

# Over the Garden Fence

## (Finding Answers for Garden Questions)

*By Brian David (UC Master Gardener, Mariposa)*

In Mariposa we can access answers to gardening questions through the University of California's Master Gardener Helpline. Belinda Gilbert and Diane Timmins, UC Master Gardener Helpline volunteers, explain the helpline process.

**What is the purpose of the U.C. Master Gardener's Helpline?** We receive calls from people wanting help identifying insects or plants. Sometimes people bring in samples, others email us with photographs. The helpline's purpose is to educate home gardeners. We help people solve garden problems and answer their gardening questions with research based answers. We serve Mariposa County, but we take calls from other areas and give referrals.

**How does the helpline operate?** There is no fee for the Master Gardener's Helpline. Memberships and fundraisers support the helpline service. We are all volunteers with university based training in botany and entomology; we always refer to University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR) for researched factual information, rather than our opinions. We have access to experts throughout the University of California system.

**Who calls in?** Equal amounts of men and women call. Many people in this area live on several acres. Questions are not just flower or vegetable garden questions from around their house. It could be trees and other things people find around their property. We don't discriminate we take any gardening questions. We take calls from all the elevations throughout Mariposa County from Cathey's Valley to El Portal; Fish Camp to Greeley Hill, so we have to research information specific for each unique locality.

**What type of questions do you get?** When we summarized our questions over the past few years the most common questions we had were, "what is this plant?" Then (people) wanting to know, "what kind of insect is this?" Does the insect cause problems for humans or trees? Many people wanted to know if they had *pine tree bores*. One year we had *gall wasps* living in oak trees, thousands of the little pink crystalline balls (they looked like tiny puffs of cotton candy) were showing up in oak trees. People were really concerned. Two years ago it was drought questions; "what can we plant that does not require much water?" Last year it was the *red hump caterpillar* questions; they seemed to be eating everything in town. There are cycles in what we hear about. We are now researching diseased oleanders. If it is an issue we are not familiar with we let people know we will be calling them back after we do the research.

**What is the most typical question?** In 2017 we answered one hundred fifty different gardening questions. Many folks want to know what and when to plant. People have lots of gardening questions on tomatoes like, "why did my tomatoes split?" or "Why aren't they producing now?" When the weather is too hot or too cold tomatoes will not produce.

**How can people contact you for gardening help?** This year we will be doing a UC Master Gardener outreach at the Wednesday evening Mariposa Farmer's Market near the Creekside Garden. We will be able to provide UCANR quick notes to people on site. People can bring us pest and plant samples or just ask us their gardening questions. Otherwise, they can contact us at the UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) office in the AG Complex at the Mariposa County Fairgrounds. People can drop off samples at the UCCE office Monday - Friday (they are closed for lunch from 1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.), leave a message on our phone, (209) 966-7078 and/or email us at: [mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu](mailto:mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu).

Let the University of California Master Gardeners of Mariposa County help you with university-based research on gardening in our foothills. Our resources include our website at: [http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/Master\\_Gardener](http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardener), local newspaper and radio program spots, a Facebook page, and many excellent workshops.

The U.C. Master Gardener Helpline and Helpdesk are staffed:  
Tuesdays from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.  
Thursdays from 2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

**Master Gardener Office Location:**

UC Cooperative Extension Office  
5009 Fairgrounds Road  
Mariposa, CA 95338  
Helpline Phone: (209) 966-7078  
Office Phone: (209) 966-2417  
Email: [mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu](mailto:mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu)  
Website: [http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/Master\\_Gardener/](http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardener/)