



Volunteer Times

Published for the volunteers of the UCI Arboretum

February 2012

Volunteers Needed for Winter Bulb Festival

By *Laura Lyons, UCI Arboretum*

The early rain and cold weather of last fall have brought out the blooms in the South African Bulb Garden. Early *Moraeas*, *Chasmanthe bicolor*, and multi-hued *Lachealias* give hints of the spectacular bloom to come—just in time, we hope, for the Arboretum’s Winter Bulb Festival on March 3rd and 4th.

This popular annual event showcases the garden and, also, features a major plant sale.

All through the month of February, we will be preparing the garden for the Festival. The Master Gardeners meet each Wednesday morning to take care of both the Bulb Garden and the South African Perennial Garden, and welcome additional volunteers at any time. It’s a great way to learn new techniques and get a chance to work closely with some of our spectacular bulbs.



Our students work all during the week, but we have particularly large groups on Tuesday and Thursday mornings working around the gardens weeding, mulching, keeping the garden tidy, and doing other tasks. They would welcome help from our volunteers, and indeed you could be a great help to them by providing experience and guidance. I spend as much time with them as I can, but with my many responsibilities I can’t spend as much time as I would like.

On Saturday, February 25th from 9 a.m. to noon students and volunteers are welcome for a garden workday, where we’ll undertake a number of maintenance tasks around the garden.

During the final week the students will be working every day around the grounds. On Wednesday, February 29th and Friday, March 2nd from 9 a.m. to noon volunteers from the Nursery Group and Friday Club will set up the plant sale and would welcome additional help as they select plants under my direction, do a final grooming and cleanup, move them out to the sale area, and make sure all the plants are properly labeled.

Friday afternoon March 2 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., we will be busy giving the garden a last tidying up—sweeping paths, raking planter beds, washing down paths, and, maybe, pulling the odd weed or two.

Winter Bulb Festival Weekend

The Festival runs both Saturday and Sunday. Volunteers will work at the front gate—checking in Friends of the Arboretum and taking admission—and as salespeople, cashiers and holding area staff at the plant sale, answer telephones, etc. Students will work as take out assistants and possibly as cashiers. Detailed shift information can be found in the box below.

Master Gardeners should contact Veronique Swett at (949) 497-0444 or vrswett@cox.net to schedule their shift at the Bulb Garden.

To volunteer either out in the garden or for the Winter Bulb Festival, please give Laura a call at (949) 824-5833 or email ldlyons@uci.edu.



Winter Bulb Festival Shift Schedule

Saturday, March 3

Show Hours:

Friends Preview: 9 to 10 a.m.

General Public: 10 to 4 p.m.

Setup 7 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

1st shift 8:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

2nd shift noon to 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, March 4

Show hours: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

1st shift 10:30 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.

2nd shift 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Cleanup 2:45 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Many things grow in the garden that were never sown there.

~Thomas Fuller

The Toughest Question: Watering

By *Laura Lyons, UCI Arboretum*

When I'm talking to customers at plant sales or students in horticulture class, the first question I get is also the toughest: "How often do I water this?" For novice gardeners, it's important to learn how to water our plants properly. As experienced gardeners, we need to know how to answer this question, because I guarantee you'll get it from a bewildered friend or neighbor eventually!

People looking for a detailed schedule are bound to be disappointed, because so many factors go into answering that question. In class, I tell the students, "Look, you don't look at your watch and say, "Wow, it's 1 o'clock, I think I'm thirsty! You get thirsty when your body needs water." Plants are the same way—except that WE are the ones that need to recognize they are thirsty and give them water.

As gardeners, we know there are so many factors that influence a plant's water needs. Is the plant a succulent, or an aquatic plant? Is it growing in a container, or in the ground? Is it in full sun, part sun, or deep shade? How big and well established is the plant? How well draining is the soil? Is the area well mulched? Throw in seasonal variations in temperature and humidity and you have a very complex issue on your hands—but there are some basic guidelines that can hopefully steer you in the right direction.

The first and most important issue is to know your plant's needs. Setting aside true aquatic plants and some of the really demanding succulents like Lithops, plants generally fall in three major categories.

