# Lompoc Valley Botanic and Horticultural Society Newsletter

November 2026 | Volume 41 | Issue 5

## November Meeting

The ***Notorious Plant and Seed Exchange*** will be held at: **Stone Pine Hall,**
210 S H St, Lompoc, CA
**November 15th at 2pm**

This is an opportunity to share some of your plants and to bring home new ones!
After the business portion, we will have plant introductions and then start drawing tickets! First round, pick out one plant. The next ticket may be called before the previous person has selected their plant/item. Please arrive early, so that we can set up the plants and start the meeting at **2pm.**

## First Saturday Root & Route

We will be at the:

**Drought Tolerant Garden on November 7th from 10am-noon**

A significant amount of mulch was spread on Make a Difference Day but there is **OH-SO-MUCH** *more*.

Saturday morning - grab your pitchfork, garden rake, and wheelbarrow and head over to 1801 W. Central Ave!



*Hakea laurina*. Now in bloom!

## Falling in Love with Fall ~Linda Jay

Yea! Fall has arrived. My favorite time of year. A little cleanup before my plants and I go into hibernation. My books are stacked up and ready to be read, but first there is work to be done.

Get out that notebook, so you can keep track of ideas or new plans for next year's garden. Maybe even take a few pictures to help you remember what works for the design of your garden and what does not work.

I start first by removing poor performers. No mercy. If they did not enhance the garden on any level, they must leave. This will open the garden up to new possibilities. With that done, it is time to trim back some shrubs and trees a bit to allow the wind air to circulate, so there won't be excessive damage during storms. I save small soft leaves from shrubs and trees that have fallen. These will be worked into the soil to decay. My soil is sandy, so it benefits from mother nature's leaf blessings. I also use the old leaves as mulch when planting a new shrub. I put them in the bottom of a hole and a bit around the edges of the base.

## Falling Cont.



This seems to work well in my sandy soil in Vandenberg Village. Lastly, raking and picking up anything on the ground that looks ugly or cluttery needs to go. The bones of your garden should still be beautiful in the fall.

With all the rain that we are hoping to get this year, be sure you have checked for proper drainage in the yard. Clean and sharpen all your tools during this slow time. Now that it is cool, you can spend a bit of time in the shed reorganizing and thinning out some of those old tools you keep saving just because you may need it someday.

With this done, sit down with a cup of coffee, and enjoy the fall beauty. You can relax and look forward to spring.

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## Hiking the Burton Mesa Ecological Reserve

**~Tom Hofmann**

To understand your own village, sometimes you need to look through the eyes of a visitor. Two dozen people converged on the parking lot at Burton Mesa and Harris Grade. The consensus was light layers and sensible trail shoes as the marine layer melted away. I only recognized two other locals, and I would meet people from Paso Robles and Ojai. Why would people drive 100 miles for a 2-mile hike on a dusty trail?

The California Native Plant Society came to the Burton Mesa Ecological Reserve on September 19, 2026. Their goal: study our unique maritime chaparral. At least 50% has been lost in the last century, but this one remains the largest example in our state. Each version of maritime chaparral develops independently on thick sandy soil, so these hikers came to see our local endemics. As a bonus, we saw late-blooming plants and explored a different botanic regime on Harris Grade.



Non-native Torrey pines flourish, but lack the fire resilience of native pines

Bill Waycott from the CNPS-SLO chapter introduced himself and led the nature hike. David Kisner contributed information on the plants and animals sharing this land, and identified some bird calls as we walked. Local botanist Victor Garcia Balderas, an LVBHS member, presented data on the plants of our chaparral and scrub as we found samples.

# Hiking Cont.

The hike began in oak woodland, and our shoes kicked up dust. We gathered beneath a **coast live oak**, *Quercus agrifola*. In its shade we found mats of **phlox-leaved bedstraw**, *Galium andrewsii*, with tiny spiked leaves. From the branches hung strands of **lace lichen**, *Ramalina menziesii*. Our official state lichen resembles Spanish moss, a true plant growing in the southern US. Therefore, oak, the apex plant of our local community not only fosters plants that can't grow in the chaparral or scrub, but also provides food for grazers. We ventured south and the oaks thinned out—more shrubs could find light and grow. The land hasn't differentiated into chaparral or scrubland, so I think this must be disturbed property from Burton Ranch. These hikers had traveled distances to see our rare plants, but most of our hike was land that will soon be planted with 476 homes.



