

of famous historical figures, an Ice Cream Social sponsored by the Pikes Peak Library District and the Historical Society, the Legendary Ladies portraying famous

Colorado women, bus tours of The Glen, and other history-related activities. The Palmer Lake Volunteer Fire Department will fire up the grill to sell hotdogs, chips,

and drinks to raise funds to support the firefighters. Bring the whole family to this free event and experience local history up close and personal!

For membership and program information, visit our website: www.palmerdividehistory.org.

HANG: High Altitude Natural Gardening

Let's talk about HANG tomatoes

By Janet Sellers

Biodynamic farming takes a holistic approach to agriculture. This type of farming is best described as a give and take. Instead of just constantly taking from the land, biodynamic operations also give back, allowing nature to thrive. The Biodynamic Association describes this approach as a "spiritual-ethical-ecological" way of farming.

Chemicals aren't welcome on biodynamic farms—instead manures and composts fertilize the soil. Farmers look to the stars to help them know when to sow and plant, and animals, crops, and soil are all treated as a single system.

In June, the Tri-Lakes Gardening Community invited three local gardeners as speakers to share their expertise on high altitude tomato crops. Yep, it is possible. Yep, it takes special care. Yep, the majority of success is with a greenhouse or other accommodation to create the warm nights and warm conditions so tomatoes will grow, fruit, and actually ripen.

Leah Squires shared her tomato starting and growing system of starting seedlings in the small six-pack pots indoors, then later moving them to a 6-inch pot for her greenhouse garden bed where they sometimes grow 6-8 feet tall with plenty of tomatoes. Squires sows seeds in a dedicated seed medium, and she saves heirloom seeds. Her handy hint for tomato success focused on timely sowing and repotting, and adding calcium to the soils.

Sue Rattigan had a handy hint to smear ripe heirloom tomatoes onto a paper towel on the kitchen counter, then let dry, fold up neatly and label the whole thing. Then, the next year, tear off a scrap with five seeds or so and plant them just like that, paper towel scrap and all. Rattigan's indoor seedling setup for success includes grow lights, which she said are fairly expensive to use but provide protected indoor growing time, and she has 3-foot plants to put out in spring. She starts with small paper cups and graduates to a 5 gallon bucket prepped with bottom and side holes, soil and the plants, and then puts the whole bucket into the ground in a sunny area. Worms move in and out of bucket through the soils, as do roots. If a frost comes, she can grab the buckets and take them indoors, then put the tomato bucket outdoors on an OK

day. Rattigan harvests hundreds of pounds of tomatoes with this system, and is most fond of heirloom tomatoes from seed.

Fred McGuire shared that he just goes out and gets plants, or buys them, and does not plant the seedlings himself. His raised bed for the tomatoes is 6 inches deep. McGuire plants the tomatoes in the raised bed with a tomato cage to support the crop, and uses clear trash bags over the tomato cage for a mini-greenhouse until the days and nights are warm enough for the plants to grow and set fruit. McGuire's secret is to plant the tomatoes deep, with 12-15 inches of soil covering the stalk. He does this to create more roots and a sturdier plant stalk to hold all the tomatoes. Tomato plants can grow from merely putting a portion of the stalk into healthy soil or mature compost. The tomatoes will root from the stalk alone or a leaf embedded in the soil with only the top half of the leaf exposed. McGuire likes the Early Girl tomato plant, which takes only 50 days to harvest the fruits.

Phyllis Head shared at the roundtable discussion that she used an organic brand of soil supplement, which got her 60-75 pounds of tomatoes from one bush last year. It has the added important minerals calcium and magnesium. These minerals are the micronutrients the heavy feeding tomatoes need most. They help build cell walls throughout the plant and increase plant vigor. These nutrients aid plants in their conversion of carbon dioxide and soil nutrients to energy in the form of sugars and starches in the leaves and stimulate soil microorganisms. The microbes in turn help keep plants nourished and healthy.

One guest to the event brought in her HANG tomato solution as a tomato tower from a 5-gallon bucket. She puts a colander mound side up in the bottom of the bucket, adds a water tube, and uses a leak hole about 5 inches above the base to keep from overwatering, then fills the whole bucket with soil and tomato plant. The system is self-watering and only filled with water to the leak hole. She reports little watering is needed all season, and that she maybe watered the tomato bucket four times last summer. The portable bucket can be easily brought indoors if cold or harsh weather threatens, then goes back outside to protected spots with warm days.

