

High Altitude Natural Gardening

Enchanted forests, and plants as homicide detectives

By Janet Sellers

Remember when you heard fairy tales as a kid about plants and forests that are alive and could talk? Well, we can now prove there is more to the forest than we see on top of the ground, more under its floor than you might expect, and more friendship between our trees and plants and us than we ever imagined!

Intermittent warm days are nodding to springtime. March outdoors isn't reliable enough for flowers and veggies because they're imports to our ancient forest area and need a greenhouse climate. So, it's indoors for now. Seeds to start indoors are nightshades (tomato, pepper, eggplant) and tomatillos, and cold weather greens in or outdoors (snow peas, kale, chard, romaines). Local wisdom says, "sow seeds on Mother's Day, but sow plants after Memorial Day," and raised beds get optimal results.

Looking outdoors, Mother Nature seems asleep! But underneath the blanket of snow, and underneath the blanket of forest-floor protections, there are high levels of activity and communication via electrical and fungi magic. The secret communicator is fungi. Plants talk with an in-

ternet of fungi, a superhighway of communication. The fungi's thin threads, mycelium, act as an underground internet, linking interspecies plants. And the atomic activity on the cellular level is so powerful, it can sprout seeds, grow plants, and even power up a cell phone.

During photosynthesis, plants use sunlight to split water molecules into hydrogen and oxygen, producing electrons. The Spanish company Bioo.tech has a potted plant system out this year that can charge cell phones and more. The system uses a pot: just add soil, water and a plant for a whopping 5 watts. The portable technology allows up to two charges per day with a power of 5.0v, 1.0A—enough to charge a cell phone—from a 25-by-15-by-15-inch pot. They're successfully developing outdoor garden plots for harvesting electricity to power homes.

Interspecies communication occurs with all our plants, forest and garden, but is at its zenith with wild plants that evolve in their aged, restorative habitat. In his book, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleber declares that our cultivated fruit trees and agriculture have become deaf and blind due to lack of communication from so-called modern planting methods, and they also

miss the full vitality and immune system capacity that the wild plants have.

Even houseplants have amazing communication ability. On a whim in 1966, former C.I.A. polygraph expert Cleve Backster hooked up a galvanometer to the leaf of a plant he kept in his office. By simply imagining the plant being set on fire, he could make it rouse the needle of the polygraph machine through a surge of electrical activity. A story in *The New Yorker* states that "Backster found that a plant that had witnessed the murder (by stomping) of another plant could pick out the killer from a lineup of six suspects, registering a surge of electrical activity when the murderer was brought before it, and he documented this and other plant phenomena for the *International Journal of Parapsychology*, in 1968."

That said, I suppose we had better be careful about garden secrets, and I've heard that whenever the enchanted forest wants to have a great time, it always invites the fungi.

Janet Sellers welcomes your tips for a healthy forest and happy gardens. She can be reached at janetsellers@ocn.me.

Snapshots of Our Community

CERT Training, Feb. 6



Each Monday night in February, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) classes were held at Palmer Ridge High School, coordinated by Robin Adair of the El Paso County Office of Emergency Management. This class helps prepare and train volunteers to respond to emergency situations and disasters that could hit the Tri-Lakes area. Instructors with professional experience educate volunteers about sanitation, fire safety, search and rescue, and other useful topics with hands-on exercises. Thirty-one people enrolled in the class and learned how to establish treatment sites as well as examine, assess, and help treat patients with burns, broken bones, open wounds, hypothermia, and more. These lessons give them the necessary skills to help those in need until first responders arrive. To register or learn more about CERT, go to www.epccert.org or contact Adair at robinadair@elpasoco.com or (719) 575-8858. **Above:** Robin Adair, left, demonstrated how to correctly apply a tourniquet with the help of John Rickman of the Tri-Lakes United Methodist Church Emergency Preparedness Group. **Right:** Greg Thorn taught volunteers how to treat an open wound. *Photos by Lauren Jones.*



Wastewater plant tour, Feb. 6



Did you know that treatment of wastewater using microorganisms has a biological oxygen demand (BOD), and the stronger the BOD the higher the cost to treat the water? Tri-Lakes Waste Water Treatment Facility (TLWWTF) Facility Manager Bill Burks discussed the treatment process with a handful of OCN reporters and curious citizens during a tour on Feb. 6. Influent or raw wastewater flows from the Monument, Woodmoor, and Palmer Lake Sanitation Districts into a screening process that removes inorganic materials, sand, and large objects. After being screened, the water progresses to aeration basins where sophisticated oxygen diffusers are regularly adjusted to meet the differing metabolic needs of various bacteria that consume about 99 percent of the waste constituents. The complex, high-maintenance process ends with the water passing through an ultraviolet disinfection unit to kill remaining microorganisms before being discharged into Monument Creek as treated effluent. TLWWTF invites the public to take a tour and learn what happens after the flush. For tour information, call Burks at 481-4053. **Above:** Pictured from left are Monument Community Liaison Specialist Madeline VanDenHoek, Monument Sanitation District board member John Howe, Burks, and OCN reporter Lisa Hatfield. *Photos by Jennifer Kaylor*