Succulents and other arid climate plants – Need the least water once established. The potting soil or dirt should go quite dry (but not bone dry) between waterings.

Thirsty plants – need to be kept quite moist, but not soaking wet, all the time. Examples include ferns and roses.

"Average" water – Most of the plants the Arboretum sells, and a lot of the ones we grow, fall in this area. These plants should be kept damp, but not wet. The soil should be somewhat dry to the touch before the next watering.

It's worth mentioning, since the Arboretum grows a lot of bulbs and natives that there is one additional category that we see more than the average landscape—**No or little water when dormant**. Certain bulbs and arid climate plants tolerate little or no water during their dormant period. Remember that can be any time

of year! For California natives, for example, the 'dormant period' is summer.

It's worth noting that most people tend to overwater their plants, especially in the ground. At the nursery I worked at for several years about 75% of the plants brought back to us dead had been overwatered, about 15% had been planted wrong, and about 10% died of other causes, including underwatering.

We know why a plant dies of underwatering, but why does it die of overwatering? Simply put, a plant's roots need oxygen. Just like you would drown in water, a plant's roots drown if they are constantly saturated—oxygen is driven out of the root zone and, if the conditions persist, the roots begin to die. Typically, disease (root rot) moves in and finishes off the roots—but the disease hits root tissue that was already dying. Hitting the roots with fungicide won't do a thing if you keep watering too much. It might help slow down the rot from moving up into the plant's stems and leaves but with the roots already dead and dying, the plant is doomed anyway.

Over time, as you care for a plant, you'll learn to anticipate its needs. For example, I have a handful of key species I check in the Arboretum's lath house to assess if the building needs water—some that dry out very quickly, and some that dry out much more slowly. A quick check of those key groups helps me assess the area's needs that day.

For seasonal variations, we need only think of our own needs for water. We get less thirsty when it's cool and damp and more when it is hot and dry. So do plants.

Proper watering of our gardens is one of the most challenging issues a gardener can face, but knowing the general guidelines I've laid out will help us be successful more often than not.



URGENT REQUEST

USED 1-GALLON POTS

Drop off by our garage any time we are open,
or outside the front gate when we are closed.

Receive *Volunteer Times* Electronically

Subscribe to the e-Times!

Send an e-mail to ldlyons@uci.edu with "Subscribe to the eTimes" in the Subject line and your name and e-mail address in the body. Your newsletter will be delivered in PDF format via email, with COLOR photos!

IMPORTANT DATES

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>TIME</u>
February 8	South African Bulb and Perennial Garden Group	9 a.m. – noon
February 11	Saturday Plant Sale	9 a.m. – 3 p.m.
February 15	South African Bulb and Perennial Garden Group	9 a.m. – noon
February 22	South African Bulb and Perennial Garden Group	9 a.m. – noon
February 24	Laura Off – No Volunteering	All Day
February 25	Garden Workday	9 a.m. – noon
February 29	South African Bulb and Perennial Garden Group	9 a.m. – noon
February 29	Plant Sale Prep	9 a.m. – noon
March 2	Plant Sale Prep	9 a.m. – noon
March 2	Final Cleanup for Winter Bulb Festival	1 p.m. – 4 p.m.
March 3	Winter Bulb Festival	9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
March 4	Winter Bulb Festival	11 a.m. – 3 p.m.
<u>LOOKING AHEAD</u>		
March 24	Saturday Plant Sale	9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

EARLY SEASON EVENT CALENDAR

March 3 & 4	Winter Bulb Festival
March 24	Saturday Plant Sale
April 14	April Showers of Flowers
May 5 & 6	Spring Perennial Sale

CURRENT VOLUNTEER SCHEDULE

<u>GROUP</u>	<u>DAY AND TIME</u>
Nursery	Wednesday 9 a.m. – noon
Orchid Care	Wednesday 9 a.m. – noon
Bulb & Perennial	Wednesday 9 a.m. – noon
California Garden	Thursday 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Herbarium	Thursday 1 p.m. – 4 p.m.
Friday Club	Friday 9 a.m. – noon
Special Events	See Important Dates

For information on any of these or for general information on volunteering, call Laura Lyons at: 949/824-5833 or e-mail: ldlyons@uci.edu