

The speaker for our February meeting was Australian-born horticulturist Robin Parer, owner and operator of Geraniaceae Nursery in Marin County. She has been featured in magazines such as *Garden Design*, *Horticulture*, *Martha Stewart Living* and *Sunset*, and recently debuted *The Plant Lover's Guide to Hardy Geraniums*, published by Timber Press. During her 34 years at Geraniaceae Nursery, Robin has collected and propagated over 500 geranium species, selected color forms and hybrids, and she drew upon her extensive knowledge to tailor her slide show and lecture to those varieties best suited to Southern California gardens.

By way of introduction, Robin made it clear that her focus for the evening would be on Geraniums, not their Pelargonium, Erodium or Monsonia cousins, which are the four genera within the Geraniaceae family. She indicated that Geraniums are usually classified as hardy and are typically simple, five-petaled wildflowers that are winter dormant. While the genus contains around 420 species, and is found on all continents except Antarctica, Robin's presentation was composed primarily of the Mediterranean-climate types.

She began her talk with *G. californicum*, or California cranebill, which can be found in the wilds of the Sierra Nevada and Southern California coastal ranges. While available in the trade, she said that the seeds of this pink-flowering native can easily be harvested to grow at home.



Photo from wikipedia

Continuing with ground covers, she showed slides of the various *G. x cantabrigiense*, including 'Biokovo', 'Hanne', and 'Cambridge', all of which are widely available, and have a color range from white to purple. Rounding out the ground covers, she spoke about *G. macrorrhizum* and its numerous

cultivars, including 'Album', 'Ridsko', 'Pindus', 'Variegatum' and 'White-Ness' among others. Finishing this class of plants was *G. dalmaticum*, a pinkish-purple species that only blooms in May.

The next category Robin shared was made up of the many shade-loving species which she considers to be the "supporting cast" in any garden - useful as fillers, edging and at the base of trees and shrubs. These included the many varieties of *G. maderense* (all of which can be crossed), *G. pyrenaicum*, *G. nodosum*, and the very large group of *G. phaeum* that have a wide range of colors (including the yellow 'Springtime') and sizes, making them useful in many garden settings. Some of the highlights were 'Mrs. Withey Price', 'Merry Widow', 'Lily Lovell' and 'Wargrave Pink.' Next among the shade lovers were *G. gracile*, *G. x oxonianum*, and *G. endressii*, which offered some taller options for the back of the border. She also showed some pictures from the 2016 Chaumont Garden Festival in France, including *G. oxonianum* 'Ankum's White', which is very pure, and *G. oxonianum* 'Dreamland' in a container, and is in flower from May through December.

Next came plants for rock gardens and containers that were limited to selections of *G. cinereum*, including 'Signal', 'Thumbling Heart' and 'Rothbury Gem', followed by border and bedding plants. This last was the largest group by far, with over 40 different species, including *G. magniflorum*, *G. sanguineum*, *G. libani*, *G. x magnificum*, *G. himalayense*, and the popular *G. pratense*, which Robin indicated cannot survive more than a season in the heat of Southern California. She also warned against *G. incanum*, which she described as a "thug" because it seeds like crazy and is impossible to remove once it takes hold.

Robin concluded her presentation with some general recommendations covering basic care guidelines applicable for most geraniums, as follows:

- plant in fast-draining soil
- make a soilless mixture for container

plants, which can include perlite, sand, coir, red lava rock, or finely ground bark

- don't allow plants to dry out
- cut plants back in late fall, or winter
- give them "morning sun / afternoon shade" as a general rule

Afterward, she answered a round of audience questions and then made herself available to sign copies of her book. Both her book and plants from her nursery were for sale during the meeting and received positive attention, much as her informative presentation did.

For a complete list of the slides shown, go to the "Past Meetings" page on SCHS website at: www.socalhort.org, and to learn more about specific plants, visit Robin's website at: geraniaceae.com.

✂ Sabine Steinmetz

SCHS GARDEN EVENT

The SCHS is excited to offer a new local Garden Tour at the Hollywood Hills home of Johanna and Eugene Woolcott. Here is one view of the garden from Joanna's website, wildgardeningla.com (Park Oak page).



Mark your calendar for this event!

Sunday, May 7

9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

A flyer with more info. will be available at the March meeting, and a reservation form will be posted online, as well as included in the April newsletter.

Reservations will be required for this event, so don't miss out!

SHARING SECRETS RESPONSES

What is your favorite rainy day, garden-based reading material? Design magazines? Seed catalogs? Botanical-themed mysteries?

Unfortunately, we did not receive any responses to the above question we posted last month! Perhaps everyone was too engrossed in their reading to write about it...

However, we did receive a friendly letter from former member, Roger Boddaert, who is an ecological landscape designer in Fallbrook, California. He calls himself a "maker of natural gardens" and sent along a very detailed list of gardening resolutions which are never too late to apply. As we have no reading recommendations to share, we will pass along some of Roger's suggestions instead.

- tackle that problem area in your garden - and take joy in fixing it

- create a "secret niche" in your landscape to rest and meditate awhile
- share your extra bounty with a Senior Center, food bank, or others in need
- think globally and act locally, for you, your family and community are part of the solution for a sustainable Earth

Thank you for your positive words and for staying in touch with the SCHS, Roger. We appreciate it and wish you the best! Feel free to correspond with us in the future... - Ed.