Some of the gardeners use crushed

eggshells in their soil to add calcium, and Epsom salts for magnesium to promote growth and sturdy plants. All of the speakers there have found ways to create healthy, safe/nontoxic soils and plants that resist bugs and disease because no poisons are used. Poisons weaken the plants and of course are dangerous to us as well as the bugs!

Many local gardeners and small farmers have been working hard to educate our community about safe ways to handle gardening issues of weeds and pests. The threat of losing pollinators such as butterflies and bees is real and imposing on our lives. We won't have gardens or crops without them, and we won't eat without crops! And there's more to that issue of safety versus harm. The threat of toxic noxious weeds in our area is also real and imposing on our lives.

Unfortunately, one safe weed that gets targeted with poison herbicide—but we in turn get poisoned—is the dandelion, which is actually very helpful to the soil, and the flowers are vital to pollinators as these flowers are the first in the spring food source. Removing dandelions with environmental safety is not difficult, but many municipalities turn to cheap herbicides and skip the safer removal methods.

Applying an environmentally safe, thermal electric tool works just as quickly as the poison application, and is used directly over the weed, which is "zapped" for several seconds. Heat kills the weed at the root, without chemicals that could harm surrounding soil, groundwater or plants. It does not ignite mulch, I am glad to say.

A garden event and walking tours are coming up soon in July. Join the Tri-Lakes Gardening Community's upcoming garden talks, movies and events, dates and info posted on these Facebook pages: www.facebook.com/MonumentCommunityGarden and click the link there for the Tri-Lakes Gardening Community for details.

Janet Sellers is an avid HANG newbie, and welcomes your tips and handy hints to share with others here at our high altitude. She can be reached at: JanetSellers@OCN.me.



Above: The Monument Community Garden's first event of the season, a talk on the topic of growing tomatoes at high altitude, was held June 14 at the Tri-Lakes Chamber of Commerce facility. Speakers at the event included, from left, Fred McGuire, Sue Rattigan, and Leah Squires. Photo by Janet Sellers



Above: Members of the Tri-Lakes Business Accelerators help in the Monument Community Garden in June. These volunteers aided in the preparation and care of the vegetable garden that will benefit Tri-Lakes Cares as the vegetables become ready for harvest and sharing this season. From left are Megan McGuire, Sue Buell, and Newlene Laib. (Not shown, Janet Sellers.) Photo by Janet Sellers.

Art Matters

Newest public art for Tri-Lakes; Art Hop celebration



By Janet Sellers

The Tri-Lakes Views (TLV) art organization, a volunteer arts group, placed over a dozen new artworks for the 2015-16 public art sculpture exhibit on June 18. The outdoor artworks are on view from Palmer Lake at the Tri-Lakes Center for the Arts and the map locations go to the Monument Town Hall, along the Santa Fe Trail, and at the Monument Sculpture Park at Second and Jefferson Streets in Monument. TLV will soon publish a location map of the large number of public art sculptures in our area.

The TLV dedication ceremony with the artists was hosted by Jody Bliss at Bliss Studio and Gallery during the June

Art Hop evening. Live music, food, and engaging conversations filled the event both outside in the gardens and indoors at the gallery. TLV President Sky Hall and Betty Konarski, both founders of the TLV, presided at the dedication, celebrating with the happy crowd after a long day of supervising the installations throughout our community.

The June Art Hop was a spectacular summer event, and we have more to come each month. Many venues had musicians playing lively music, and the whole art quarter in historic Monument was hopping with locals and visitors shopping and enjoying the free refreshments and conviviality. The area has enormous powerpots

on just about every corner, and many shops have created truly attractive and fun window power boxes and urns filled with flowers with a glamorous air.

That, and our public outdoor artworks, have grown nearly 50 sculptures community-wide, and are creating a place to love and bring our family and friends to enjoy our locally owned shops and eater-

ies, a winery, a micro brewery—and I see we also have a distillery, too. Good thing we have plenty of gourmet coffees and teas available all over town!

So, I hope we all get out and enjoy this great summer weather in our community filled with art on any day we can. There is plenty of original art to see and buy to take home. Please visit and share our wonderful

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