

THE MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN SOCIETY

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BRANCH

An international forum devoted to furthering knowledge and appreciation of plants and gardens suited to the mediterranean climate regions of the world

issue 16
Spring 2004

Eschscholzia californica California poppy

(excerpted with permission from the brand new book,
Wildly Successful Plants: Northern California,
by Pam Peirce; Sasquatch Books – see review on page 2)

PLANT TYPE: *Perennial*
HEIGHT AND SPREAD: *1 to 1½ feet tall and 1 to 3 feet wide*
BLOOM TIME: *Late winter to midsummer*
LIGHT NEEDS: *Full sun*
SOIL NEEDS: *Poor to moderately fertile, well drained*
WATER NEEDS: *Ample when young, moderate when mature*
OTHER TOLERANCES: *Cool coastal summers, seaside conditions, inland climates, snail resistant, deer resistant*
HARDINESS: *Zones 9 to 11*

The California poppy was declared the official state flower by the California legislature in 1903, after having been so designated by the California State Floral Society in 1890. During this period, California went through a sort of poppy madness. Poppies appeared frequently as a brand name, as motifs in the decorative arts, in poetry, and in song. Much was made of their golden color in relation to the gold that the forty-niners found in the Sierra. Californians still love the poppy. In 1974, April 6 was declared "California Poppy Day," and this day is still celebrated by the state's schoolchildren.

SOURCE AND USES

The species *Eschscholzia californica* subspecies *californica* is native in much of California, as well as into Oregon and Baja California. The first California poppy seeds to germinate in England were collected in Oregon by the plant explorer David Douglas in 1825. California poppies soon became popular in England and are now grown in gardens in many parts of the world.

The plants are dramatic en masse, either alone or with small grasses and other bright flowers and are useful in a rock garden or among succulents and cacti. The satiny blossoms close at night and on foggy or overcast days but open fully during whatever part of a day is sunny.

CARE AND REPRODUCTION

Full sun and a rather infertile sandy soil will produce the best California poppy plants and the ones most likely to survive for several years. Overrich soil reduces bloom. For the longest bloom period, you can deadhead often, cutting flower stems to a joint with a bud-bearing stem, but most gardeners wait until the plants are pretty well bloomed out and then cut them back to near the ground. These plants will usually regrow and rebloom a few weeks later in watered gardens, and may do so twice, though the plants that grow back are usually smaller than the ones produced at first.

The plants are best grown from seed. In fact, they are so easy from seed that when California native wildflower mixes contain poppies, they are usually the plant most likely to come up. In mild-winter areas, sow seed in the fall, barely covered. If rains don't do the job, water to keep the soil consistently moist for the first month or so, until seedlings are growing heartily. Seed sown in late winter or early spring may succeed, but avoid overwatering the resulting plants as the weather warms, as they become more susceptible to soil-borne disease in warmer weather. Small plants can be transplanted with some success only if they can be moved without disturbing the soil around the roots. A 2-inch-tall seedling can already have a 4-inch-long taproot, and if it is broken the plant probably won't survive.

(continued on page 2, column 2)



