In the Back Yard

Full-Moon Party at Moraga Gardens
By Sophie Braccini

Full Moon over Saint Mary's Hills, Moraga   Photo by Andy Scheck

The phrase "Full Moon Party" brings many images to mind; of Selene chanteys, Pagan dancing in the moonlight, or perhaps game day fraternity pranks. Actually, nothing of the kind happened on Sunday June 30th, at the Moraga Gardens. During the monthly gathering of the Friends of the Moraga Gardens (every 28 days in keeping with the cycle of the full moon), about 50 local residents gathered at the garden for a vegetarian pot luck festivity.

Tables were set under the garden's pergola with a comfy fire blazing to keep the cool Moraga evening at bay. Nearby, a large clay oven, built by volunteers, cooked a wide variety of pizzas to perfection. The locally made wine perfectly complimented the salads, stews, cheeses, breads and desserts. Volunteer Bill Durkin poetically described the welcoming atmosphere: "Tickle the earth with a hoe and it will laugh with a harvest, come and be warmed by our communal fireplace."

The Garden's story began in 1985. Deva Rajan, founder of Canyon Construction, was renting a walnut processing shed from Russell Bruzzone, prominent Moraga developer. Rajan had barely noticed the acre of flat land littered with construction debris that led behind the shed. One day, it struck him that this was an ideal place for a garden. Russell Bruzzone loved the

Robin Flowers, Deva Rajan and Bill Durkin working in Moraga Garden   Photo by Sophie Braccini

idea; the plot had been a garden in the heyday of farming in Moraga, growing the vegetables to feed the hands who resided on the premises. The two men collaborated in cleaning up, fencing and installing the water lines. A Sharecropper Agreement was signed and as a result, the Bruzzone family gets a portion of everything that is sold by the Garden.

Rajan's vision for the Moraga Garden is one of abundance: "Grow more than you need, so you can share the bounty." Everything planted in the Garden starts from seeds. Crops include tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, lettuces, onions, fruits trees and more. The prime organic vegetables are sold to restaurants and markets in the area: Star Grocery on Claremont Ave., Monterey Market in Berkeley, Chez Panisse, Oliveto, and Postino. The money collected serves to buy next year's seeds, organic amendments and to pay the rent. The rest of the harvest is donated to non-profit organizations such as Redwood Gardens retirement home or the Berkeley Food Pantry. The volunteers share in the abundance as well.

The regular 10 to 12 helpers who come two or three times a week to immerse themselves in this oasis of peace and beauty are from all walks of life. Alice Maisel is a photographer and yoga teacher; she is "chief irrigation assistant" and has been working in the garden for seven years. Bill Durkin, a solar engineering consultant, has spent countless hours in the garden since he discovered it two years ago. Attorney Kathryn Lyddan believes that the garden has changed her life. She brings her two daughters to the garden; there they meet other young people such as Rajan's children. That's how the love of gardening and respect of the Earth is transmitted to the next generation.
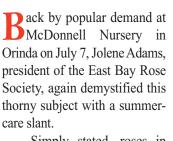
The parties are held every full moon. They are attended by the garden volunteers, their families and friends. If you want to get your hands dirty, contact Rajan at Deva.Rajan@earthlink.net (serious inquiries only, please).

SUMMER ROSE CARE
By Suzan Ormandy

Back by popular demand at McDonnell Nursery in Orinda on July 7, Jolene Adams, president of the East Bay Rose Society, again demystified this thorny subject with a summer-care slant.

Jolene Adams at McDonnell Nursery

Simply stated, roses in summer need only two kinds of care: water and selective pest/disease treatment. What about feeding? Except for potted plants (which require a little fertilizer every month added to the top of the soil) on this side of the Tunnel, don't fertilize again until Labor Day. Many of us have learned to fertilize roses on four holidays: St. Patrick's Day (mid-March), Memorial Day (after the Spring flush of new growth), 4th of July, and Labor Day. In this area, skip that mid-summer feeding as plants are working hard enough already to survive in our hotter climate. (See below for more of Ms. Adams' tips on fertilizing roses.)

Water is the real issue for roses in summer. More than many plants, roses require a lot of water: each rose needs 10 gallons a week applied regularly to root depth (about 12"). Lack of moisture is indicated at leaf edges: die back starts there when leaves can't suck up water fast enough during hot spells, so regular and deep irrigation is critical. Like all plants, roses lose water through evaporation (soil level) and transpiration (leaves). To help keep things cool and moist at soil level, be sure to have at least 3" of mulch near but not touching the base of your roses. The yearly addition of organic matter under your mulch (or fresh mulching with organic matter) is very helpful in many other ways too.

At the leaf level, get your rose leaves wet. Forget all you've heard on that issue before. However, do it early in the day (by 10 a.m.) so the foliage has a chance to dry out before nightfall. A good hosing twice a week washes off dirt, bug droppings, fungal spores and even spider mite infestations (twice a week foils the dryness requirement and interrupts the life cycle of spider mites).

Speaking of spider mites, these and other insects should only be treated for when they are present, i.e., don't use pesticides preventatively. Aphids and spittle bugs can be efficiently dealt with by a strong hose spray, by running your gloved fingers down stems they're inhabiting, and/or by a spray of water mixed with a little dish detergent. Good organic products – like Neem oil and fatty soaps – are readily available. Malathion and toxic systemics are neither necessary nor desirable. For caterpillars that chew holes in rose leaves and buds, use B.t, bacteria that are safe for us but deadly to caterpillars.

Likewise, disease treatment should be on an as-needed basis only. The most common to roses is black spot, a fungus characterized by black and yellow splotches. It's unsightly but

Rose photos by Ken C. Young, Moraga
See his work at the Moraga Art Gallery or online at www.kcyoungfineartimages.com

will not kill your roses. Remove the infected leaves from the plant and the ground and throw them away (don't compost). Use a copper fungicide if you feel the need to: it's effective and even good for the soil if some gets down there. Ditto for powdery mildew. Rust can be suppressed with fungicidal oils but not in the summer; instead, blast this bag fungus off with forceful water shots in the early A.M.

Deadhead high in summer: just snap off spent blossoms, leaving as many leaves as possible until September, then do one last, deeper deadheading for that final flush.

When you fertilize at the end of the summer for that Fall show, use a balanced fertilizer like a 12-12-12 (it's spring when we triple feed nitrogen). Avoid systemic foods with added insecticides and/or fungicides. Coffee grounds (which you can get free from most cafes) are always a great addition to the soil – and will not acidify it. Compost is neutral in pH and always welcome. Ms. Adams is not a fan of Epsom salts in this area, incidentally, except in spring for certain needs.

To summarize Ms. Adams' advice, mulch, deadhead high, hose off, weed and control pests and diseases selectively.

To become a real rosarian, attend the East Bay Rose Society's monthly meeting on third Wednesdays from 7:30 – 10:00 p.m. at Lakeside Park Garden Center at Lake Merritt in Oakland. Call 510-215-9016 or visit www.eastbayroses.org.