

MASTER GARDENERS

A shopping list for the tomato sale

For many locals, the UC Master Gardeners of Napa County's annual tomato sale is the true harbinger of spring. Details about the event on April 15 are at the end of this article.



CINDY WATTER

We are selling two dozen proven varieties this year, ranging from fat, red beefsteak to tiny, sweet cherries.

Classic red tomatoes

We have eight classic red tomatoes, suitable for your favorite sandwiches and salads.

Better Boy is a favorite; it is disease resistant, it is huge, and it produces all summer long into the fall.

Bloody Butcher has a rich heirloom flavor and is ready to eat in eight weeks. It remains productive until frost.

Early Girl is an early and heavy producer. It grows in clusters and has an excellent tomato flavor and aroma.

Super Beefsteak is another large red tomato, averaging 17 ounces each. As its name suggests, it is tasty and meaty.

Mortgage Lifter is a favorite variety every year; its fruits are pink, huge, and full of flavor. Its unique name comes from a grower who developed it in the 1930s and sold the plants to pay off his mortgage.

Container tomatoes

We have three red tomato varieties that are good for container growing:

Super Bush is a good slicing tomato, specially bred to yield large crops on 2½- to 3-foot plants.

Celebrity also has an abundant yield of flavorful slicing tomatoes.

Dwarf Hannah's Prize is a beefsteak tomato that weighs from 6 to 12 ounces and has a flattened form. It is red with lighter striping and produces an abundant mid-season crop.

Unusual colors

Many of our customers like to grow unusually colored tomatoes.

Black Krim was originally grown in the Crimea near the Black Sea and has a rich taste. It is a dark maroon color.

Paul Robeson is named after the Black scholar/singer/actor/activist and has a sweet and smoky flavor. It is very popular and always sells out.

Pork Chop is a true yellow tomato, sweet with a hint of citrus.

Kellogg's Breakfast is a sweet orange tomato. Vintage Wine is pink with gold stripes and is also very sweet. Because of its distinctive appearance as well as excellent flavor, it is popular with chefs. All of these are beefsteak tomatoes, and most are heirlooms.

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DINA SAALIS PHOTOS

St. Helena resident Dina Saalisi shares some of the special places and plants she has discovered in Napa Valley.

Special flower places of the Napa Valley

DINA SAALIS

The harmony felt when we're amid nature is our elemental state of being. Nature heals. Each time we connect with the greater world around us, we create a bit more wholeness within.

Whenever I'm in need of deep soul healing, I turned towards the wonder of what's outside my door. I recognize this connection as part of my existence within the rhythm of life force energy, and how it holds me and soothes me, when nothing else can.

Exploring Northern California for decades, I have many spots that I return to year after year, to pay homage to the beautiful blossoms that grow there and the magical energies felt. I've come to know the exact mark on the trail where each special flower lives, and I relate to the essence of each place with wonder and awe.

The Napa Valley and surrounding area is no exception to the bountiful energy of plants, flowers and rocks. Many of the original Bach flowers prosper here in the wild, and it's a joy to catch them in bloom. I'd like to share some of my favorite spots that keep me connected to this potent life-force energy throughout the seasons.

Mid-Winter Mustard Bloom

Just when Northern California has had its share of winter gloom, the bright golden-yellow



Mustard flower essence is "used for the feeling of sudden gloom for no apparent reason, which often comes on during the darkness of winter. The remedy lifts, energizes and confirms the coming of a new light," Dina Saalisi writes.

low mustard flowers make their bold appearance at the start of February. A companion plant amid rows of vineyards, the blossoms come alive and give off an optical effect of emergent light, which saturates the valley and feeds the soul.

An awe-inspiring sight to behold, this phenomenon heralds the end of the dark months and the beginning of the light. Interestingly, mustard flower essence is used for the feeling of sudden gloom for no apparent reason, which often comes on during the darkness of winter. The remedy lifts, energizes and confirms the coming of a new light.

You can view this event by walking, cycling or driving alongside the vineyards on Highway 29. There are many pullouts for that post-worthy pic.

White Chestnut/Chestnut Bud

The giant horse chestnut trees adorn the roadsides, their fragrance wafting through neighborhoods in early spring. Grand arms reaching up into the heavens, remind me of the indication for this flower remedy; obtrusive thoughts that cannot be quelled.

As the enormous white

flowers come into full bloom, I reflect on how the upward energy, seemingly lifts thoughts into the sky, leaving one with a peaceful feeling of mental calm.

Olive

As the Napa Valley enjoys a Mediterranean climate, the usual floral suspects abound, and olive is one of the most prolific trees seen throughout the terrain.

Popping up out of rocks and dry soil, dotted around town, there's no shortage of olive's healing essence. The emotional challenge associated with this

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BILL PRAMUK

Bottom view of overgrown oak nursery stock "J" roots.