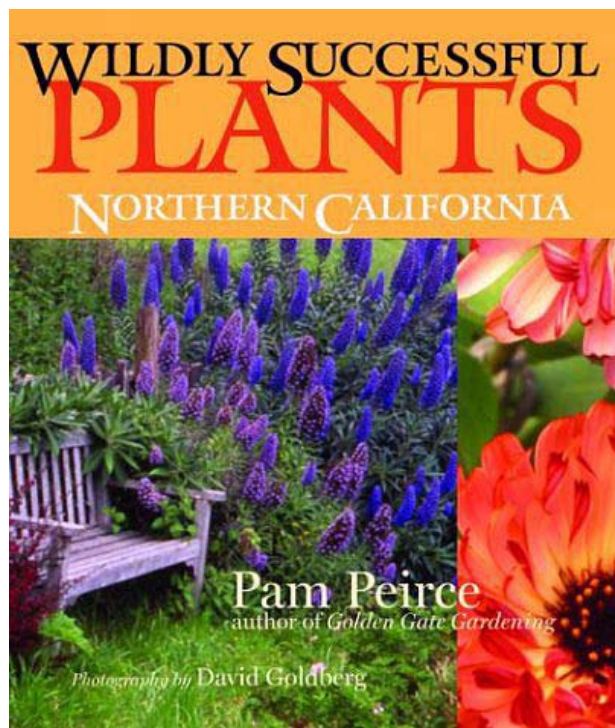
Calochortus venustus, UCSC Arboretum

Spring Garden Tour Sunday, May 16th

We have planned an outstanding day, with visits to several different kinds of gardens in the Santa Cruz area. We'll visit an astonishing private garden, enjoy a very special private tour at the UCSC Arboretum, check out the new propagation facilities and growing grounds at Cabrillo College, savor farm-pressed olive oil at a commercial lavender/olive farm, and end the day at a splendid nursery that produces a wide selection of interesting and unusual mediterranean plants, and has extensive and inspiring demonstration gardens. All this and a gourmet box lunch for \$45.

To register, send your check, made out payable to the MGS, to SueAnn Manners, 63 Davis Rd, Orinda, 94563, or for more info, call her at 925/254-0226. Space limited.

*see the calendar inside for
info about the MGS AGM!*



**WILDLY SUCCESSFUL PLANTS:
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA**
by Pam Peirce
Sasquatch Books, March 2004

Some plants have a poor reputation and are largely ignored by serious gardeners. Perhaps because we see them commonly growing in unremarkable gardens, surviving in spite of neglect in vacant lots and waste areas, thriving in our local climate conditions without any help from us. It may also be because they offer no horticultural challenges to overcome; they fail to inspire gasps from visitors in response to our skill in successfully cultivating rarity. But who cannot appreciate the sheer vitality of some plants, filling in otherwise ugly and desolate corners with their uplifting fecundity and hopeful promise!

These are the plants Pam Peirce has chronicled in *Wildly Successful Plants*, setting aside our common prejudices to look at these plants critically, examining both their faults and their assets, and helping us to understand the unique character of these survivors. While some may even be considered weeds where undesired, all are not without merit under appropriate circumstances. Who among us has not had a difficult garden situation that called for a true thug of a plant? And in proper combination, they can provide important backbones to a variety of planting schemes, requiring little in return for the abundance they provide.

Seán O'Hara

(*Eschscholzia californica* - from page 1)

CONTROL AND REMOVAL

California poppies can reseed rather prolifically in a site they like, and it is easy to overlook the tiny, narrow-leaved, gray-green seedlings, which sprout most of the year in watered areas. Deadheading will reduce seeding somewhat, but some seeds will certainly pop out of their long pods before you can remove them. People sometimes have to overcome residual nervousness about harming Our State Flower to pull out unwanted plants. Just remember that each tiny seedling will form a plant at least a foot in diameter, or as wide as 3 feet in a favorable location. Thin them to at least 8 inches apart. Use a trowel or shovel to remove full-grown plants that you don't want.

Because California poppies are a treasured native species, no attempt is made to avoid their spread from gardens. It is sobering to know, however, that California poppy grows wild in parts of France and is considered a potential problem weed in Hawaii, Alaska, and even in Tennessee.

VARIETIES AND SIMILAR SPECIES

Purchased seed of the orange-flowered species is most likely *Eschscholzia californica* subspecies *californica*, which you can identify by the forked seed leaves. Those of the subspecies *mexicana*, an annual plant that grows mainly in northern Mexico and Arizona, aren't forked. In the wild, the species is actually quite variable, including differences in plant size, leaf form, flower color, and width of the torus, the little red rim at the base of each flower. These variations have given plant breeders material from which to create many hybrids, including ones with white, apricot, red, pink, and burnt orange flowers, double flowers, and ones with fluted petals. Plants of hybrids are often more compact than those of the species, often only 10 to 12 inches tall.

