



Creek Watch

Sacramento Urban Creeks Council

Volume XV, Number 2

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Fall 2004

Creek-friendly Landscaping

by Dave Tamayo, Pesticide Control Program Manager, Sacramento County Stormwater Program

The way you design and maintain the landscaped areas of your home or business can either help or hurt local creeks and rivers, and the creatures that depend on them.

Landscapes have the potential to trap pollutants, conserve water, and prevent creek erosion. However, poorly designed and maintained landscapes can waste water, cause soil erosion, and discharge toxic levels of pesticides and other pollutants.

One of the biggest water quality problems in our local area is the level of pesticides that are discharged from the urban environment. The Sacramento Stormwater Quality Partnership (a collaboration of the County of Sacramento and the Cities of Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, Folsom, Galt, Rancho Cordova, and Sacramento) and other public agencies have found through extensive monitoring that local creeks frequently contain the insecticides diazinon and chlorpyrifos at levels that will kill the insects and crustaceans that form an important part of the food chain.

Maintaining healthy plants is crucial to avoiding the use of pesticides in the landscape. As expert gardeners know, the best way to do that is to use a holistic approach that includes proper plant selection, soil conditions, watering, pruning and other maintenance chores.

Plants that are ill-adapted to the Sacramento area, or to the specific conditions where they are planted, will fail to thrive without heroic efforts to prop them up. Too much shade, seasonal temperature stress, incompatibility with other plants, poor drainage, and other environmental factors can all weaken a plant and make it more vulnerable to insects and diseases. Often, the gardener is better off replacing a problem plant, or moving it to a better location, rather than spending lots of effort and money, and creating more pollution in the process.

Establishing and maintaining a healthy soil is also a key to success. Some soil additives, such as organic material, nutrients, and trace minerals may be necessary to establish good growing conditions. However, in many instances,

over reliance on chemical fertilizers, especially those that also contain weed killers and insecticides, can actually harm your soil and its ability to support healthy plants.

Pesticides should never be used unnecessarily, but unfortunately they often are. For instance, some products are marketed in the Sacramento area to control lawn insects, which are very seldom the cause of the problems encountered in local lawns. Many weed problems can be solved on a long term basis by better plant selection, use of mulch and weed cloth, and even lawn mowing and watering practices. Some bug "problems" really aren't harmful to the plants at all, and don't need to be "solved". And many less toxic, but effective pesticides are widely available, if they are needed.

Gardeners who apply these principles often get great satisfaction from having a better understanding of how their garden works, as well as benefiting from healthier plants, a cleaner environment, and reduced exposure to toxic pesticides.

The Sacramento Stormwater Quality Partnership supports and partners with various programs to provide easy access to detailed information and assistance:

UC Master Gardeners:

(916) 875-6913

UC Davis:

www.ipm.ucdavis.edu

Nurseries and home centers:

www.sacstormwater.org/wise/nurs_gard_part/index.html;

<http://www.ourwaterourworld.org>

Landscape professionals:

www.sacstormwater.org/cwbp/participants-1.htm

Bio Integral Resource Center:

www.birc.org

Our Water Wise site:

<http://www.sacstormwater.org/wise>



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Chapter meetings are generally held the second Monday of each month at the Arcade Creek Recreation and Park District.

Please call (916) 482-8377 for specific meeting dates and times.

Dipping Into Creeks Workshop

Designed specifically for Educators, Grades 2nd – 6th

Creeks naturally attract children; they are just about the right size of water for easy exploration. With flowing water, wooded banks, a variety of wildlife - combined with ready-made fascination – local creeks are an ideal resource for teaching science concepts.

This workshop includes:

- An intensive training for the use of the hands-on, inquiry-based Dipping Into Creeks Activity Guide
- Individual copy of the Dipping Into Creeks Activity Guide
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- Materials from Sacramento City and County Water Agencies
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- Correlation to California Science Content Standards

The Dipping Into Creeks Activity Guide includes many activities that can be used in a classroom setting as well as activities that use local creeks and waterways as outdoor classrooms. As students complete the fun activities, they are learning how plants and animals meet their needs in different ways, have predictable life cycles, possess physical adaptations for survival, require energy and matter to live and grow plus much more. The activities also provide students with an opportunity to learn about sustainability concepts, the interconnection of the natural world, and the complexity of many environmental problems.

Workshop Information

- **Date:** Saturday, November 20, 2004
- **Time:** 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. (Check in at 9:00 a.m.)
- **Place:** Effie Yeaw Nature Center in Ancil Hoffman County Park
- **Class Fee:** \$10
- **Register:** Call Beth Etgen at (916) 489-4918
- **Questions:** Call (916) 489-4918 or email betgen@sacparks.org

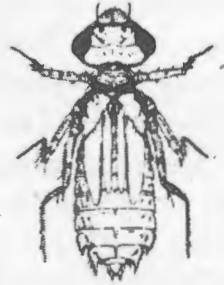
Space is limited, please preregister early. Preregistration is required.

Creek Plants & Critters

Dragonflies *by Bonnie Ross*

The other day as I was walking to my car, a gleaming object on the hot pavement caught my eye. I bent down and picked up a dead dragonfly that seemed to radiate iridescent colors from its huge eyes, its long, delicate abdomen, and its stained-glass like wings. I decided at once to make this insect the subject of my next "Creek Critter" column.

