



## Sandoval Extension Master Gardener Newsletter

<http://sandovalmastergardeners.org/>



New Mexico State University • Cooperative Extension Service • U.S. Department of Agriculture

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NMSU and the U.S.  
Department of  
Agriculture cooperating.

**SEMG Newsletter**  
**Submissions**  
**Deadline: 25<sup>th</sup> each mo.**

Please submit news,  
articles, events and  
photographs to:  
**newsletter Sandoval**  
**mastergardeners.org**

Editor:  
Kate Shadock



These two plants, to the gardener's eye, are quite different... Obviously, one is a cactus, the other a lettuce. The leaves of one deter close interactions, the leaves of the other are delicious, especially with some bleu cheese dressing! One likely took decades to reach this size - the other, of similar size, took weeks to grow this large. One is in my backyard garden where it is both shaded and irrigated, the other I saw while hiking in the Ojito Wilderness area, it's in full sun and trusts in New Mexico's sporadic rainfalls. One is cold-hardy and heat tolerant, while the other is much more finicky.

Even with all these things separating these two, they are even more alike. Both are green - they have miraculous chlorophyll that transforms the sun's rays into food. Both have roots that soak in moisture and keep them grounded. Both require water to live. Both put forth flowers. Both have leaves and are circular - maybe even growing in a sort of Fibonacci spiral. Both breathe in carbon dioxide and exhale oxygen. When one 'digs down' even further, their chromosomes don't even differ all that much.



We, humans are like these plants. Even though each of us is quite different, when we dig down, we are more similar than we appear. We all have needs - food, water, air, and a suitable place to belong. Let's remember this as we come together - to grow gardens, to live life, to govern our country. We share much more than what divides us.

*Photos by M. Buerkle Hunn*

-Meg

**NOTE: It's never too early to start recording your volunteer hours!**

## May Garden Checklist

1. Plant heat loving annuals; marigolds, cosmos, zinnia, sunflowers – all grow well from seeds
2. Mulch your edibles; vegetable garden, herbs, and fruit trees 2-3" of compost/straw/leaves
3. Perennials and roses in containers can be planted this month
4. Visit a local [botanical garden](#) to see what plants thrive in your area.
5. Beans do best when planted after Mother's Day and covered (row cloth) until they sprout

*Source: Month-By-Month Gardening: Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico Jacqueline A. Soule*

## Public Training Opportunities

### Ready, Set, Grow

- **May 15, 2024 - "SUNFLOWERS!"** with Texas AgriLife Extension Hemp & Alternative Crops Specialist Dr. Calvin Trostle from Lubbock! include recommended varieties for the southwest region, benefits for wildlife, how to grow them (soil, water, etc.), and tips for sunflower photography.
- **June 19, 2024 – TBA**
- **July 17, 2024 - "Passive Rainwater Harvesting"** with Kali Bronson & Megan Marcee of the Bernalillo County Water Conservation Program. Passive rainwater harvesting can be as easy as directing your gutter downspout or the overflow from your rain barrel to your landscape. But you can capture even more rainwater (and support more plants) by creating swales that channel rainwater from your roof to shallow, depressed basins.
- **August 21, 2024 - "Weed Management in Urban Landscapes"** with Dr. Leslie Beck, NMSU Extension Weeds Specialist

### Prior 2024 Sessions:

**Top 10 Tree Diseases and Disorders Found in New Mexico** - Dr. Phillip Lujan, NMSU Plant Pathology Extension Specialist

- [Video Recording 3-20-24](#)

**Reading a Garden Catalog** – Bernalillo County Extension Program Director John Garlisch

- [Video Recording 2-17-24](#)

**Chill Hour Requirements & Other Factors Affecting Budbreak in Fruit Trees** - NMSU Extension Specialists Dr. Richard Heerema (Pecans and Pistachios) & Marisa Thompson (Urban Horticulture)

- [Video Recording - 1-17-24](#)

## ***Gardening with the Masters - Loma Colorado Library***

*Fourth Monday of the month. The class runs from 6:45 pm to 7:45 pm as the library closes at 8:00 p.m. These classes are not recorded. We encourage you to join us in person, so your individual questions get answered. New Gardening with the Masters classes will be announced here as they are created.*

*May 20 (note THIRD Monday due to Memorial Day) Mike Halverson – Propagating Native Plants*

*June 24 – TBA*

*July 22 – TBA*

*August 26 – TBA*

*Pre-recorded classes* *Courtesy of COVID, we adapted some of our in-person classes to Zoom, recorded them and they are available at <https://sandovalmastergardeners.org/gardening-classes/gardening-with-the-masters-online/>*

## **Did You Know? Quick and Easy Ways Get Answers**

When you have a gardening question at 2 am on Saturday morning, or even at a more reasonable time, who can you call for answers? New Mexico State University (NMSU) has a wealth of information on hand for the home gardener! Use [Quick Links](#) to start your search. From there you can find the Southwest Plant Advisor which helps you find the right tree, shrub, vine for your growing conditions. There are How-To Videos, the Extension service library of How To Publications, Links to **Ready, Set, Grow** and a collection of prior blogs and helpline questions and answers to help you.