The plants sold as *E. caespitosa* 'Sundew' are really *E. lobbii*, an annual poppy just 6 inches tall with small, pale yellow, scented flowers. It is quite useful with other small annuals.

THE NAME

The name *Eschscholzia californica* (esh-shol'-see-uh cal-ih-for'-nih-cuh) commemorates a friendship. A Russian ship visited San Francisco in October 1816 with a team of naturalists aboard. When botanist and poet Adalbert von Chamisso went plant collecting in the Presidio with his friend, Johann von Eschscholtz, the ship's surgeon, among the plants they found was a very late-blooming California poppy. Chamisso named it *Eschscholzia* after his friend (dropping the "t" in his name). Later, Eschscholtz returned the honor by naming a blue-flowered lupine collected on the trip *Lupinus chamissonis*.

CAN YOU PICK A POPPY?

It is a common belief that there is a California law against picking California poppies, but the only relevant law on the books says it's illegal to pick any plant (that is not a noxious weed) on roadsides, in public parks, or on private property without permission of the owner. In your own garden, you are the boss.

[Author's note: while the excerpt chosen for this newsletter is a California native, most of the plants in *Wildly Successful Plants* are not native plants.]

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April - June, San Francisco

CALIFORNIA MONOCOTS – an exhibit of pen and ink drawings and watercolors of California native bulbs and grasses by Kristin Jakob, Daily except major holidays, 10 am to 4 pm, Helen Crocker Russell Library, Strybing Arboretum & Botanical Gardens, 415/661-1316 x303.

May 2nd (Sunday), 1:00-4:00pm, Berkeley

ELEGANT DRYLAND SALVIAS FROM AFRICA & CALIFORNIA - Booksigning and Lecture with Betsy Clebsch - prepare to be dazzled by the many beautiful and aromatic Salvia from Africa and California which are ideal for Bay Area gardens. Event includes a booksigning of the updated edition of her book, *New Book Of Salvias: Sages for Every Garden*, and a plant sale! Fee \$45 (registration required). UC Botanical Garden, 200 Centennial Drive, Berkeley, 510/643-2755, botanicalgarden.berkeley.edu.

May 11th (Tuesday), 10am-4pm, San Francisco

WILDLY SUCCESSFUL PLANTS: NORTHERN CALIFORNIA – lecture and booksigning with Pam Peirce (see article excerpted from this book in this newsletter issue). Fee \$15 (registration required). Strybing Arboretum Society/Strybing Arboretum & Botanical Gardens, Ninth Avenue at Lincoln Way, San Francisco, 415/661-1316 x354, www.strybing.org

May 16th (Sunday), Santa Cruz *

SPRING GARDEN TOUR – (see box on front cover)

May 27th (Thursday), 1:00pm, Orinda

OUR MEDITERRANEAN CLIMATE: WHAT DOES IT MEAN AND WHY SHOULD WE CARE? – a slide presentation by Seán O'Hara, outlining the unique climate we enjoy in the Bay Area, its challenges and advantages, and its impact upon our lifestyle as well as our gardening style; Orinda Garden Club, Orinda Library Auditorium, 24 Orinda Way, Orinda. For more information, contact Jean Finch, 510/482-5884, jeanfinch@comcast.net.

* MGS sponsored event

Oct 20th-24th, Corfu, Greece *

MGS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The tenth Annual General Meeting of the MGS will be held at the Achilleion in Corfu (see back page photo) on Saturday, October 23rd, 2004. During the meeting elections will be held for MGS officers, the details of which can be found in the July issue of *The Mediterranean Garden*.



PROGRAM OF EVENTS

On the Wednesday evening (10/20) a welcoming reception will be held at the Ionian Academy. This charming building, dating from 1808, has been the home of the Ionian Academy since 1824; its distinguished past includes a period during which it served as the first university in modern Greece. A short recital of

classical music, kindly offered by the Ionian University Department of Music, will be followed by wine and canapés.

