



Photo by Jim Cyr



Ginkgo Biloba Tree  
Kids' Adventure Garden

## *December in the Conejo Valley Botanic Garden*

The world's oldest trees, Ginkgos, also known as Maidenhair Trees, are the only survivors of a family that existed more than 200 million years ago. Even though they were living during the time of the dinosaurs, they eventually vanished in most regions of the world. But they had survived in China, where they were found in mountainous regions, palaces, temple gardens and monasteries. Buddhist monks, since the Middle Ages, had cultivated the trees because of their medicinal and culinary properties. The seeds then found their way to Japan and Korea. Early scientists thought the Ginkgos were extinct, until they were discovered in Japan by German naturalist and physician, Engelbert Kaempfer, who brought the seeds to Europe in the early 1700s.

*-Sandy Krutilek-*

### **Can Winter be Far Behind?**

I can't recall a more magnificent autumn in the Conejo than we have been enjoying this year. The newly gathered leaves that adorned our Thanksgiving Day table were of every hue imaginable. Outdoors, so plentiful as to provide great piles for kids to jump into and toss into the air. As gardening chores go, not much fun to rake up however. Much more

inspiring is the transition into wintry days that offer opportune planting times for California native species and other hearty perennials and shrubs. We will be featuring many at the sales area on Sundays. Come take a look.

-Barbara Song, CVBG Volunteer-

## *What's In a Name?*

by Diane Conejo



### *Helleborus niger*

Christmas Rose

With holidays around the corner, many stores start filling their shelves with bright red Poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*). 'Pulcherrima' actually means beautiful, and, I'll admit, they are interesting looking plants; but poinsettias are not my 'cup of tea'. So, what does one do? Well, if you are a budding horticulturist (pun intended) who lives in Southern California, you substitute a plant that is often referred to as "Winter's flower" because it can bring color to your cool-season garden. The plant I speak of is the Hellebore. Now, some might say, "What the heck is a Hellebore?" This shade-loving plant ranges from 1 to 3 feet tall and wide and many are evergreen. Given the right care, they can last for decades! Isn't that reason enough to read on?

First, let's do the translation. The word Helleborus most probably comes from a combination of Greek words: 'hellos' meaning fawn and 'boros', eaten. It is pronounced hel-eh-BORE-us. This might suggest that it is a tender, forest favorite of baby deer, but, Hellebore is one of the four classic poisons in history and it actually repels deer. (The other three being nightshade, hemlock & aconite.) 'Niger' refers to the black roots on this plant. (Black Hellebore roots were used as a remedy for 'mania' by physicians B.C. by insertion into the ear canal. Science has brought us a long way from this!)

(Just to set the record straight, the other plant, Poinsettia, is also toxic if ingested; so keep both of these plants away from holiday tables.)

## Sunday Plant Sales

### Red Hot Poker (*kniphofia uvaria*)

Our featured plant this month is the stunning Red Hot Poker. They are in full bloom and will continue to bloom through December. According to Irene Benyoung, they are being sold in gallon containers and will be discounted.

Plant sales are held every Sunday at the CVBG from 10:30-2:30 in the area next to the Kids' Adventure Garden, located at 350 W. Gainsborough Rd. California natives, hardy, water wise perennials, shrubs, trees and succulents, reasonably priced are available. CVBG volunteers will be happy to help you with selections and share their expertise.



Duranta  
Kids' Adventure Garden  
Photo by Pat Carlson

## **Birthday Parties**

The birthday parties held at the KAG on Saturdays have become very popular. So popular that Betty needs more volunteers to give her some help. It is a lot of fun and not too much work. Sometimes the kids come in costumes, depending on what the 'theme' of the party may be. The adults set up and take down the tables and chairs. There is a donation to use the garden. You help by keep your eyes on the kids as they get excited about having a party at the KAG. Sometimes you even get a piece of birthday cake. If you are willing to help by giving a few hours of your time, give Betty a call at 1-818-889-0560.

## **Want to Help us Grow?**

Do you love Conejo Valley Botanic Garden and would like to help, but just don't have the time to volunteer? Even though much of the work you see going on in the garden is done by volunteers, we still have expenses for planting, heavy pruning and new improvements. These projects are funded through grants and donations from the community. If you would like to help us grow, tax deductible donations are always welcome and may be made out and sent to Conejo Valley Botanic Garden, PO Box 6614, Thousand Oaks, CA 91359. Thanks for all your support!

## **Conejo Valley Botanic Garden Needs You!**

The Garden is managed and maintained by community volunteers. Without your help, the garden cannot thrive. None of the volunteer positions at CVBG has a minimum number of volunteer hours attached. If you can help for a few hours a month, great! For more information on any of our volunteer opportunities, please go to our web site at [www.conejogarden.org](http://www.conejogarden.org) and click "Volunteers."

### **WE CURRENTLY NEED VOLUNTEERS FOR THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS:**

**Assistant to the Volunteer Coordinator:** Help recruit new volunteers and match them with garden jobs they might enjoy.

**Adopt A Garden:** We have an ongoing need for volunteers to join the teams working in our theme gardens. Days and hours are flexible so give us a call.

**Garden Nursery:** There is no better way to learn about California native and water wise plants than to join the teams working in the propagation and sales nurseries.

**The Kids Adventure Garden:** KAG is open from 11:00 to 3:00 each Sunday. Docents welcome families to the garden, answer questions and ensure everyone is safe and has fun. You will train with an experienced Docent. You can sign up for one shift a month or as many as you want.

Email: [conejogarden1623@hotmail.com](mailto:conejogarden1623@hotmail.com) .

**For information and directions to the garden, visit our web site at [www.conejogarden.org](http://www.conejogarden.org).**

December 2011