For iPhones there is also the app [Southwest Plant Selector](#) that identifies landscape plants. This is invaluable when you are admiring a shrub in the neighbor's yard and neither of you can remember what it is called.

For gardening help closer to home...<https://sandovalmastergardeners.org/email-hot-line/>  
Questions to this email line are answered by Master Gardeners within a few days.

*“Gardeners are the original multitaskers.  
We can weed, prune, and daydream all at the same time.”  
~ Unknown*

## What's The Buzz About?

A look at terms, trends and practices that impact gardeners, farmers, and our food supply

### What's Regenerative Farming/Gardening and how it is different from Organic Farming/Gardening?



More and more farmers and ranchers are joining the conversation around regenerative agriculture as the best way to manage the land for environmental, animal and human health. Noble Research Institute's education, consultation and research efforts are now focusing on regenerative agriculture, and more specifically regenerative ranching — which focuses on grazing lands. Regenerative ranching is a solution to not only the challenges that face farmers and ranchers but also to broader societal challenges.

We all want clean air and water, food, and an overall healthy environment. Targeting grazing lands, regenerative ranching supports these end goals while at the same time keeping farmers and ranchers profitable — which keeps good stewards on the land. While plenty of anecdotal evidence and an expanding body of research exists for regenerative agriculture, Noble will contribute science-based management knowledge to farmers and ranchers.

## WHAT IS REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE?

Noble defines [regenerative agriculture](#) as, “the process of restoring degraded soils using practices based on ecological principles.” It requires managing a farm or a ranch by considering the interactions among the soil, water, plants, animals and humans — interconnected pieces of one whole system.

The benefits of regenerative ranching include:

- Increased soil organic matter and biodiversity.
- Healthier and more productive soil that is drought- and flood-resilient.
- Decreased use of chemical inputs and subsequent pollution.
- Cleaner air and water.
- Enhanced wildlife habitat.
- Carbon captured in the soil to combat climate variability.

With regenerative agriculture, producers are not just sustaining the current land resource so that it can continue to be used in the future. They are actually improving what is there, leaving it better for the next generation.



## ORGANIC VS. REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

The question that commonly comes up is, “How is regenerative agriculture different from organic practices?”

“Organic” is a labeling term that denotes products produced under the authority of the Organic Foods Production Act. When an individual goes into the grocery store and sees the [green and white seal that says “USDA Organic,”](#) they are seeing a product that has been produced and handled under a strict set of standards overseen by the federal government.

This national label began in 1990 with the passage of the Organic Food Protection Act, which aimed to create national standards for the production and processing of food that could be marketed to consumers as “organic.”

By 2002, the year the standards were implemented, the U.S. Department of Agriculture had defined “organic” as “a production system ... that respond(s) to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological, and mechanical processes that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biological diversity.”

In order for a farmer, rancher or food processor to market their product as “organic,” they must prove to a certifier that they followed all [organic regulations](#). These rules dictate what practices and substances can and can’t be used. For example, organic farmers cannot use seeds that have been genetically engineered. They also cannot use most synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. Any such item they do use must be on the approved national list.

While buying organic food can assure you that the land on which it was grown was managed without the use of most synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, the label itself cannot tell you whether the health of the land is improving.

Organic alone is a prescriptive standard for the production of food. While stating the intention to promote ecological balance and conserve biological diversity, the system does not endeavor to rebuild or regenerate the soil. Only recently, consumers have been introduced to a new certification standard “regenerative organic” to further incorporate management principles focused on the soil and its health.

## REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE FOCUSES ON OUTCOMES



Regenerative agriculture is about principles, not practices. It focuses on outcomes — actual improvements to soil health and the overall quality and health of the land (the soil, water, plants, animals and humans).

Regenerative agriculture is an adaptive management approach that is supported by soil health principles. There is no recipe or prescription because each farm or ranch differs based on unique natural resources, climate variability, and animal and ecological dynamics. Producers apply those principles for their particular region, operation and personal situation.

This freedom for producers to make decisions on their land is important. The reality is that working with nature is complex. There are good practices that if applied at the wrong time or under the wrong conditions can hurt, not help the land.

New Mexico State University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and educator.

Noble recognizes that prescribed practices are no substitute for producer-led problem-solving and critical thinking to manage a complex environment.

Instead, Noble seeks to empower all producers to understand how their land functions and give them tools to make the best possible management decisions that improve land health. These decisions may differ from producer to producer, depending on their unique set of natural resources, their climate, and their skills and goals.