Thursday & Friday (10/21-22) a program of visits to gardens and estates has been arranged, accompanied by a series of brief talks. On Friday evening members will have the opportunity to see an exhibition at the Corfu Art Gallery of botanical paintings by Lady Marjorie Holmes, who was awarded an RHS gold medal for her work in 2002. There will be drinks, canapés and live music.

Following the AGM on Saturday, we shall visit the palace of Mon Repos, built next to the ancient site of Palaeopolis with its Doric temple

Betsy Clebsch, MGS member and author of *The New Book of Salvias: Sages for Every Garden*, was the featured speaker of our Feb. 29th meeting at the UC Botanical Garden at Berkeley. As part of her talk, she had prepared a handout of suggested Salvias for mediterranean climate gardens – we reproduce that list here for those who were unable to attend this informative event:

Salvia africana-lutea
S. apiana 'Vicki Romo'
S. chamelaeagnea
S. leucophylla
S. confertiflora
S. 'Anthony Parker'
S. mellifera 'Terra Seca', 'Mrs Beard', 'Shirley's Creeper'
S. lanceolata
S. 'Waverly'
S. barrelieri
S. chamaedryoides 'Marine Blue'
S. cacaliifolia
S. clevelandii
S. spathacea 'Kawatze', 'Powerline Pink'
S. microphylla 'Rosita', 'Forever Red', 'Desert Blaze', 'San Carlos Festival'
S. greggii 'Alba', 'Plum Wine', 'Moonlight', 'Desert Pastel', 'Cherry Queen'
S. sonomensis 'Dara's Choice', 'Hanging Valley', 'Tilden Bot Garden', 'John Farmar Bowers'
S. nemorosa 'Mainacht', 'Schneehugel'
S. 'Bee's Bliss'
S. tingitana
S. sclarea

and Roman remains.

An optional day of events on Sunday (10/24) is planned. You may choose to participate in one of the following:

- ~ a nature walk
- ~ a mushroom search
- ~ a herbs/wild vegetable group.

REGISTRATION AND BOOKING

If you wish to attend the AGM and take part in what promises to be a delightful program, either contact Vina Michaelidou (PO Box 14, GR-19002 Peania, Greece, e-mail: v1318@otenet.gr) for a registration form and information.

Note that the registration fee of €30 (\$36us) plus the 1st installment of payment must be received by May 31st. The 2nd installment must be received by July 31st.



The 10th Annual General Meeting of the MGS will be held in **Corfu, Greece**, from October 20th – 23rd, 2004. The formal membership meeting will take place at the Achilleion Palace (the spectacular view from the garden terrace shown above) on Saturday, 23rd October. See the **Event calendar** inside for more info!

We invite you to join the Mediterranean Garden Society to learn more about gardening in our unique and desirable climate. Memberships are for the calendar year (Jan-Dec), and all members receive the Society journal, *The Mediterranean Garden*, which contains articles written by members worldwide.

If you join mid-year, you will receive all journal issues for that year.

Annual membership is ~~\$35~~

Life membership is ~~\$350~~

Send your personal check or credit card information to:

The MGS Secretary
Sparoza, P.O.Box 14
GR-190 02 Peania, GREECE

(International letter postage is ~~80€~~)

tel/fax: (30 1) 664 3089

email: bd@hol.gr

Payment of dues for the Mediterranean Garden Society includes you in this Branch if your address is within our range or if you specify branch inclusion directly on the membership form. You can join at any of our events or send your application separately. For a membership form, contact Sue Ann Manners, (925) 254-0226, or visit the MGS web site:

www.MediterraneanGardenSociety.org

This newsletter is produced in FALL, WINTER, & SPRING (dormant in SUMMER) to announce the events and news of the Northern California Branch of the MGS
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California poppy,
Eschscholzia californica
- see front page

Don't Forget to Renew Your Membership for 2004!