TREES AND PEOPLE

Pot-bound trees a recipe for failure

Significant property damage was prevented this week when the owners noticed two adjacent trees suddenly leaning away from each other. Because of common anchoring root defects and wet soil, the trees were in the process of failure.



BILL PRAMUK

That word has a particular meaning when we are assessing tree risk. It is not like an "F" for

failure on a school assignment or "failing" health. It is akin to language engineers use to describe structures or materials when they collapse, break down or fall apart.

Aside from health, trees are physical structures, subject to defects. Sometimes, defects are the result of a natural tendency in trees.

For example, Bradford pear, a cultivated variety of flowering pear, is a clone—one of many varieties of flowering pear that has an inherent tendency to form

weak branch attachments. Every Bradford pear is genetically identical to every other Bradford so they all have this tendency. The variety was pretty much taken out of the nursery trade after "failing" i.e., falling apart all over the country.

Defects can also occur in individual trees of species we consider strong. For example, coast live oaks, in some cases, tend to form weak branch attachments when the angle is a narrow, tight

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Flowers

From B7

flower is that of exhaustion after a long illness or arduous work. It's no wonder that this place is symbolic of rest and renewal, as the trees lend their enlivening energy to a depleted landscape.

Vine

The vineyards are the main draw of the Napa Valley, but it's the vine flowers in late spring that lend their energetic pull to the area. You can see it in the plant's habit of twisting, turning and wrapping itself around everything it can hold onto. The essence of vine is that of control, and how to relinquish our grasp, to enjoy inner peace. A nice glass of wine may create such a state, and all the better to join with the energy of vine, to support deeper healing of tension and strife.

Finding flowers in Napa Valley

As well as the flowers found throughout the valley, there are a variety of places that I've discovered that hold their own potent vibrational charge.

Glass Mountain

The hills on the outskirts of

St. Helena are dubbed "Glass Mountain" because of the black obsidian naturally tumbling out of the hillside. The indigenous Wappo people used it for arrowheads and tools.

Today you can mindfully wild harvest small amounts right along the Silverado Trail, north of St. Helena, right before the Glass Mountain Road turnoff. The best time to look for rocks is right after the rains when they're literally washed down the hillside.

Although not at all floral, what I find most potent is the healing energy that can be felt here. A powerful gemstone, obsidian is said to carry the properties of protection and cleansing. To be able to come here and find these uncommon gems in their natural environment is a profound experience of connecting to a higher source.

Lake Hennessey, Sam the Eagle Trail

Named after a resident bald eagle that can sometimes be seen on top of the towering pines, some of the densest tree lichen is found on the highest point of this trail, lazily hanging over branches. It feels incredibly peaceful, as you climb up the forested path, greeted by swaying bright green ribbons hanging

from trees.

As if out of a Tolkien novel, one could be enchanted by the quietude and mystical air. At the top of the trail is a bench with a view to the lake. There are few displays of wildflowers along the way, but most notable is the profusion of lupine in spring and summer.

Amid the open meadow, the collection of bright purple blooms creates a glorious hue. I especially like to go close to sunset on summer evenings, when most everyone has left the park, and the birds are singing one last chorus. The mossy fragrance, verdant colors and primordial sounds provide the perfect backdrop for a soulfully nourishing experience.

Bothe-Napa Valley State Park

Grab your state park pass and head over to this hidden gem off of St. Helena Highway in Calistoga. Once you enter the park, drive all the way to the end of the road and park in the last parking lot near the picnic area.

The History Trail is a little over two miles out and back, and it leads all the way to the historic Bale Grist Mill. But it's what's found along the way that is most delightful. Go in early spring, mid-March-April, during when

Meet the Author

Dina Saalisi will sign copies of her new book, "Listening to Flowers" at Copperfield's Books in Napa from noon to 1 p.m. on Saturday, April 1.



I've hiked this trail weekly, to the tune of a new wildflower bloom in succession each time; wild iris, fairy lantern, lupine, viola, larkspur, baby blue eyes and columbine all can be experienced within the depths of this forested trail.

Oat Hill Mine Trail

This has always been one of my favorite hiking spots in the valley. There's a small dirt parking lot on the right at the north end of Calistoga. One of the most magical hikes I've ever done was the spring after the Glass Fire of 2020. Latent blooms came to life with masses of California poppy, wild iris, sweet pea, mariposa lily, fireweed and more. I walked up to the charred embers and was amazed by the growth that persisted here. An extraordi-

nary hike on any given day, you will always feel satiated by the beauty that abounds and the stellar views of the valley below.

Sonoma Botanical Garden

A little outside of the Napa Valley, originally called Quarry Hill Botanical Garden, this little-known gem in Glen Ellen is, in my opinion, one of the best gardens in the state. More than 25 acres of lush woodland, mindfully developed to keep a meandering flow, this habitat is home to one of the largest collections of Asian plants in the US and Europe. There are two ponds, one laden with water lilies in mid-late summer.