Marketing programs like organic may work for some producers, but there is no one-size-fits-all solution. It's important to preserve choices for both producers and consumers. At the same time, it is important to consider the future health of the land.

Noble's hope is that regenerative agriculture will become a mindset that all farmers and ranchers will pursue because it focuses on improving the very thing that all people depend upon the soil.

## THANK YOU TO ALL OUR SEED STARTERS!

The SEMG Annual Plant Sale at the Corrales Growers Market on April 28 was another record breaker. We had people queued up waiting for the opening bell to ring and we had people gathering treasures to the very last minute.

We could not have done that without the **many** members who generously donated seedling tomatoes, peppers, basil as well as aloe, houseplants, herbs, etc. The unexpected donations of orchid cactus and Elephant Ear bulbs were quickly snapped up by our buyers.

Customers appreciated help finding the specific plants they wanted as well as the insights about planting, care and growing tips as their plants were packed to go to their new homes.

**It's exciting to see what we can do when we unite our efforts for a common cause.**

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."*

~ Margaret Mead

# To Amend or Not To Amend – That Is The Question!

Apologies to William Shakespeare

At the April **Gardening With The Masters** session the discussion about the challenges of gardening in New Mexico became lively when the conversation turned to planting trees and shrubs (including roses). Several attendees wanted to know what to use and how much amendment they should add to the soil when planting a new tree or shrub. The Master Gardeners in attendance were united in their response of, “NONE – don’t amend the soil.” The Master Gardeners shared several stories of plant failure when the roots grew through the amended soil then hit unamended soil and were unable to thrive. It was obvious some of the attendees were resistant to leaving “native soil” as is when planting. That prompted a search in the NMSU guidelines for a deeper explanation of when to amend, or not to amend the soil.

## Soil Amendments Are No Longer Recommended

**Question:** Should I add fertilizer or amendments to the soil when planting landscape plants in my garden?

**Answer:** The short answer is no. And the long-term answer is an even stronger no. Soil amendments are materials that are worked into the soil with the intention of improving soil physical qualities. The trouble is it’s just not that simple. As City of Las Cruces Community Forester Jimmy Zabriskie said when I asked if he ever recommends using soil amendments when planting a tree, “**Save your money for mulch.**” Mulch is material that sits on top of the soil, providing an insulation layer that helps control soil temperature, retain moisture, and suppress weeds.



*Shredded woodchip mulch helps soil hold moisture and insulates plant roots on a frosty November morning.*

*Photo credit M. Thompson*

This is assuming you’re planting ornamental plants that are recommended for your area. The recommended species are the ones with roots that are well adapted to our native soils, so they’re more likely to live long, sustainable lives.

The bottom line: **Always put the same soil you dug up right back into the hole with the new plant, and top dress with a thick layer of mulch.**

Slow and steady wins the race when it comes to perennial landscape plants. As Albuquerque City Forester Joran Viers said at a tree planting demo put on by Tree New Mexico and The Nature Conservancy, it helps to think of our trees (and other perennials) as marathoners, not sprinters. When fertilizer is applied to trees, they can grow too fast for their own good and are more likely to develop structural problems and have other issues. Fertilizers are not recommended at the time of planting perennial plants because we want the plant’s energy to go into root establishment at a healthy rate to support the aboveground growth. The growth hormones necessary for healthy root development are found in the root tips and are made by the plant itself, so adding root stimulator to living roots is not necessary, or even helpful.



(Side note: Rooting hormone is potentially useful when you're trying to get roots to grow quickly from cuttings where the roots have been removed completely.) Hold off on fertilizing for at least a few years while your plants are setting down roots.

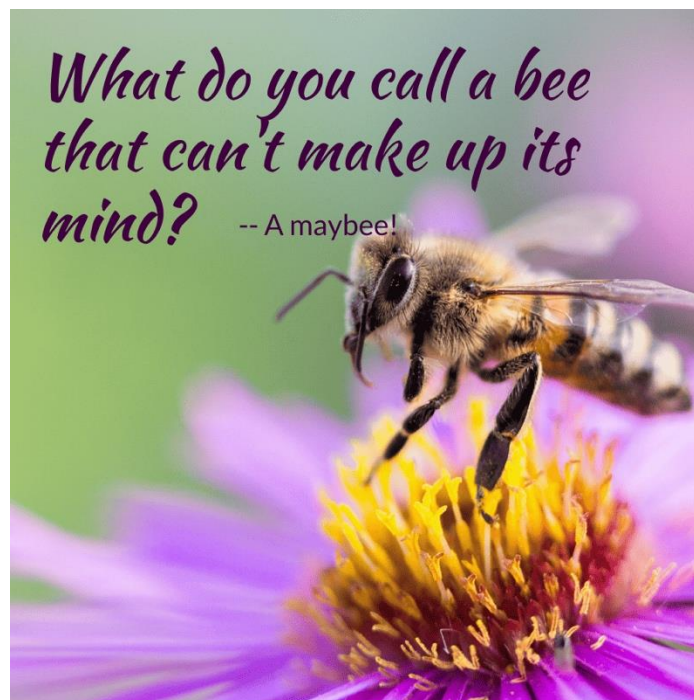
*Frosty cottonwood leaves add a nice layer on top of several inches of shredded woodchip mulch.*