Burton Ranch created oak savannas with wider tree separation than oak woodlands

We found examples of our endemic chaparral plants, **Purisima**, *Arctostaphylus purissima*, and **shagbark**, *A. rudis*, **manzanitas**, and as I exclaimed to all within distance, the **Lompoc ceanothus**, *Ceanothus cuneatas var. fascicularis!* These woody shrubs have adapted so well to the poor sandy soil of the Mesa, cool summer breezes, and nighttime fog, that they won't grow 20 miles inland. Or 2 miles south in the alluvial lowlands, or two miles north in the Purisima Hills.

The landscape opened and encouraged softer shrubs from our coastal scrub, like black sage and sagebrush. Two shrubs were blooming: **coyote brush**, with male and female plants, and **mock heather** with sprays of dainty yellow flowers. These late-bloomers enable local pollinators to survive our long dry season into winter. A few herbaceous wildflowers from the aster family remained:

- **telegraph weed**, *Heterotheca grandiflora*—several tall flower stems produce dozens of 1/2-inch yellow blooms
- **common sandaste**r, *Corethrogyne filaginifolia*—lavender/yellow flowers wave on thin branching stems



Telegraph Weed - yellow ray and disk florets

One highlight was the observation of local fauna. A spry young hiker, Senna Kisner, captured a lizard. Bill Waycott later identified it as a **San Diego horned lizard**, *Phrynosoma blainvillii*. They eat harvester ants, but development and non-native Argentine ants impact their food supply, so they have become a California species of special concern.

After 3 hours, we returned to parking, and many hikers searched for lunch at our local dining establishments. The adventure continues later in this issue... : )

# A Bromeliad Tale ~Warren Arnold

After a storm, I found a thick piece of wood, which was the base or sheath of a palm petiole. Its pithy, porous interior looked to me like a good medium for growing some type of epiphyte, like an orchid or bromeliad. I kept that chunk of wood around for several years until I acquired a bromeliad stalk at an LVBHS plant exchange in November of 2025.

The stalk was kept in a bucket of water for a month or two before I decided to drill a hole in the central pithy layer of the palm piece. I did so and inserted the bromeliad to a depth of about 4 inches. To stabilize the stalk in the palm pith, I stuffed sphagnum moss around the edges of the stalk. The project was then placed back in the bucket and ignored for weeks with the exception of an occasional watering of the binding moss. Slowly the stalk lost its rigidity and became soft. I held out hope for a recovery.

I purchased another bromeliad from our guest speaker in September and inserted its root into another hole I drilled in the side of the palm piece. Care and watering of both bromeliads now became more frequent. And, lo and behold! The original bromeliad stalk, now almost dead, had produced a healthy pup!



At this writing, both the pup and the second bromeliad appear healthy. I plan on fastening the palm piece to the trunk of a nearby tree so the two bromeliads can grow as nature intended.

Did you know that Pineapple is a bromeliad? There will be a potted one available at our November plant exchange.

## Make a Difference Day

Make a Difference Day is a day when the city of Lompoc partners with LVBHS and other groups in town to make a difference in Lompoc. We spread mulch at the Drought Tolerant Garden for this annual event. This is an opportunity for us to have mulch delivered, a tractor to move it further into the garden, and a few additional people (thank you Amelia, Nick and Cristian!) to sling the mulch. Not pictured in this fun photo are Doreen and Weston Miller who participated in this event but departed before the photo was taken.



***We will be back out there this Saturday (7Nov) from 10 am to noon, so stop by for a bit and sling some mulch!***



Hand drawn monkeyflower on newsletter

# LVBHS Logo

The monkeyflower has long been a symbol of our Society. Pictured to the left is the original drawing of a monkeyflower that first appeared on the May 1982 newsletter.

