

## Digital Gardener's Year-end Roundup

Hard to believe that 2017 is coming to an end. Another year contemplating successes and failures in my personal gardening endeavors. My garden is sort of hanging in there. Thank goodness for drought-resistant, low-water, and low maintenance plants because otherwise, it could be worse as I contemplate the garden's future after five years of drought, let alone the ability to take care of it. Neighbor boys setting fire "accidentally" in July to my back hillside garden that burned off 30 years of shrubs and duff didn't help either. Still working on that, but you'd be surprised what can burn in a mature "green" garden and what firemen do to put it out.

But those are my problems to solve and I'd rather suggest/recommend some ideas for you to consider from the digital side of gardening that might interest you in your garden and Master Garden endeavors. Several I've covered before in other **TLDs**, but I think several areas are worth further elaboration: the MGCC's HOrT COCO blog, other "gardening" blogs, gardening podcasts, and **free** "gardening" ebooks and publications.

### MGCC's HOrT COCO Blog

I've been the editor (or maybe the survivor) for our MGCC's HOrT COCO blog now for three-plus years. It's been an interesting MG "adventure." The basic premise is "plagarizing" timely Help Desk email advice/responses and converting them into a stand-alone blog version that hopefully is of interest to the public. They have to request it to read it. That usually includes inventing a hopefully catchy informative title, making the response complete as can be as well as informative and readable. While the earlier blog outputs were rather spotty and different (but quite good... more on that later), my goal was to take full advantage weekly of the hard work from the Help Desk responding to one person and make it available to many via the blog, especially as close to real time as possible. One measure of whether the public is finding and reading/learning from the blogs are the statistical reports that UCANR provides for what are called "direct hits" on the blog. Direct hits are defined as when somebody takes enough interest in the blog to open the page up to view it versus just being seen in a list of possible items such as a Google search. Whether they read it is still a question to be resolved.

For 2014 we had 15,444 direct hits total. For 2017 to late November, we've had 92,861 direct hits with a significant upward trend in the latter half of 2017. Even if only 10% actually read the information on the blogs, the blog is providing useful gardening information to a lot of people. And you know what? Some of the 2014 blogs are still the most popular of all the blogs because they were not Help Desk items but stories about individual garden experiences and/or about "food". Those types of topics can still be part of the blog. Maybe they are something that I suspect most of us could write about. The interest is definitely there. For example, the blog on "Thanksgiving Herbs" had 1,600 direct hits the week before Thanksgiving. Other earlier blogs on the "joys" of routine, but pleasurable tasks were always warmly received.

Here's the 10 most popular blogs for 2017 to date... 3 from 2014...4 from 2015... and 3 from 2017

Click to view↓	POST TITLE	POST DATE	DIRECT HITS
<a href="#">1</a>	Those Finicky Ficus!!!	2015-06-22	3116
<a href="#">2</a>	Redbud Leaf Spots	2014-10-27	2837
<a href="#">3</a>	Considering Using a Drought and Foot Traffic Tolerant Grass?	2015-05-04	1999
<a href="#">4</a>	Squirrels Eating Your Shrub's or Tree's Bark?	2015-06-09	1998
<a href="#">5</a>	About Those Bumps on Your Cherry Tree Leaves	2015-04-13	1980
<a href="#">6</a>	Thanksgiving Herbs	2014-11-26	1618
<a href="#">7</a>	"Black Moldy Stuff" on Plant Leaves	2017-06-26	1542
<a href="#">8</a>	Garden Fountain Attracting Raccoons?	2017-07-10	1511
<a href="#">9</a>	Hedges and Screening for Privacy	2017-07-03	1497
<a href="#">10</a>	Carnivorous Figs: The Relationship Between Wasps and Figs	2014-08-27	1435
Total Direct Hits 1 Jan - 25 Nov 2017 =			92861

So... are you [subscribed](#) to the HOrT COCO blog? You might find some useful and new gardening information or solutions. Again, thanks to the Help Desk volunteers for all their hard work!

### Other Gardening Blogs

I admit to being a gardening “nerd” -- big time. When I can’t be out in the garden, I often spend some time in front of my computer/tablet/phone wandering through the various digital offerings of the gardening world. Most of these blogs can be read in five minutes or less if the title entices you enough to open them. Some of them will take a lot longer than five minutes to contemplate what you just read though.

As Master Gardeners, there are several blogs I’d like to recommend that could interest you:

**The Garden Professors** is a long-standing recommendation because it strives to be very close to keeping the blog “science-based”. Professor Linda Chalker-Scott of Washington State University is the nominal lead but there are others of similar stature that lead and/or monitor the discussions that are all closely tied to university posts or Extension. You can find Garden Professors on the web at [gardenprofessors.com](http://gardenprofessors.com). To give you a feel for the tenor of their blog articles, the latest I looked at was reviewing an article on the proposed use of arborist chips as mulch and “...putting it through CRAP analysis (credibility, relevance, accuracy, and purpose). It’s a skill that I encourage everyone – not just gardeners – to develop.” You can also find the Garden Professors on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/TheGardenProfessors/> where ongoing garden and/or horticulture discussions are ongoing. One of the more interesting discussions last summer was the “final word” on why tomatoes get Blossom End Rot... backed by published studies... you can look it up on the Facebook site... [see Don Shor’s comments](#).