Dragonflies, along with damselflies, belong to the Order Odonata – from the Greek *odont* or *odous* meaning tooth. That's funny since neither dragonflies nor damselflies have teeth. They do, however, possess an opposable lower jaw which they can project out about one third of their body length to capture prey faster than most of us can blink. Their lower jaws are not the only remarkable adaptation they possess. They are semi-aquatic, spending their adolescence in ponds and slow moving creeks. As nymphs (which look like adult dragonflies without the wings) they usually take two forms. The long aerodynamic type swims after prey. The "tank-like" sturdy form, condensed in shape and usually covered in sediments and organic



debris for disguise, wait in ambush for prey to come to them. Their gills are inside their abdomens and they take in water through their anal openings and extract oxygen that way. When chasing down fast prey or escaping larger predators, a dragonfly nymph will squeeze its abdominal muscles, forcing water out and "charging" forward like a balloon flying in circles as the air escapes.

Dragonflies are remarkable aerial predators as well. I have watched a swarm of dragonflies feasting on a cloud of termites. The dragonflies were catching the termites in their basket-like legs, biting off the abdomens and spitting out the wings, thorax and heads. In the water, nymphs feed on anything they can catch from fish and tadpoles to other invertebrates. They also feed on the aquatic larvae of annoying, biting insects like midges and mosquitoes. Although mosquitoes do not lay their

eggs in fast moving creeks and streams, they will lay their eggs in back water areas where they are easy prey for these excellent Odonates. By eating mosquitos, dragonflies may even help to control disease and for that reason alone deserve our respect and admiration. Their shimmering beauty and grace enriches our senses.



Creek-Friendly Landscape Plants

There are many California native plants that look quite handsome in the garden and, being natives, are more pest resistant and drought tolerant than many popular non-native nursery items. The three shown below have the additional benefit of being attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds.



W. Hewlett
Bush monkeyflower (*Diplacus aurantiacus*) - perennial shrub 2 - 4 feet tall with orange flowers April - September.



Western redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*)
Deciduous shrub 15 - 18 feet high with bright pink flowers in early spring and heart-shaped leaves.



R. Potts
California fuchsia (*Zauschneria californica*), spreading, 18" tall perennial with graygreen leaves and scarlet flowers.

Wolfe Ranch Sanctuary...a little known gem

by Amy van Riessen, Natural Resources Specialist
Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency (SAFCA)

Throughout the Sacramento Valley, expanding development has caused a reduction in the amount of natural habitat. However, public agencies are quickly learning that development can include the creation, enhancement and preservation of natural areas.

An example of this enhancement can be seen at Wolf Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary (formerly known as Borrow Site 2L) in Rio Linda. When this 65-acre site was originally brought into public ownership, it was an irrigated pasture lacking natural plant communities. The Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency (SAFCA) excavated the area as a borrow site for earthen fill material (approximately 800,000 cubic yards) for the North Area Local Flood Control Project levee improvements. SAFCA saw this as an opportunity to enhance the area's habitat value, and proceeded to have the site graded and contoured to support the establishment of a wetland! In fact, they created six habitat types during construction of this large-scale restoration project: emergent marsh, riparian marsh, mixed riparian, oak riparian, open water, and a giant garter snake hibernacula.

Not only has tree and shrub survival averaged about 70% after 6 years, but surveys show that every year an increasing number of bird species are utilizing the area. Wolf Ranch supported 91 species of birds in 2003, up from 80 species in 2002 and 58 species in 2001. This includes an abundance of raptors, and waterfowl!



Wolfe Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary, formerly a 65-acre pasture with few surviving plant communities before being excavated for flood project landfill material. SAFCA saw the opportunity to create a wetland!

Not only does the Wolf Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary provide habitat for an abundance of flora and fauna, it has created opportunities for passive recreation, including hiking, bird watching and horseback riding. The site will also act as the northern-most point on the City of Sacramento's Ueda Parkway! As use of the site increases, we have to be vigilant in protecting it from vandalism and associated wildfires. We hope that this area continues to become more popular for passive recreation.

SAFCA would like to encourage you to explore Wolf Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary. You can park your car in the parking lot adjacent to Elkhorn Boulevard and take a short walk down Sorento Road to this beautiful wetland. Take your binoculars and be prepared to see an abundance of wildlife!

For more information about SAFCA and their environmental restoration projects, please call (916) 874-7606.



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What creek critter helps to protect us from mosquito bites? See page 3 to find out!

Address Correction Requested

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The Urban Creeks Council of Sacramento is dedicated to protecting and sharing the abundant natural treasures that make up the extensive creek systems of our region. As a member, you will receive many benefits, including our newsletter *Creek Watch*. To become a member or renew your membership, please fill out and mail the form below to: Sacramento Urban Creeks Council, 4855 Hamilton Street, Sacramento, CA, 95841

YES! I want to help Sacramento's creeks. Enclosed is my tax deductible gift of:

- \$10/Students
- \$25/Regular membership
- \$40/Family Membership
- \$100
- \$250
- Other _____
- I would like to be a member of the Sacramento Urban Creeks Council.
- I'm already a member; please accept my donation and renewal.

Make check payable to: Sacramento Urban Creeks Council.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ **Email** _____

Questions? Call: (916) 482-8377 Email: ucc@arcadecreekrecreation.com