

The May SCHS presentation was on the subject of tree health, with an emphasis on the future of our urban forests in Southern California. Speaking on this most timely topic was arborist and horticultural consultant Rebecca Latta, who has been working with trees

Speaker's website photo.



in the greater Los Angeles region for more than 25 years. As an arboricultural and a water management consultant, she spoke to us from a position of seeing first-hand what our local trees' struggle for survival has been in recent years. She talked about factors contributing to the problems facing our urban forests and some of the things we can personally do to keep our trees as healthy as possible.

The first point Latta addressed was the current status of the prolonged drought and its impact on our landscapes. She indicated that with ground water levels being low and overall temperatures still rising, on-going conservation efforts continue to be important, both by individuals and municipalities. In home landscapes, she stressed the need to capture as much rainfall as possible to prevent wasteful run-off. The use of cisterns and swales were several options she mentioned to achieve this, as well as the proper use of mulch. Flushing soils to manage the salt, boron and chlorides found in irrigation water was another suggestion she made towards improving soil health, which in turn contributes to the overall health of all plants and trees.

This led Latta to talk about the difference between a plant's drought-tolerance and its heat-tolerance. Drought tolerance refers to the plant's ability to go for extended periods of dryness in the soil or the air, while heat tolerance refers to its ability to withstand increased temperatures without sustaining damage to foliage or tissues. She remarked that typically three days of prolonged heat (without any remediating action being taken) would result in the greatest amount of damage. Additionally, Latta mentioned that plants which require chilling time and don't receive enough are unable to rest, thereby causing them to lose insect and disease resistance.

Latta continued with a discussion of the damage that our drought-stressed

trees have been suffering from. In some cases, stress can cause the release of pheromones which attract beetles, or cause botryosphaeria cankers, or give other pests opportunities to attack vulnerable trees, such as the polyphagous shot hole borer which has caused fatal and widespread damage. She maintains that efficient water management is the key to promoting strong, healthy trees which can withstand some of these problems. Over-watering and saturated soils can also lead to disease, so sufficient watering at proper intervals is crucial. While different species will have varying schedules, Latta did provide some general watering tips such as: keep water away from trunks, avoid misting, try flooding every 7 to 21 days (depending on soil type), and protect the feeder roots. Strategies for the latter include: not planting directly under trees, leaving leaf litter whenever possible (in lieu of rocks piled against trunks), and encouraging, or importing, red worms to help "roto-till" the soil.

Latta concluded her presentation by talking about ways that municipalities are trying to select trees for the new paradigm, as a large percentage of our urban forest will have to be replaced in the near future. Selections will need to be drought, heat and salt tolerant, and preferably a diversity of species will be chosen. Species which meet these criteria also appear



to share some common characteristics, such as having pinnately compound and/or waxy leaves. Latta mentioned a variety of trees that are being considered, ranging from pines to broadleaf shade trees to ornamental selections which meet cities' aesthetic criteria as well.

With such a broad topic to cover, Latta gave attendees much to consider in her overview of the current situation. She was able to answer additional audience questions after her talk, but many questions remain. The preservation of our urban forests will require proactive measures to protect what remains, and careful consideration for selecting new plantings in the future.

✎ Sabine Steinmetz

## SCHS VISITS A HILLSIDE GARDEN OF DELIGHTS

On May 7, attending SCHS members and guests were treated to a garden tour of a private and very original garden in the Hollywood Hills. The garden's unique look was created through the joint efforts of the homeowners: landscape designer Johanna Woollcott and her husband Eugene McCarthy.

By artfully combining collected treasures and found objects with carefully chosen plant selections, their garden of drought-tolerant plantings and recycled materials works together to create an eclectic showpiece of landscape possibilities. Glass bottles, mosaic balls, gabion walls, benches, sculptures and containers repurposed from any number of unexpected items provided inspiration and wonder for visitors as they strolled upwards along curved paths. From the top of the garden, the Hollywood sign was visible directly across the canyon, and looking down, the garden could be appreciated in its entirety. The perfect spring weather made the experience even more special for everyone in attendance.

The SCHS would like to thank Johanna and Eugene for generously allowing us into their space, and also for being on hand to walk visitors through and to answer questions. Pictures of this garden as well as Johanna's other designs can be seen on her website at: [wildgardensla.com](http://wildgardensla.com), and on SCHS's Facebook page.

We look forward to returning for a visit in the future and discovering new delights!



Photo by Marilee Kuhlmann

## SHARING SECRETS RESPONSES

*Which summer annuals & edibles can't you live without?*

Now that the exuberance of spring is fading, it's time to look forward to the next season in the garden: summer. My (reseeded) sunflowers are knee-high already, and I'm thinking about what type of tomato to plant in my limited garden area.

- Anonymous

It's hard to choose as I see so many fruits and veggies ripening outside, but I would have to put my peaches and plums at the top of list... They taste all the sweeter as I have to work so diligently to prevent squirrels and birds from getting to my precious (and limited) crop!

- Sabine Steinmetz