunately this change will have two negative consequences at the expense of making a poorly informed

vocal minority happy.

First, historical climate data is not an accurate predictor of daily weather. Very often, in this era of climate change, our weather is drier and hotter than in previous years. We'll need more water than is allotted to compensate for this change, so folks will almost always be over their water budgets.

For example, in Coachella Valley, the current 10-year average evapotranspiration rate (the data point all of the climate and weather calculations reference for irrigation purposes) for our base calculations is 74.25 inches. Five of the last 10 years have had higher evapotranspiration rates than the 10-year average. I bet you can guess which five!

Second, the best argument for getting a smart controller—the most efficient way to water when they're correctly programmed—is that it helps customers keep their water use in lockstep with weather activity. When our budgets are based on weather activity, it's easier to ask people to upgrade to a weather-based smart controller. Now, there's no incentive to upgrade to a smart controller, since it will frequently be overwatering as compared to the preset water budgets.

Have your own opinions? Send 'em to jessyca@waterwisnow.com and we'll publish them next month.

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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. We'll share them in future newsletters.