

Our monthly meeting in December was a celebration of the season as we came together for our Annual Holiday Party, held for the first time at the Canoga Park Women's Club, and attended by members as well as a large number of guests from the west San Fernando Valley.

After people had a chance to mingle and sample the tasty goodies brought in by members, SCHS president Steve Gerischer introduced guest speaker Jo O'Connell, owner of Australian Native Plants in Casitas Springs in the Ojai Valley. As a survivor of the 2017 Thomas Fire, she provided a thought-provoking presentation about Australian plants in general, with a specific focus on planting recommendations for fire prone areas.

Jo's nursery has been in business since the early 1990s, and is open by appointment. She lost her home in the fire, and has been rebuilding it and the business during the last year. Jo spoke about some of her favorite and tough specimens to try in our changing climate - selected for their flowers, attractive qualities, cold and dry tolerances, as well as fire resistance and/or ability to regenerate.

Landscaping with fire resistant trees and plants, coupled with diligent maintenance, were criteria Jo cited to help mitigate potential fire damage to both plants and structures in high risk areas. She defined "fire resistant" plants as those that can absorb more heat from an approaching fire without burning and consequently slow a fire down. Fire resistant trees can also help trap embers and slow down the danger to structures from approaching winds.

Her maintenance recommendations included removing lower branches from trees, keeping any branches off and away from the roofs of structures, pruning and keeping plants well-irrigated ahead of and during the fire season. Suggestions for design elements that could help make home landscapes more fire resistant, were: planting a well-watered hedge on the fire

and noted which ones appeared to be recovering the best. *Cassia brewsteri* was the first to regenerate, and both *Banksia integrifolia* and *Brachychiton acerifolius* came back strong. She also mentioned that *Tristaniopsis laurina* was a great "indicator" tree for knowing when your garden needs watering. Plants that burned to the ground but regenerated were: *Calothamnus* 'Little



Photo courtesy of speaker.

Lion', *Erimophylla decipiens*, *Melaleuca hypericifolia* and the *Lomandras*, which she claims can withstand just about any extreme weather conditions. Jo also shared that many of the plants featured in her presentation would be incorporated in the rebuilding of her

prone side of a structure, replacing lawns with organic mulches, DG or gravel to slow down fires, and using swales to retain moisture. She even suggested we test plants for fire resistance by tossing a handful of their leaves into a barbeque to see how long they take to burn.

Jo then listed many of the "survivors" that made it through the fires or bounced back soon thereafter, as well as others with similar attributes that might be good options to plant for a fire resistant garden. Genera she recommended to use for hedges, foundation shrubs and cut flowers included *Grevillea*, *Eremophilas*, *Xanthorrhoea*, *Scaevola*, and various species within the *Acacia* and *Hakea* families. *A. longifolia*, *A. elata*, *A. visiglia*, *H. hakeoides*, *H. trineura* and *H. denticulosa* 'Stinking Roger' were some Jo considered to be good candidates to survive both fires and drought conditions.

During 2018, Jo observed the regrowth of trees and shrubs on her property

home, which will be set in a dry rainforest landscape with "screens" planted 20' away from all structures.

Following a question and answer session with Jo, all in attendance were encouraged to peruse the plants she brought along for sale and to browse the "Give Away" table, which quickly emptied after a countdown by Steve Gerischer. With a great speaker, food, drink, plants and freebies, the evening's program had something to send everyone home to a great start for their holiday season.

🌿 Sabine Steinmetz

Downloadable PDF copy of entire presentation can be found at:

[https://socalhort.org/resources/Documents/Australian%20Native%20Plants%20for%20Fire%20Resistance%2012\\_07\\_18.pdf](https://socalhort.org/resources/Documents/Australian%20Native%20Plants%20for%20Fire%20Resistance%2012_07_18.pdf)

## SHARING SECRETS

Last month our question was:

*What kinds of gardening plans have you made for the New Year?*

We received a great selection of replies - some of which came from guests!



Finish my Japanese garden, and plant more natives on my hillside.

- Janet

Turn the garden into a British Tavern/ Nautical theme with plants that reflect the islands and Great Britain.

- Shawn Lochridge

I plan to change out some plants that were seriously damaged in the two heat waves of late spring and early summer. (Probably some of my favorite roses will hit the trash can!) The California natives, Australian plants and some South African plants breezed through the heat showing almost no distress.

Guess I know what to plant.

- Anonymous #1

Stop growing *Lavandulas* (too short-lived); plant more *Aloe* varieties; do more fuel reduction pruning!

- John Schoustra

Plant lots of wildflower seeds!

- Carol A.

Guerrilla Gardening at my job at DCT H2O Reclamation Plant using natives and Mediterranean plants, plus flowers for the hummingbirds, butterflies and bees!

- Sanitation Fairy

I double-checked with County Ag extension, and our citrus fruit are not under quarantine yet, as the disease itself hasn't been detected here in Burbank. Therefore, as a precaution, I'm making foods with my citrus to give away. I made preserved lemons as Christmas presents for my cooking friends and will do more in January, plus maybe some lemon-ginger preserves.

Also, I'll continue filling in blank spaces in my garden with California natives. Those from the TPF autumn sale are in the ground and loving it thanks to recent rains.

- Anonymous #2