Always in season with profusions of citrus blossom, dogwood, wild rose, lily, rhododendron and much more. With many impressive specimens, one could get lost in this sanctuary of divine flower energy.

St. Helena resident Dina Saalisi is the author of "Listening to Flowers: Positive Affirmations to Invoke the Healing Energy of the 38 Bach Flowers." She is a healer, author and educator with skills as a National Board Health and Wellness Coach (NBHWC.) Bach Foundation Registered Practitioner (BFRP) and Certified Hypnotherapist., California. More information is at dinasaalisi.com.

Plants aren't silent. They make clicking sounds, a study finds

KATIE HUNT, CNN

Plants make popping sounds that are undetectable to the human ear, according to recordings made in a new study — and they make more sounds when thirsty or under other kinds of stress.

The research shakes up what most botanists thought they knew about the plant kingdom, which had been considered largely silent, and suggests the world around us is a cacophony of plant sounds, said study coauthor Lilach Hadany.

She said she had long been skeptical that plants were completely noiseless.

"There's so many organisms that respond to sound, I thought there was no good reason for plants to be deaf and mute," said Hadany, a professor at the School of Plant Sciences and Food Security and program head of the George S. Wise Faculty of Life Sciences at Tel Aviv University.

The first plant Hadany recorded, using an ultrasonic microphone, was a cactus in her lab six years ago, but she couldn't rule out that the sound she detected was made by something else in the environment. Previous studies had shown that plants made vibrations, but it wasn't known whether these vibrations became airborne sound waves.

To figure out whether plants actually were emitting sounds, Hadany and her team commissioned soundproofed acoustic boxes.

The researchers placed tobacco and tomato plants in the boxes, rigged with ultrasonic microphones that record at frequencies between 20 and 250 kilohertz. (The maximum frequency that a human adult's ear can detect is about 16 kilohertz.) Some of the plants had cut stems or had not been watered for five days, and others were untouched.

The team found that the plants



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The team conducted their experiments in a green house and placed the plants in soundproof boxes.

emitted sounds at a frequency of 40 to 80 kilohertz, and when condensed and translated into a frequency humans can hear, the noises were a bit similar to the pop of popcorn being made or bubble wrap bursting.

A stressed plant emitted around 30 to 50 of these popping or clicking sounds per hour at seemingly random intervals, but unstressed plants emitted far fewer sounds — around one per hour.

"When tomatoes are not stressed at all, they are very quiet," Hadany said.

Are the plants communicating? Not so fast

The researchers don't know exactly how the sounds are made,

but they believe the noises come from cavitation — a process in which an air bubble in the plant's water column collapses under some kind of pressure, making a click or pop.

But rest assured, the bouquet of cut flowers in your vase isn't screaming at you in pain. There is no evidence that the noise produced by the plants is intentional or a form of communication.

"This result adds to what we know about plant responses to stress. It is a useful contribution to the field and to our general appreciation that plants are responsive organisms capable of sophisticated behaviors," said Richard Karban, a distinguished professor of entomology at University of California, Davis, who studies interactions between herbivores

and their host plants. He wasn't involved in the research.

"However, it should not be interpreted as showing that plants are actively communicating by making sounds," Karban added.

While the plant sounds are a passive phenomenon, other organisms might be able to use the plant's audible cues for their own benefit, said sensory ecologist Daniel Robert, a professor of bio-nanoscience at the University of Bristol's School of Biological Sciences in the United Kingdom. He was not involved in the research.

For example, he said the sounds could indicate to a female moth the message that a particular tomato plant is in stress and not suitable to lay eggs on, or feed on.

"Lots of sounds in the world are generated that are not 'intentional'

signals, but nonetheless can be heard and used by other organisms for their own benefits. So, the concept of communication is indeed a challenge ... does it need to be bi-directional to work and be considered as such?" he said via email.

Who's listening?

The team repeated the experiment with tobacco and tomato plants in a noisier greenhouse environment. After recording the plants, the researchers made a machine-learning algorithm that could differentiate between the unstressed plants, thirsty plants and cut plants.

"The finding that there is information in the acoustic emissions, using neural network classification, is exciting as such (a) technique is fast and can identify data structures that the human eyes or ears cannot," Robert noted.

While the researchers used tobacco and tomato plants because they are easy to grow in a standardized way, they also recorded sounds made by a variety of other plant species, such as wheat, corn, cacti and grapevine, and found they also emitted more sounds when stressed.

As well as insects or mammals that might detect and use plant sounds, Hadany said other plants could also be listening in and benefiting from the sounds. Previous work by Hadany and other members of the team showed that plants increase the concentration of sugar in their nectar when they "hear" the sounds made by pollinators.

Hadany said she now looked at plants and flowers differently. "There's many songs we can't hear."

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