

THE ALPINE SUN SHOPPER – January 3, 2013
Tattered Tidbits: Alpine Historical Society

THE PLANTS ALPINE'S HERB LADY LOVES

On Saturday, December 30, 2012, one of Alpine's most well known gardeners, was honored in anticipation of her January 3, 2013, 90th birthday. Friends and neighbors gathered at the Alpine Community Church to celebrate this occasion. Elma Terry, affectionately known as "The Herb Lady," has been delighting Alpine residents for years with the beauty of her native plant garden. How many of us reading this article have offerings from Elma's garden residing in our own yards? I'd venture to say many—Paul and I certainly do. The centerpieces she creates for every imaginable community occasion are lovely to behold.

Elma's garden has been on the Sage and Songbirds tour three times. Meandering through the paths one can see every imaginable type of native plant—one more beautiful than the next. The pond with beautiful koi offers a peaceful place to meditate. Elma's late son Tim peppered the garden with his amazing rock sculptures—many of these still grace the area. It is a lovely sight and a true Alpine treasure.

This energetic lady is involved in many community organizations. As a member of the Alpine Historical Society's Board for as many years as most of us can remember, Elma served in many capacities through the years. Paul and I met her when we stopped at the museum for a tour and she was serving as a docent. We left as members of the Society and have been active ever since. She is very persuasive.

With Elma's love of native plantings in mind, I reviewed some of the history of Alpine and came upon an article written in 1951 in *The Alpine Sun* by a guest writer, Evelyn Worley. It is as pertinent in 2013 as it was in 1951, and follows.

"Editor's Note: Mrs. Evelyn Worley has lived in Alpine on Victoria Drive since 1946 and is an authority on the natural wild flowers and plants that grow in Alpine. Instead of trying to raise plants not native to this part of the country, she has developed a garden depending upon native sources, consequently demanding a minimum of water for their growth.

When we bought our ten acres in December, 1946, we had no way of knowing what beauty was to be ours the following spring.

On an April day we drove away from the smog of Los Angeles and the fog of the coast into the Alpine sunshine and when we reached our own hill abloom with wild lilac and looked down on the long stretch of arroyo filled with blue, it seemed as if heaven were above us, below us, and about us.

In reconnoitering we found a dell in the shadow of our Balanced Rock, filled with bright blue larkspur. On a slope near the spring was meadow rue, its foliage resembling maiden-hair fern, shoulder high. Blue-eyed grass looked up at us, wild sweet peas were hanging in the scrub oak, zygadenine lilies had poked their way through the hard road bed, and lovely lilac-pink Mariposa tulips were everywhere. Yucca by the hundreds and bushes of white ceanothus were scattered about the hills. We had never felt so wealthy! This was only the beginning of nature's bounty.

The more common natives seem to feel that they have squatter's rights—golden yarrow, woolly blue curls (Romero), the gorgeous penstemon, bush monkey flower, the delicate yellow rock rose, buckwheat, greasewood, and the many sages, the most beautiful of which is Cleveland's sage, a San Diego native. Its flower is a vivid bachelor-button blue.

The phacelia, blazing star, pink gentian, yellow mariposa, Indian pink, and the magnificent scarlet larkspur, which grows to a height of six to eight feet, could find few challengers in a beauty contest.

A visit to Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden convinced us that we must add to our native flowering shrubs. Plans for our hillside planting reach into the future. Our Fremontia is now furnishing seed for further planting. The matilija and tree poppies, bush lupine, carpenteria and St. Catherine's lace are well established. The wild lilac is our particular enthusiasm and I can imagine nothing lovelier in the springtime than plantings of this native shrub along both sides of Highway 80 from the Alpine sign on the west to the Honey Hill ranch on the east.

Passers-by may be skeptical concerning printed signs but they could never ignore the beauty of such a planting. Alpine might become as famous for its wild lilac as the Smokies are famous for their wild rhododendron. It is something to consider.

Forty-four species of ceanothus, or wild lilac, are found in California, ranging in color through various shades of blue to a violet hue. San Diego county's own Lakeside lilac, one of the most beautiful, is a deep indigo blue, quite different from those growing in the wild around Alpine. After a native shrub is established it will, with few exceptions, take care of itself. The wild flowers seed themselves and on our land, at least, furnish almost continuous color without effort.

All situations are not adaptable to native planting, but according to horticulturists, there are more native California plants grown in English gardens than are grown in the gardens of California. In the past century, Dr. Thomas Coulter, a Scotch-Irish botanist, took back to Great Britain some fifteen hundred species of California natives, and as early as 1877 our flowering shrubs were thriving in English gardens.

One good reason for planting natives is to save water. We bring drought resistant plants from Australia and South Africa. Why not use our own natives? Another reason is for the fun of it, and still another is the lazy man's reason—color and beauty with Mother Nature as gardener. More commendable than all of these is the desire to share in the perpetuation of California's natural beauty.”

It is amazing how something written over sixty years ago is so true today. This article is for you, Elma, our twenty-first century master gardener, and to all of us who so love the beauty of the native plants that thrive in beautiful Alpine. Happy New Year to one and all.

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Elma Terry in front of the old
Town Hall building.