

Update on Mother's Memorial Butterfly Garden (2010, 2011)

Selvi Viswanathan

I want to let my family and friends know how our Mother's Memorial Butterfly garden is doing after two years of its origin.

The garden is doing well as I expected. The marjoram (Maruvam) had to be replaced. Luckily I was able to get a couple and planted them. The Chrysanthemum is doing well and will bloom in a couple of weeks starting in August, I hope.. These are the plants Mother grew in the Berhampur yard.

The butterfly bushes (Buddleia), I have four in this area, looked almost dead because the past winter was very harsh. Then we learnt from Dave Fox, who helps the community by having a nursery at his home during spring, that there is a liquid vitamin called Super Thrive, which helps the plant come out of shock. A 1 oz bottle costs \$5 but it takes only a quarter teaspoon per gallon of water and the plant needs only a quart of this mixture. We also have to cut off the dead limbs. This did a miracle; all have comeback and are starting to bloom.

Shasta daisies, the white flowers with yellow in the middle, have multiplied and the purple flowers, the Tall Phlox, are also doing well. Pink Asters are now blooming. We had a few blooms of Monarda that I saw humming birds using them. The Pink Yarrow this year has more blooms.

Regarding the butterflies this year, the big attraction is the appearance of two tailed Tiger Swallowtails flitting all over the yard and actually in the town too. I have included a spectacular picture taken by Hari with his new camera and lens. The flower is the Buddleia the butterfly is feeding on.



Tiger Swallowtail (Photo: Hari Viswanathan, 2011)

In early summer of 2010, we had Black Swallowtails laying eggs on the herb plant RUE next to the side of the house where Joe planted it. Watching close by, I witnessed several tiny black eggs turning to caterpillars in different stages. Then they were gone to the next stage, to make Chrysalis. I did not know where they went. But I did see after a month or so again Black swallowtails coming to the Rue plants and laying eggs. It is the first time I enjoyed watching the caterpillars.



Blackswallow caterpillar



Swallowtail caterpillar (Photo: Mary Carol Williams, 2010)

This year, once again I saw a black swallowtail but it did not use the Rue plant. This year, after severe winter we had drought. That may be the reason we are not seeing many butterflies according to Butterfly expert, my mentor Dorothy Hoard. Now the rains have come, may be we will soon see Monarchs that start to migrate.

A month ago Gowri and Hari surprised me with a beautiful plaque that read “Mom’s garden”. It has a dragonfly on it and Gowri said that she wished it had a butterfly instead. I said dragonfly is an insect too and the flowers on the plaque are the Tall Phlox that bloom in this garden. So, I have the sign saying it is for our mother.



We have a picture now: The butterfly Roosting house, the certificate from NABA and the plaque. You will see a butterfly made of crystal in front of the roosting house, which is actually a solar decorative yard sign that turns at night into three colors: blue, green and hot pink.

The basking area, the puddling areas are being well maintained.

I hope the Monarchs will come through. When the Buddleias are in full bloom, which will be in a couple of weeks, I expect to see Painted Ladies, which are very common.

Summer of 2011:

Fire in Los Alamos

In June 2011, Los Alamos had one of the worst fires. This picture taken by my neighbor Cathy Morzinski gives an idea why we had to evacuate during the wild fires. This was actually taken after we returned to Los Alamos and we could still see the fires from our deck on July 5th. The house you see is our house. The fire really looked scary. We saw helicopters and planes going once in a while.



Photo: Cathy Morzinski, my neighbor, July 5, 2011

During this evacuation period, about a week, Darien, my other neighbor who stayed back at home took care of the garden watering. She knew a friend from forest service and she thought she could get out when and if the fire really came close. So the garden thrived well; a **big** thanks to Darien. The humming bird garden plants I planted in a lot for sister India Devi, especially needed to be watered more often and she did that by dragging the hose most of the days.

NABA publishes my article:

In the summer of 2011, the North American Butterfly Association (NABA) published my article under the title, "A Memorial Butterfly Garden in New Mexico" in their Butterfly Gardner magazine (Vol. 6 Issue 2, Summer 2011). I was thrilled because it was a nice tribute to my mother. Here is the link to the Table of Contents Page. <http://www.naba.org/pubs/bg11b.html>

Dorothy Hoard is the one who got the idea, sent it to right person at NABA magazine. She was the contact person and always informed me whenever she heard from NABA. She had seen the website created by my brother Seenu and like many, she was impressed. She edited the article for the magazine. She suggested Mary Carol Williams to take pictures as Hari did not have right lens and camera at that time.

It was published in early October. The article is in black and white. NABA gave me three complimentary copies. I bought extra copies and gave to the people whose names are mentioned in the article including Joe the gardener and to my siblings. When asked why the pictures weren't in color, I was told that the color pictures were expensive to print and NABA magazine use the color pictures only for the butterflies.

How I Met Doorothy Hoard, my mentor:

In 2005, I went to Pajarito Environmental Education Center (PEEC) building for the first time to attend a meeting about Earth Day festival. I had just joined PEEC as a member. This is when PEEC had acquired this building from the schools to be used as a center. I found the place buzzing with activity. Later, I was introduced to Dorothy Hoard who just walked into the meeting. I was excited! I knew her by name since I had her 1981 book "Los Alamos Outdoors" and her picture was on the back cover, with her friend, the photographer Betty Lilienthal.

In 2008, I was delighted when she accepted my invitation to visit my garden and came over with her husband Donald. I had some plants that were inviting to the butterflies. My garden was already a certified wildlife refuge. Dorothy encouraged me to certify my garden with North American Butterfly Association and I decided to do it. Then it dawned on me to make it a memorial butterfly garden for my mother.



Photo by Mary Carol Williams

At PEEC we planted a butterfly garden for the children's club called Kinnikinnick Club (K Club). We received an \$800 grant. This brought me closer to Dorothy. We went with children to the nurseries, bought the plants, which the children planted, and had lot of interactions while doing this. We had a ribbon cutting ceremony on Earth Day in 2010. Dorothy and I started taking care of the garden because the schools close during the first week of June and K club does not meet in summer. This is when the garden needed maintenance. I used to water the plants, while Dorothy would help weeding and other things as needed. With her binoculars she would identify the butterflies. The past couple of years, during butterfly season, I have been seeing Dorothy every week for a couple of hours. It is very interesting and an educational experience for me, not just to talk about butterflies, but also on several subjects. She is involved with finding the biggest trees in Los Alamos, petroglyphs, dendroglyphs (writing on aspen trees), wild turkeys at Valles Caldera, wild flowers, and homesteads in Los Alamos and etc. She is a very good historian and has good sense of humor. Dorothy worked at the laboratory and is retired now.

It is a real blessing to know Dorothy who has expertise in many subjects. Dorothy became my mentor for Butterfly garden. She is a very busy person but makes time for me. I am blessed.

Selvi
Los Alamos, NM, USA
May 17th 2012