



## UC MASTER GARDENER DIRECTOR PAM GEISEL RETIRES

*By Pamela Kan-Rice*

Shortly after Pamela Geisel joined the University of California Cooperative Extension as an environmental Horticulture advisor in 1981, she started a Master Gardener Program in Fresno County. UC had launched the new gardening program in Sacramento and Riverside counties the previous year. In 2006, Geisel became director of the UC Statewide Master Gardener Program and expanded its reach from serving home gardeners in 24 counties to 45 counties in California by the time she retired in June.

"Pam helped the Master Gardener Program grow into a fabulous organization," said Beth Teviotdale, who had been an active master gardener volunteer in Fresno County since retiring from UC Cooperative Extension in 2004.

"It's a whole new order of magnitude from where it was to where it's headed. Pam's vision and energy and ideas really made this happen."

UC Cooperative Extension now has 5,600 master gardener volunteers. In exchange for the training and materials they received from the university, master gardeners volunteer to share their home horticulture and pest management knowledge with the public. Over the past year, the volunteers contributed a total of 326,521 hours, giving gardening advice through workshops, websites, newspaper columns and over the phone.

Geisel, a Bay Area native moved to Fresno to attend Fresno State University, she earned bachelor's and master's degrees, both in plant science. "Since it was an ag school, I just sort of fell into the plant sciences and, specifically, entomology," she said.



In 1981, Geisel began her 32-year career with UC as a UC Cooperative Extension advisor in Fresno County. She wrote a weekly gardening column "Growing Things," which was published in the Fresno Bee, and hosted a weekly gardening show on Fresno's PBS channel. In 1993, she leased an acre of land from the City of Fresno for the master gardeners to develop Garden of the Sun.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## NEW MASTER GARDENING CLASS IN GLENN COUNTY

The Glenn County Master Gardener Program has announced a new class for aspiring Master Gardeners to be held from January 15 through May 19, 2014. This class leads to certification as a Master Gardener through University of California Extension.

The class will be held in Orland on Wednesday afternoons from 1:00 – 5:00 p.m. Instructors for the class will include experts from U.C. on a range of topics from I.P.M. (Integrated Pest Management) to vegetable gardening, backyard orchards, entomology, plant propagation, diagnosing plant problems, soils and fertilizers, and water management.

The goal of the Master Gardening Program is to provide research-based information about home horticulture to the general public. Master Gardeners are required to participate in volunteer work for the community and build on their knowledge through continuing education hours. Master Gardening projects include workshops, developing community gardens, operating a hotline, and offering horticulture information through plant clinics, county fairs, farmers' markets, and a newsletter.

Orientation sessions to provide more information about the class will be held later in 2013 at times to be announced. If you are interested in attending an orientation session or already know you would like to enroll in the class, you can call the University of California Extension Office in Orland, 530-865-1110, to sign up for the program, or look to the Glenn County Master Gardener web site at [ucanr.edu/sites/glennmg/](http://ucanr.edu/sites/glennmg/) for further bulletins.



# GROWING PEACH TREES IN A BACKYARD FIT FOR RICE

By Bob Scoville, Glenn County Master Gardener

Just the other day I overheard a conversation in which an old-timer remarked that one of the reasons the Willows area is so good for rice farming is the clay soil that helps keep water above ground. This makes perfect sense to me. The soil in my backyard, a bare mile from the nearest rice fields, can be described as rocks suspended in clay. The large cracks in the ground during the summer months do not suggest good tilth<sup>1</sup> for gardening. The Master Gardener Handbook calls it “Montmorillonite clay. (This) type, commonly found in California . . . swells greatly when wetted and shrinks when dry, leaving wide cracks.”<sup>2</sup> Yep, that’s it.

My first thought when hearing the old timer’s comment was, “Why not put some berms next to the fence and grow rice in my backyard? However, second and third thoughts prevailed. (Not wanting to add to the burden of the mosquito to control district, for instance.)

Then I thought of planting a small orchard. As a Master Gardening student, I had won a book titled The Home Orchard<sup>3</sup> co-written by Glenn County’s own Pam Geisel. She had inscribed wishes “that your orchard be productive.” At the time I kept my mouth shut. I didn’t tell her that my “orchard” -- which had come with the property -- consisted of one very old and sick apricot tree and one mandarin bush with larger thorns than fruit.

A backyard orchard seemed a fine idea the more I considered it. I already had two important resources for starting the project: a good reference (Pam’s book) and access to the University of California ANR (Agricultural and Natural Resources) website,<sup>4</sup> which has everything you want to know about horticulture in California. Other Master Gardeners were also available with their valuable experience.