*Photo credit M. Thompson*

Research on all sorts of landscape plants has shown that by adding amendments (like organic matter or perlite) to your soil backfill, the initial, short-term results are good. But the interface between the amended soil and the native soil is bad news. Water doesn't move well across the interface, and neither do roots. With time, the roots may be inclined to stay in the original planting hole and spiral around, so you end up with essentially a potted tree with reduced growth rate, constant water and nutrient stress (because lateral roots never fully developed), heightened vulnerability to pests and diseases, and even an increased falling hazard (think root ball in socket).

Even after landscape plants are established, the best practice is "test, don't guess." Having your soil tested can help you decide which nutrients are deficient, if any. The International Society of Arboriculture's new Best Management Practices publication for tree planting warns that even if soil tests "reveal conditions that will limit tree performance, amending the fill soil is rarely effective at correcting the long-term problem." That's the key—we're talking long-term plant health here. NMSU Extension [Guide A-114: Test Your Garden Soil](#), has great info on soil testing.

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## Tips On Keeping A Garden Journal

[Excerpted from Jackie Carroll's article for Gardening Know How](#)



If you save your seed packets, plant tags, or garden center receipts, you have the beginnings of a garden journal and you're only a few steps away from creating a complete record of your garden. This article shares garden journal ideas that will help you learn from your success and mistakes and improve your gardening skills.

A garden journal is a written record of your garden. For many people, a ring binder works best because it allows you to insert sheets of graph paper, calendar pages, pockets for your [seed packets](#), plant tags, and pages for your photographs. Keeping a garden journal gives you a written record of your garden layouts, plans, successes, and failures, and you'll learn about your plants and soil as you go. For vegetable gardeners, an important function of the journal is tracking [crop rotation](#). [Many vegetables](#) should be planted on a three to five year rotation schedule. Your garden layout sketches serve as a valuable planning aid from year to year.

### How to Keep a Garden Journal

There are no rules on how to keep a garden journal, and if you keep it simple, you're more likely to stick with it through the year. Try to find time to record something every day or so and record the important things as soon as possible so you don't forget.

### Garden Journal Contents

Here are some of the things you'll want to record in your journal:

- A sketch of your garden layout from season to season
- Pictures of your garden through the growing season and in the winter
- A list of successful plants and those to avoid in the future
- Bloom times
- A list of plants you'd like to try, along with their growing requirements
- When you started seeds and transplanted plants
- Plant sources
- Expenses and receipts
- Daily, weekly and monthly observations
- Dates when you divide your perennials

**The value of a garden journal far exceeds the time it takes to keep one.**

## HELP WANTED #1

### **SEMG volunteers and Project Manager for the 2024 Placitas Elementary Garden project reboot.**

Contact SEMG Outreach Committee co-chairs Penny Lundgren and Sandy Liakus for more information and to express your interest in educating and guiding children in gardening. SEMG volunteers will be working with Placitas PTO on this project.

## HELP WANTED #2

**Help Line Coverage** We still have need of volunteers to cover the Helpline. This is online, from the comfort of your own home. Each week of coverage earns 10 hours of Outreach credit. For more information, contact Sandra Liakus via email or phone number in the member roster. Our new intern teams will cover the Helpline for several weeks in May, June and July. There is still a need for early May, and late July into August.

## Reminder to Members & Interns

SEMG provides several opportunities for interns and members to visit public gardens with a guide, labs where garden research is undertaken and commercial locations that are not accessible to the public. Sometimes we even get to tour private gardens with the designer and/or homeowner to see and hear why they made the design decisions. These opportunities are most numerous in the early spring when both gardens and gardeners are resting.

To be current on these openings – keep an eye on our website, in the MEMBERS ONLY section called [PROJECTS AND VOLUNTEERS](#). Some of these sessions are initially available only to Interns; and will be open to members, if there are spaces left towards the end of the sign up period. Some are only available to members as part of their advanced training.

When you sign up to attend a session, we do expect you to be there. Since these sessions are not accessible to others, have limited space, and are customized to SEMG. We want to respect our hosts' time and commitment to our organization by attending the sessions we've signed up for.

On this same link is an ever changing list of volunteer opportunities where we can give hours to in order to both fulfill our requirements for the year and to learn more about SEMG's support of Sandoval County residents.

**NOTE: It's never too early to start recording your [volunteer/education hours](#).**