Almost any of the [UCANR blogs](#) are worth considering, especially the likes of [Bug Squad](#), [Topics in Subtropics](#), [Pests in the Urban Landscape](#), [UC Weed Science](#), etc. Some of the other [Master Gardener program blogs](#) are worth considering as well. I especially recommend those of the Solano, Napa, Santa Clara, Sonoma, and Marin programs.

### Podcasts

I follow and recommend three gardening podcasts currently. The first two I have recommended before:

- **Davis Garden Show...** featuring Don Shor, the owner of Davis’ Redwood Barn Nursery. Sure, he is a commercial nursery owner, but he is also a UC Davis horticulture graduate, and has been in business since 1981. How would you like to run a nursery in the same “small town” as a world class agriculture school? Some of his customers are world-renown plant experts. He sticks to IPM and gives straight answers, in my opinion. The program broadcasts live Thursday 11 am on KDRT 95.7FM, but that’s a really small community station and you probably won’t pick it up. You could listen directly at 11 am on your digital device. You can directly download the programs weekly at <http://davisgardenshow.com/>. However, they usually aren’t posted until the Monday following the live broadcast. I listen to the weekly program via podcasts.

If you have iTunes, you can find this podcast there -- open iTunes. Type 'Davis Garden Show' in Search in the iTunes Store. Click Subscribe at the Davis Garden Show and Beyond icon (with a picture of yellow daisies). The other icon (with a picture of orange poppies) is an older link. It still works, but it’s being phased out.

- **Farmer Fred...** is a Lifetime Master Gardener with 7500 volunteer hours. [Fred Hoffman](#) is the host of the "KFBK Garden Show" on 1530-AM/93.1-FM KFBK in Sacramento each Sunday morning from 8 am to 10 am, followed by "Get Growing" on Talk 650 KSTE in Sacramento, 10 am to noon. And you can listen to all the shows live via the KFBK.com and KSTE.com websites.

While his shows are broadcast from Sacramento, they are pertinent to central and eastern

Contra Costa and mostly on target for west County. He has interesting guests of all horticultural backgrounds, he definitely sticks to the science, and is well versed in Master Gardener topics and closely allied to the Sacramento County MG Program.

While you can listen to them live, I usually listen to them via the podcasts which are usually available shortly after the programs are finished. Due to some internal network changes, the podcast addresses have changed: previous editions of "The KFBK Garden Show" and "Get Growing" can still be found by clicking on the program. New and current Podcast links for iTunes podcast users can click on the program following: "KFBK Garden Show" and "Get Growing".

- ***Still Growing*** ... this is a relatively new gardening podcast for me. I have been following it for about the last six months. While the program originates from "lovely Maple Grove" Minnesota, there are several pluses about it that make up for that. First, the host is knowledgeable and enthusiastic and has interesting guests who are on target and are usually pertinent to our Bay Area gardening (even though a recent podcast was all about a checklist for shutting down the garden for the winter snows and freezes). I also find her curation of the garden press for the weekly podcast of interest in that it helps me to decide what I might want to read and/or follow up on based upon her summaries and recommendations of that week's news. Easy to listen to via podcast, and I always learn something. It is kind of sappy at times but so far worth it. Podcast info can be found at <http://6ftmama.com/still-growing/>. There is also a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/stillgrowingpodcastgroup/>.

#### **Free Gardening Publications (Books, etc.)**

I've brought this subject to the TLD before. I was recently reviewing my web sources again and found that significant new publications have been uploaded for your perusal. If you are looking for some interesting and free information, these web sites are prime sources for essentially free e-books.

The primary sources I look at are [issuu.com](http://issuu.com) and [slideshare.com](http://slideshare.com).

I was especially impressed this time with the sources of information available on herbs and the variations associated with them. Here are a few on herbs that I found of interest:

*Herb Magic for Beginners* by Ellen Dugan

*2018 Herbal Almanac* ... (Digital Gardener found out what moon should you be planting by)

*Healing Herbs - How to Grow, Store, and Maximize Their Medicinal Power*

by Dede Cummings and Alyssa Holmes

*The Kitchen Herb Garden - A Seasonal Guide to Growing, Cooking and Using Culinary Herbs*

by Maureen Little

as well as some others that might interest you....

*Wicked Plants - The Weed That Killed Lincoln's Mother and Other Botanical Atrocities*

*Wicked Bugs - And Other Diabolical Insects*

*The Drunken Botanist - The Plants That Create the World's Great Drinks*

... all by Amy Stewart.

Take a look. I think you will find something there that will interest you. Their subjects are very inclusive.

All for now... how about submitting your garden "adventures" for the HOrT COCO blog?

**Steve Morse (2010)**