Deciding to have a small orchard was only the first of numerous choices that had to be made. I needed to choose the variety of fruit or nut, a site for planting, spacing of the trees, possible soil amendments, and means of irrigation. The choice of variety ended up being easy. Serendipitously, Glenn County Master Gardeners held a pruning workshop in March of 2013 at which bare-root peach trees were given away as a sort of door prize. I love peaches. These were ‘Fay Elberta’ and ‘Carnival’ peach trees on ‘Nemaguard’ rootstock. Several trees were left over at the end of the workshop, and I ended up with four – one ‘Fay Elberta’ and three ‘Carnival’. Carefully moisturized, wrapped, and shaded in the back of my truck, I carried them home. This was going to be the start of my backyard orchard. The site for these trees was also an easy choice. The Home Orchard (p. 40) recommends: “Plant your new fruit trees where they will receive full sun for 6 to 8 or more hours per day during the growing season.”

I know of few outdoor sites in Willows that don’t satisfy this requirement. My back yard is not one of them. I decided to put the trees in a row on the south side of the yard near a faucet which was going to be the source of my irrigation system.



**The 'Fay Elberta' at four months. Note the open center design that resulted from heading the tree at knee level immediately after planting. This will allow more sun in the tree's center and help keep the eventual fruit within reach.**

I then needed to decide how far apart I wanted to plant the trees. I am planning to keep the trees relatively short (about 6 - 7 feet) for ease in picking the fruit. According to the Master Gardener Handbook (p. 459) an eight foot peach tree will have a mature canopy spread of 18 feet. This is partly dependent, of course, on pruning decisions. I decided to place my trees fourteen feet apart, giving the trees plenty of canopy space when they are about 6 feet tall. These trees will be pruned to an open center system. Adjustments can be made while pruning. The important thing to keep in mind in planning a site (and in pruning decisions), is that the leaves must get plenty of sun. A peach tree is solar powered.

The next consideration was soil. The ground had (or I hoped it had) all the minerals the trees needed. The problem was it came in the form of clay clods (technically, the composition of soil is measured in units of pedons or “peds”. Not clods.).<sup>5</sup> *(Continued on page 3).*

1. Tilth is the physical condition of the soil. “Garden soil in good physical condition (good tilth) can hold and provide adequate quantities of nutrients, water and air to plant roots. It will also drain well when large quantities of water are applied and will be easy to work without becoming sticky when wet and crusted when dry.” Master Gardener Handbook, University of California, ANR Publications #3382, 2009, p. 35.

2. *Ibid.*

3. University of California, ANR Publication #3485, 2007.

4. Links to this website, to the California Garden Web, and to the California Backyard Orchard site are available on the Glenn County Master Gardening home page, or through your search engine.

5. Singer, Michael J., and Munns, Donald N., *Soils, An Introduction*. Prentice Hall, 1999.



## GROWING PEACH TREES *(Continued from page 2)*

As I mentioned, the tilth of my soil is poor. The Home Orchard (p. 40) reports, "Many home gardens have soil that is loose and well drained. Many others, however, have less-than-ideal soil conditions for drainage and root growth, including heavy clay soil . . ." Clearly, Pam Geisel or one of her co-authors had been to my neighborhood.

There are strategies for easing soil problems when planting your trees, and I tried a few. First, I dug a big, deep hole, about two feet deep and three feet wide. (The roots on the bare-root trees varied in size, but were mostly about six inches long.) I filled this hole with a mixture of relatively good, loose soil from an old vegetable garden on the property, some store-bought "garden soil," and some of the broken up clay. My plan was to set up the hole so that the roots would gradually transition, as they got older, from a soil with good tilth to the more difficult environment of my original ground. By the time the roots hit the edges of their hole, they would be rambunctious teen-age roots, ready for anything. Right now they were just wimpy baby roots, who needed some encouragement to explore and grow. I also wanted to avoid the picture I had in my head of mistakenly planting the trees in large, underground clay pots.

Another strategy is to plant the trees in a mound – planting them "high". It has several advantages. For one, the trees will better avoid crown root disease. Downward sloping soil will prevent water from accumulating near the trunk. Home Orchard (p.41) notes that planting trees deep in the ground is not an advantage. "Tree anchorage is not improved by deep planting, but from subsequent root growth." I needed to be careful because the book says "it is best to leave the soil directly below the root system undisturbed to help prevent the tree from settling; this undisturbed soil is sometimes referred to as a pedestal." (ibid.) Since I had dug my hole deeper than required by the size of the bare root, I was careful to back fill the center of the hole with firm soil. I also kept an eye on the height of the tree and mound as I watered the area.

Before putting the trees in their new homes, I examined the roots. Home Orchard (p.41) recommended cutting off any that are broken or kinked, but to avoid shortening excessively long roots. I ended up not cutting any roots at all. However, I straightened out overlapping roots with my fingers before placing the trees in their holes and backfilling to make a mound. One tree seemed a little low, so I pulled it up to the desired height and used a trowel to fill below. I continued to fill and lightly tamp until all the trees were in their new homes. At this point, they looked as if I had stuck some sticks in the ground.

