







Can bananas grow in Sacramento?

BY **DEBBIE ARRINGTON**



Set for Saturday at Fair Oaks Horticulture Center,

Harvest Day is a chance to pick up a cornucopia of gardening know-how. Typically attracting about 2,000 patrons, it's the Sacramento area's largest free educational gardening event and a showcase for master gardener expertise.

Popular speakers and pop-up demonstrations present hot topics in Sacramento gardening. (That includes beating the heat.) Scores of vendors offer unique wares, including artwork and succulent wreaths. Several local clubs and gardening experts will staff information tables. (That includes me—look for the Sacramento Digs Gardening banner, where I'll be giving away recipe cards.)

Food trucks will feed the crowd, who also can taste fresh-picked grapes and perhaps sample other crops. It depends on what's ripe.

This year, the focus is on award-winning All-America Selection vegetables, including eggplant and okra, plus new herbs for Asian cooking and summer cilantro.

"We have six different colors of tomatoes plus 15 different peppers—nine sweet, six chilies," said Judy McClure, coordinator for Sacramento County's master gardeners. "That includes a jalapeño that's not hot."

But you'll have to taste for yourself.

For 22 years, Sacramento County master gardeners have tried new varieties and new growing methods at their demonstration garden, which puts UC research to the test. Doubling as a wild-life habitat, the garden uses only integrated pest management, controlling problems and fertilizing plants with as few chemicals as possible.

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An often perplexing crop, grapes are a popular Harvest Day staple. Two morning mini-seminars are devoted to home vineyard care. "We should have 12 varieties of grapes available for tasting," McClure said. "We found out this year: Flame Seedless grows a good raisin grape."

There will also be plants for sale. "We have early-, mid- and late-ripening varieties," she said.

It isn't just people who like grapes; birds and critters do as well, and outsmarting them can be a challenge. "We did a lot of bagging and netting," McClure said. "It's quite a sight to see all these little organza bags hanging on the vines."

In addition to the vineyard, the horticulture center has its own little orchard of dwarf fruit trees, including some grown in containers.

"One fun new thing: We have a banana tree," McClure said. "It's part of our new tropical fruit hut. And the best thing: We have sex in the garden. We're trying to get the male and female kiwi vines to flower at the same time."

Under the shade of a giant tent with plentiful seating, three featured speakers will address popular topics. At 8:30 a.m., American River College's Debbie Flower will share tips on water-wise container gardening. At 9:45 a.m., compost expert Kevin Marini will tell how to know when your soil and plants need fertilizing. And at II a.m., landscape horticulturist Pam Bone will get to the root of many tree and shrub issues—root problems.

"Because they're underground, those are problems you can't see," McClure noted.

Unless you're at Harvest Day.



EVENT DETAILS

Harvest Day

8 a.m.-2 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 3, Fair Oaks Horticulture Center, 11549 Fair Oaks Blvd. Free admission and parking Details and event schedule: sacmg.ucanr.edu/ Harvest Day

Debbie Arrington, an award-winning garden writer and lifelong gardener, is co-creator of the Sacramento Digs Gardening blog and website.