



Gardening Insights

April - June 2012

Yard art for critters?

My friend and arborist, Juan Barba, came by this week with a trailer load of tree trimmings to add to the piles I maintain for wildlife habitat and erosion control. As I randomly stacked the material, I pondered more artistic options that would still please the quail, woodpeckers, ground squirrels, and fat black lizards that enjoy my mounds.

I looked around and found interesting creations by artists Andy Goldsworthy and Patrick Doherty and yet another at a ranch south of Green Valley. Goldsworthy's stacked oak piece (right) is large and dramatic but it was done without fasteners and is unstable. Something similar, using big limbs secured to a firm central core, would invite all sorts of creatures to explore its nooks and crannies without being a hazard. Wood of this dimension is easy to get after monsoon storms uproot mature trees.

Patrick Doherty weaves delightful twig structures (above left) for human exploration, but small birds must love the tangled masses too. While much of our local material is too spiny for this kind of work, I imagine a twig pile on a decorative raised platform would be very well used for nesting and cover. Getting it off the ground would keep packrats and snakes from making it home.

Corral fences (above right) are handsome structures typically constructed of large and medium branches to withstand the abuse of rowdy livestock. They make great lizard and native bee habitat. A somewhat less robust fence could be made in the same fashion with brush. At, say, 15 to 18 inches wide and 5 feet tall, they'd provide cover and nesting places for birds while creating effective barriers and screens. It would be fun to incorporate dramatic zigzags or snaky curves.

I can think of all sorts of possibilities for making branches into wildlife habitat/art and most would require little more than a pair of pliers and a roll of bailing wire. But even if you're not inspired to turn your yard trimmings into art, it's worth stacking some of them for the creatures who share your spaces. Put bigger branches down first and smaller stuff on top, leaving openings within and refresh the stack yearly as the materials decay and settle. Keep piles well away from structures in case of fire but near vegetation so animals have cover as they come and go.



Photo: Jonty Wilde



2012 Open Studio Tour - April 14 and 15!

Next Saturday and Sunday is the spring Tucson Artists' Open Studio Tour. Hundreds of local artists will have their studios open to the public those days from 11 am to 5 pm. My studio, at **4200 N. Oxbow Road**, is one of them and I'll have bee habitats, benches and tables and other practical art for sale. I will be joined here by several friends whose work is described below. Please come by to say hello and meet these great local artists.

Terry Bendt - turns molten glass into beads and strings them into glistening necklaces, earrings and more.

Stephen Buchmann - is an internationally recognized bee expert, who also creates fascinating bronze sculptures and black and white photography.

Deirdre Calhoun - crochets and strings beads and other items into bracelets, necklaces and other wearable art.

Scott Calhoun - is an award-winning garden writer. He'll be here with his books, including recent releases on container gardening and cacti.

Sharon Eaker - turns found objects and thrift store finds into charming succulent planters.

Susan Fehlow - uses recycled wool to make expertly crafted and beautiful hooked rugs that will last for generations.

Raj Helweg - makes sleek-lined modern furniture from recycled steel, wood, and bike parts.

Miriam Otte - dyes, silk screens, prints and stitches fabric into lovely collages.

Curt Pradelt - photographs landscapes and natural elements in black and white with

Amanda Quinby - gilds panels and other objects to give them a rich metallic luster

Kay Richter - works in black and white photography and newly in bronze sculptures. She does both realistic and abstract photography.

Dwight Shogren - creates functional items from wood using his well-honed cabinetry skills.



Sonoran IX

Tucson Cactus and Succulent Society is holding its ninth bi-annual conference on **April 28th and 29th**. The event includes a cactus and succulent show with amazing specimens from private collections, plant sales and vendors with books, pottery and art. I will be there with bee habitat sculptures. The location is near I-10 and St. Mary's Road. It's easy to find and there's ample parking.

The show and sales area is **open to the public and free of charge**. There is a charge for the workshops and speakers portion of the event. The sales area is open Saturday from 8 am to 5 pm and Sunday from 8 am to 1:30 pm. The plant show runs a bit longer each day. Details are available at: **www.tucsoncactus.org**

TCSS Sonoran IX
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Another muffin recipe

I know I did a muffin recipe recently, but those muffins were the hearty, manly kind that you down with a half gallon of coffee before heading out to chop a couple cords of firewood. The recipe below is from the opposite end of the muffin spectrum, a very light, even dainty morsel that you could serve on the good china to delicate visitors. The recipe came from a friend of ours in Virginia many years ago. She can't remember its origin, but suspects it is old enough to be in the public domain. My wife Susan has made a few alterations and asserts that freshly grated nutmeg is the key to success with the recipe.

Nutmeg Muffins (Yields 24 regular sized muffins)

Ingredients:

2 cups unbleached white flour

1 & 1/4 cups brown sugar

3/4 cup cold butter

1 cup whole wheat flour

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

2 teaspoon baking powder

2 teaspoon nutmeg - freshly grated

2 eggs

1 cup buttermilk

Directions:

1. Set oven to 350 degrees (F).
2. Put the first 3 ingredients in a medium bowl and cut in together until the mixture resembles cornmeal. Measure out and set aside a loose, generous cup of the mixture for use as a topping.
3. Add the next 5 ingredients to the bowl and stir to blend.
4. In a separate small bowl, slightly hand beat eggs and mix in buttermilk. Pour over the dry mixture and stir just until moistened.
5. Spoon batter into paper-lined or well greased muffin cups - 1/2 to 2/3 full.
6. Spoon a bit of topping over each muffin - just divide it among the muffins.
7. Bake about 18 minutes, just until toothpick comes out clean - guard against over baking as they dry out easily. These muffins are best eaten right out of the oven or within a day.

GARDENING INSIGHTS - "WHERE ART MEETS ECOLOGY"

Our LEAF* design philosophy and practices include:

- * Local plants, materials, art, and architecture
- * Eco-friendly ways to save water, avoid chemicals, and encourage wildlife
- * Artistic, inspiring, and creative uses of plants, sculpture, and other outdoor elements
- * Functional design for spaces that are easy to live in and easy to maintain

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