Since my goal was relatively short trees with an open center design, it was important now to "head" (cut) the bare root stock at about knee level (18 to 24 inches).

"By heading the newly planted bare root tree at knee height, you can force the tree to develop low branches," says Home Orchard (p.42). This was also the time, if needed, to remove any spindly or broken lateral branches that may have started. I did not have this problem.

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(to be continued)



## PAM GEISEL *(Continued from page one)*

"It was a vacant lot," Teviotdale said. "They got rid of the trash and made a jewel of a demonstration garden." For the past 20 years, the master gardener volunteers have maintained Garden of the Sun and continue to use it to teach classes. The garden includes a variety of distinct sections, such as a 75-variety tomato garden, a children's garden, an All American Selections demonstration garden, turf grass, fruit trees, a perennial garden, a garden for the disabled and a covered outdoor classroom facility. In 2002, Geisel received an award for outstanding achievement from the Friends of Extension for projects she conducted in Fresno County.

Master gardener programs in each county had operated independently. When Geisel was appointed in 2006, she began to create a statewide structure with a unified identity. She brought continuity to the program by standardizing the training. She developed a statewide website with resources for the master gardeners. With the help of UC Agriculture and Natural Resources programmers, she created an online volunteer management system so each county can keep track of volunteer hours and the master gardeners can sign up for events, manage projects, hold online discussions and store documents and photos.

She was contributor to the ANR bestseller "California Master Gardener Handbook", co-author of "The Home Orchard", Technical Advisor the Sunset Magazine's "Western Garden Book", and has published 50 peer-reviewed articles and dozens of leaflets related to gardening. For the past two years, she also served as interim director for UCCE in Glenn County. She has been granted emeritus status by UC leadership and intends to continue to serve Glenn County residents as a master gardener volunteer.

*On every stem, on every leaf,... and at the root of everything that grew, was a professional specialist in the shape of grub, caterpillar, aphid, or other expert, whose business it was to devour that particular part.* ~Oliver Wendell Holmes



## NEW PLANT CLINIC SERVICE OFFERED

Are the leaves on your apricot tree yellow and wilting? Does your bougainvillea need more light? How much water do your plants require? The answers to these and many more questions are now offered by Glenn County Master Gardeners at a new Plant Clinic at the U.C. Extension Office, 821 E. South Street (the courthouse building), in Orland. The clinic will be held on Wednesdays from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. During these hours, a representative from the Glenn County Master Gardener Program will be available to answer your questions regarding home gardens, indoor plants, or pest management. Phone inquiries are also welcome at 865-1110, and email questions can be sent any time to [MGGlenn@ucdavis.edu](mailto:MGGlenn@ucdavis.edu).

The Glenn County Master Gardening Program is a partnership between the University of California and horticulturists in Glenn County. Members of the Master Gardening Program are trained to provide research-based information from the university to horticulturists in the community. The Master Gardening Program is administered through U.C. Cooperative Extension, the principle outreach and public service arm of the University's Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Members of the Glenn County Master Gardening Program are certified after completing a sixteen week class through U.C. Extension. They also bring a variety of specialized knowledge to the program. Anyone interested in becoming a Glenn County Master Gardener can call 865-1110 for information on the next class, which will be starting in January, 2016.

For more information contact:  
(UCCE, Glenn County) and the Glenn MG web site;  
<http://ucanr.org/sites/glennmg/> and email address:  
[mglenn@ucdavis.edu](mailto:mglenn@ucdavis.edu)

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Celebrating Pam Geisel's retirement with friends and family

## GLENN COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS PRESENT "MILLIE" TO PAM GEISEL

Glenn County Master Gardeners present a homemade scarecrow, "Millie", to Pam Geisel at the party to celebrate her retirement as Director of the UC Statewide Master Gardener Program and 32 years working for University of California Cooperative Extension.

Over a hundred friends, co-workers, and family joined Pam for dinner and dancing at her home in Old Mills Orchard on June 29.



Guests enjoyed barrel-cooked ribs, chicken and side dishes prepared by hard-working Glenn County Master Gardeners. The group also prepared flower table decorations. Dinner and decorations on a typically warm valley evening were much appreciated by all who attended.

The scarecrow was the creation of Glenn County Master Gardeners Greg Overton, who welded the framework, Barbara Overton, Glenda Babbitt, Joan Cronk, Kristine Green, Amy Watson, Alan Carrier and Sue Stone, who painted and decorated her. Other Glenn County master gardeners contributed garden-related presents for Pam in a basket that Millie held in her work shirt-covered, metallic arms.

*Gardening is learning, learning, learning. That's the fun of them. You're always learning. .... Jelen Mirren*