

Speaking to us at the March meeting was local garden consultant and California native plant expert, Barbara Eisenstein. Her presentation paralleled the structure of her recently published book, *Wild Suburbia*, which she wrote to help gardeners who have little or no experience with California native plants. Drawing on her personal observations and experiences at her home garden in South Pasadena, as well as on her professional background as the former horticultural outreach coordinator at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, she offered practical knowledge about planting, irrigation, maintenance and even potential pitfalls to avoid.



Barbara began her talk by asking “new” gardeners in the audience to identify themselves, as her book was written with them in mind. She emphasized that she believes in a common sense approach to transitioning from a traditional to a native garden, addressing pros and cons gardeners may encounter, and encouraging them to make informed decisions appropriate to their situation, as *Wild Suburbia* is not a “how to” book, but rather a guide.

The book is broken down into chapters that take gardeners through the process of identifying characteristics of their location (climate, soil, water, etc.) so they may formulate a plan that will work for them. Grass removal techniques that are covered in the book were also presented. Without providing specific design plans, the book treats creating a garden as a process rather than a final product, allowing individual preferences to dictate choices, including how informal or tamed a garden might be.

This led to a discussion about plant selection, growth to maturity and eventual maintenance needs. Barbara choose not to include detailed plant lists in her book, instead offering her readers resources and suggestions on how to select healthy plants, when to plant, watering needs, mulching, and developing an understanding of dormancy cycles. She shared pictures illustrating some of these processes to underscore the need for new gardeners to educate themselves by learning through trial and error. She stated that she does not believe in “fail-proof” formulas, as there are too many variables, and sometimes the best way to know what will work or fail is simply to try.

Along with her anecdotes and practical advice, Barbara also spoke about the many reference charts found in her book. She concluded her talk with a Q and A session, and by again emphasizing the need for people to inform themselves; mentioning a number of reputable resources, including books, websites and nurseries. She understands that new gardeners may find a lot of conflicting information on the Internet and become discouraged, but offered encouragement for the hesitant. Barbara stated that one of her personal goals is to reach out to the “reluctant” gardener, which she is attempting to do with her book (copies of which were available for purchase) as well as in her current position as horticultural chair of the San Gabriel Mountains chapter of the California Native Plant Society.

Barbara Eisenstein is the author of *Wild Suburbia*, a book about California native plants. The cover of the book shows a field of yellow wildflowers. The title 'WILD SUBURBIA' is written in white capital letters at the top of the cover.



✎ Sabine Steinmetz

SAVE THE DATE!

Saturday, June 17



SCHS is pleased to offer a special

“Coffee In the Garden”

Saturday, June 17

1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Los Angeles County

Arboretum Library

hosted by

Head Librarian Susan Eubank

Susan will give a short talk about the revamped library and its resources at 2:00 p.m.

The Arboretum is generously waiving its admission fees for SCHS attendees. You are also welcome to wander around the grounds before, during and after the event until closing time at 5:00 p.m. And, as always, the SCHS will provide light refreshments during the event.

MORE DETAILS TO FOLLOW
IN NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE...

SHARING SECRETS RESPONSES

*What is your favorite
spring bloomer and why?*

Spring appears to have sprung in earnest with warmer temperatures setting off blooms all over Southern California. I can almost see the blossoms opening on my neighbor's peach

tree. There are so many plants to choose from, but I always find myself looking forward to the first sweet peas, with their amazing scent.

- Anonymous

I can't say that I have a single favorite spring bloomer, but one certainly has to be my nectarine tree, the white variety 'Arctic Star'. Most of us are probably familiar with the

image: hundreds (thousands?) of pale pink blossoms displayed at once, interspersed with the green of tiny emerging leaves, being visited by many willing honeybees. Depending on the weather, the display comes between mid-February and early March, so strictly speaking, the tree is a winter bloomer....but surely a harbinger of spring.

- Yoav Paskowitz