NATURALLY: Here's the Dirt on Gardening Boot Camp
posted on Thu, 05/07/2015 - 08:53am by Mark Paxton

Gardeners can get a day's worth of information and inspiration June 6

Two years ago, I spent a beautiful June day learning how to grow great tomatoes and build better compost in a stunning landscape overlooking the entire sweep of Monterey Bay. Oh, shucks, this June I plan to do it all over again.

The occasion is the Fifth University of California Master Gardeners of Monterey County Boot Camp. The date this year is June 6, and the location again is the horticulture department at the top of the Cabrillo College campus in Apts. As the drought drags on, the theme, appropriately enough, is "Gardening in Our Changing Climate." The cost for the daylong series of classes and workshops is just $55 for regular folks and just $25 for students and seniors. Advance registration is required to attend.

Based on my first experience, it's probably the greatest bargain in gardening since the last time I picked up a truckload of well-composted horse manure. And this one is guaranteed to smell better and not leave anyone with a sore back.

The format is pretty simple. People show up prior to the 9 a.m. start, then scatter for the first of three sessions. There's a break for lunch, but the rest of it is a full day, spent either in classrooms or outdoors, depending on the class selection.

I'm still having trouble picking out what sessions I want to attend, because in its short five years, the menu of classes has grown and become more diverse. You can review the entire suite of sessions by going to http://mbmg.ucanr.edu and clicking on the Boot Camp link on the right side of the page.

The morning brings classes on succulents and vertical gardens, integrated pest management, local microclimates, growing healthy fruit trees and preserving the harvest. Late morning classes cover permaculture, managing common garden diseases, beekeeping, pruning, propagation with cuttings, composting and diverting laundry water into the landscape. After lunch break, offerings are removing your lawn, irrigation controller programming and troubleshooting, growing citrus, pruning Japanese maples, wok cookery and plant propagation.

Like I said, it's an ambitious menu. All sessions are about 90 minutes long.

The surroundings alone are worth the price of admission. Exotic plants surround the classroom area, and a small arboretum showcases a Cabrillo specialty—salvia. The variety of the hardy, drought-tolerant plant relatives of common sage is inspiring.

The UC Master Gardener program offers a comprehensive six-month training regimen every other year to people who are passionate about growing things. In exchange, there's an expectation that Master Gardeners return the favor by volunteering their time and knowledge. Thus, Boot Camp.

Monterey Bay Master Gardeners also staff a gardening hotline at 831-763-8007, where volunteers can help with just about any question related to growing things.

About:
Mark Paxton
I've been at this most of my life, and it still fascinates and challenges me. San Benito County can be a cruel mistress at times, but we can share in our love for her, even with all her quirks.