The monkeyflower graphic in our new logo was rendered from photographs of real monkeyflowers taken by Mark Zuhlsdorf at the BMCG during the April bloom of this year.

The logo's background color is a khaki brown that represents the ancient sand dunes at the Burton Mesa Chaparral Garden. As you draw your eyes further from the center, you see the logo bordered in California gold. This border symbolizes our golden state and is a nod to our California native and endemic plants.

You will notice that the form of our logo is an oval, deriving from the Latin word *ovum* (egg), the oval is an organic shape that is deeply associated with harmony, balance, protection, and stability. Because it is a smooth, continuous curve with no sharp corners, the oval also symbolizes continuity and the infinite flow of life. Additionally, it is a shape appropriate for our very verbose society moniker of 42 letters and 5 spaces.




The fonts for our logo were chosen intentionally. Our club name was done in optima font, a font that provides elegant readability and is often used on monuments and memorials. Additionally, charter font was chosen to represent our website to depict the educational mission of our Society. Finally, we arrive at the font for our established date--cochin font, which has a long history of use in classic literature. It was designed in 1912 and rereleased in ***1977*** and the font's elegant nature and rerelease date conveys a feeling of historical significance regarding the inception of our plant society.

Our new logo has been featured a few ways this past year, keep an eye out as we integrate it more next year during our Golden Jubilee and beyond!

# A Fabulous Fuerte ~Mark Zuhlsdorf



At nearly 30 feet tall, this tree acts as a perch for some local birds, can you identify them?

This avocado tree was planted from seed at a members home in 1975. By 1995 it had not produced any fruit, so the member's son took some sticks and chains and whacked the trunk a few times, he then used a torch to burn the edges of some leaves, completely stressing the tree out. The winter of 1996 was the first year the tree bore fruit, and it hasn't stopped producing since! The branches are easy to climb and harvest its bounty. When standing under this tree, the canopy of foliage puts a person in their own world—a multi-level treehouse that supplies visitors with food.





This Fuerte produces thousands of avocados a year that are harvested from December until February. They don't turn color like Mexicola; they are picked green and stay green. The medium to large fruit with an elongated pyriform (pear-shaped) body, weighs about five to sixteen ounces. The fruit is smooth and easy to peel while the flesh is thick and yellow. This avocado's ripened flavor has been described as rich and creamy with notes of hazelnut and a lemony-grassy finish. It is considered to be one of the best tasting commercial cultivates by avocado growers and connoisseurs. The Fuerte avocado is a good choice to grow in Lompoc; it is hardy down to 27˚F and prefers to be away from the immediate coast and hotter interior valleys.



How did the Fuerte come about in California? In 1911, 21-year old Carl Schmidt, an American employed by the West Indian Nursery in Altadena, California, was instructed to search marketplaces in Mexico for avocados of outstanding flavor and the trees they originated from. Schmidt cut budwood from the best trees, catalogued them, and sent them off to Altadena via Wells Fargo. A large number of the buds did not take to California's soil and climate, but one flourished and survived the great freeze of 1913. Its strength was acknowledged, and the variety was dubbed "Fuerte" (Spanish for "strong"). The avocado that kickstarted California's avocado industry was acquired from a dooryard garden in Atlixco (ah-TLEESH-koh), Mexico.

Source: Fuerte Avocado. Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity.

***Specimens of the Fuerte tree in the photo will be at the November plant exchange!***

## Do California Avocados Play by the Rules?



According to an article published in the May/June 2003 issue of Garden Compass Magazine, all avocados grown in California where low temperatures fall below 70˚F during the blooming season should be considered self-fruitful. The same article further explains that type A/B flowering characteristics cooperate in bearing fruit best holds true under tropical conditions where the minimum temperatures are consistently above 70˚F. However, most nursery sites state that planting an A & B together improves pollination and can increase yield. That being said, the Fuerte is a type B in case you were wondering.

# Beyond the Burton Mesa Ecological Reserve

**~Tom Hofmann**

At the conclusion of the hike, the more curious hikers followed Bill Waycott and drove up Harris Grade. We found a turnoff about 200 yards past the top. The summit consists of diatomaceous shale, and its soil supports a very different cast of characters than our sandy Reserve.

