

## High Altitude Nature and Gardening (HANG)

## Our rocky mountainous year

By Janet Sellers

Gardening in the wild, wild weather of the West We live in a seasonal place with definite seasonal weather, predominantly winter. What can we do in our rocky mountain highlands in December? Most years, we have a big, short-term freeze in the middle of fall that makes the ground very hard to work with. This fall I decided to move my bearded irises during our unusually warm October. We hadn't had rain in many weeks, so working the soil was extremely hard, rocky, and difficult.

My usual trick for that is to soak the ground so it's soft, then gently lift the plants out. I dutifully soaked the ground for a few hours over several days, dug into the soft, soaked earth one evening (night soaking is best) to be able to lift the plants out over the next few mornings. Alas, true to form, our area had its typical surprise freeze, hardening the earth, and my iris plants are literally stuck in the same place. Maybe the

plant goddesses wanted to keep them where they are, but I know bearded iris need to be separated every few years to thrive and bloom.

**Even good planning isn't pandemic proof**

Earlier this year, I thought I would get a lot done in the garden and keep a schedule. Ironically, I hurt my back just when topsoil was delivered to support miniature white clover seeds for a green space that "I would never have to mow again." With the soil and the grass seed at hand, I then booked landscaper help, got ready to get that moving...but nope, we had to put everything on hold for many months because of the pandemic! We were supposed to finish everything in June, then September—now spring is looking better than ever.

**Our micro-climates in December, pruning, and planting**

In our community, we have adverse microclimates

created by hills, trees, and low areas, desiccating wind, and snow or rain merely streaking over the land. Modifications mostly include thick mulching and watering on days when it's above 40-some degrees, but only when we have a good three hours before and after watering time before the evening cold.

And believe it or not, we can still plant seeds and bulbs now. Just mulch over them well, hiding them from critters for their spring growth. Generally, bulbs need to be planted in a soil depth twice their size; seeds need a light covering of mulch. Winter is safest for pruning dormant trees and bushes.

*Janet Sellers, an ethnoecology gardening hopeful, would like to see gardens thrive effortlessly in the wild, wild West even with its wild, wild climate. Have local successful garden tips? Send them to JanetSellers@ocn.me.*

## Art Matters

## The arts and our health



By Janet Sellers

*"Touch has a memory."—John Keats*

This winter season, maybe as a respite from stress, let's have a go at making some art, even if just with pencil and paper. Making and viewing pleasant art can help us through stressful times and help us care for our emotional well-being. Making art is linked to improved memory, reasoning, and resilience.

I recently completed specialized training to be an arts facilitator for Military Arts Connection (MAC), developed by the Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region and Colorado Creative Industries. While it's not art therapy, MAC is a joint initiative between the National Endowment for the Arts, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Veterans Affairs that focuses on arts and healing in the military sector.

Our training group studied military culture, classes specific to veterans, and information about traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress. The latter two health issues also affect the lives of many others, and our overwhelming, albeit needed use of screen time, affects our bodies and brains, especially in children. Developing art skills may help with resiliency.

We all have a powerful connection to nature,

beauty, and observation. For decades, I have taught using a results-focused method I developed for drawing in a beautiful and dynamic way from observation. Beauty helps us be creative. We start our art observation with simple, natural things such as fresh, aromatic apples or oranges and draw using chunks of charcoal.

I have students use their fingers with the charcoal. We do various exercises to see how the charcoal and chalk react to depositing it, taking it out with an eraser, and moving it with finger pressure. Putting media to paper, we observe dark and light. We explore the materials for what we can do with them, adding and removing tone. It's an efficient way to teach my students using their visual and tactile skills to understand form, light, shade, and visual space.

I suspected there was something critical to our fingers directly holding chalk, touching the page for drawing. I wondered why it helps learning so much and recently discovered verifiable evidence via neurological studies regarding the brain and the fingertips.

Neuroscientific research has shown that the brain outsources some neural processing to other parts of the body such as the retina for visual process-

ing and fingertips for tactile processing. Sophisticated processing is going on from the senses of touch and sight formerly attributed to the brain.

Andrew Pruszynski and Roland Johansson of Umea University in Sweden tested volunteers and recorded nerve fiber impulses from various stimuli. The fingertips are among the most highly sensitive parts of the human body, and when the researchers checked out the neurotransmitters in the fingertips, they found the nerve endings in the fingertips perform neural computations that were thought to occur in the brain.

Their findings may have implications for rehabilitation, working toward regrowing peripheral nerves in people with nerve injury. "It's important to consider not just how many neurons grow back, but also how they grow back, as this may be critical to the type of information sent to the brain."

Our sense of touch teaches us, helps us think. Beauty is enlivening and uplifting and helps us be whole. When art touches our heart and embodies beauty, we thrive.

*Janet Sellers is an award-winning artist and avid researcher, teacher, and writer. Contact her at janetsellers@ocn.me*

## Snapshots of Our Community

## Harvest of Love



**Above** Organized by the Kiwanis Club, this annual October event is accomplished by the students, faculty, and staff in every school throughout Lewis-Palmer School District 38. Non-perishable food collection boxes are established at each school. Once filled, the containers are picked up by Kiwanis volunteers and delivered to Tri-Lakes Cares to replenish and fortify its food pantry. **Above left:** During the first week of November, Harvest of Love Food Drive collection boxes were loaded and transported by Monument Hill Kiwanis Club members from all the schools throughout Lewis-Palmer School District 38. Here, boxes of non-perishable food

items are being picked up at Palmer Lake Elementary School by Kiwanis members. **Above right:** On Nov. 4, members of the Monument Hill Kiwanis Club transported the proceeds of the Harvest of Love Food Drive to Tri-Lakes Cares.

This year, D38 contributed over \$5,358 in cash donations and 15,208 pounds of non-perishable food.

*Photos by Sharon Williams.*