Several examples of native **bishop pine**, *Pinus muricata*, are scattered in the Reserve, but up here they are in thickets, hundreds per acre. Some of our local readers may remember the Harris fire in 2000, which burned over 10,000 acres. Once the heat from the fire liquefies the resin and the intense heat passes, the moisture inside rapidly creates structural tension and the pine cone opens and releases seeds, thousands of seedlings followed the fire. Bill asked me about scarring when we saw several feet of bark stripped from the downhill side of many trunks. I had noticed similar damage in my front yard and think the mule deer use the trunks for a scratching post. But when I later looked across the road, the trunk scars were on the uphill side.



Island Scrub Oak

We scrambled about 15 yards up the steep slope and beheld an oaky shrub. Its leaves were larger than our live oak, dark on both sides, and completely flat, where coast live oak tends to cup. Some leaves grow with spines; others have smooth edges, and some are half & half. One hiker noted that the leaves have more lateral veins than the live oak, and Victor pointed out that they lack 'hairy armpits', fuzz that sometimes appears on the underside where the lateral veins join the central vein. Bill classified this as **Santa Cruz Island Oak**, *Quercus parvula*, a.k.a **island scrub oak**.

The specimens west of the road were all shrubby, but I saw a 20-foot-tall tree downhill. Its ancestry includes interior live oak. The hike leaders always encouraged discussion. At one point, the question was the importance of microbes. Many of us shrugged, but Victor's friend, Jazmín, presented an impromptu lecture on mycorrhizae. This symbiotic cooperation supplies fungi with sugars from a plant's roots, and the plant gains wider access to soil nutrients and moisture. Personally, I gave her an 'A'.

Back at the roadside we examined a **brittleleaf manzanita**, *Arctostaphylos crustacea*. This burl-former has much much larger leaves than both **Purisima** and **shagbark**. The leaves have short pedicels, and their shape varies from ovate to heart-shaped. SW Santa Barbara County actually hosts three subspecies, and they vary on the degree of hairiness of their leaves and stems.



Brittleleaf Manzinita

Two miles and a change of soil: the variety of manzanita changes completely! In adapting to our poor aeolian sand, our beloved **Purisima** and **shagbark manzanita**s critically limited their own range, the capacity to expand their territory.



*Lessingia pectinata* is a yellow flower consisting of distinct disk florets with a brown throat

These visitors came to see our local endemics and appreciate their distinctions from the species they know at home. They found human impact—locked gate, pump station, barbed wire—in a place that will soon see more. That impact is so strong that this area lacks the natural segregations into oak woodland, maritime chaparral, coastal scrub, or grassland. As a plus, we found a half dozen bloomers so late in our dry season, and I bagged a lessingia observation to add to my website.

As we headed back to our cars, the shoulder held dozens of red firecracker **California fuchsia,** *Epilobium canum* blooms, invisible to the cars whizzing past down Harris Grade.

**LVBHS**
c/o Christine Zuhlsdorf - President
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**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**
President: Christine Zuhlsdorf
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At-Large Representatives: Linda Jay, Julie Levy, Mark Zuhlsdorf



Michael from The Planted Parlour with his display of plants available for sale after the presentation.

## Membership Information

Dues for 2026: $20.00

Membership meetings 3rd Sunday in Jan, Mar, May, Sep & Nov

Regular meeting location: Stone Pine Hall, 210 South H St

E-mail: lvbothortsoc@gmail.com

# Looking Forward

As the year and the Society's activities wind down, it is a good time to celebrate all the work and fun we had this year. We removed a **SUBSTANTIAL** amount of cistus from the BMCG, we held our first Chilies and Lilies garden tour, we had a hugely successful June Garden tour, partnered with the City for an Earth Day event, hosted a Children's Garden Tour and the wonderful presentations and tours at our regular meetings — and that is not all — we have a lot to celebrate!

Next year the Society will be 50 years old, can you believe it? We will have even more to celebrate as we rejoice in our ***Golden Jubilee***.

Looking forward to *2027* and all the wonderful things we will get to do together.

**~Christine**