I Hate to Prune  
*by Monica Tudor*

It seems like there is always a reason to postpone the task. The sages are blooming and I don’t want to take off the flowers. The early butterflies take shelter amongst the branches and I don’t want to disturb them. I don’t want to trim off any butterfly eggs that might have been laid; it’s too hot; it’s too cold; and so on. But it needs to be done. Just so you know, spring is not the best time to prune. It is usually done fall to mid-winter.

That disclaimer aside, this spring the sages were taking over the garden. Some had been trimmed in past years, but some had never been trimmed and at least one path was completely hidden by the overgrown foliage. I felt the need to trim now, so armed with my tools, began the project. First I pulled out any dead stems, using loppers to get the larger branches. Then I went for shape, shortening the branches so they would not split from the weight of the spring growth and flowers. I dug up two large Whirly Blue sages that had grown to gargantuan proportions, chopped them into pieces and put them into the garbage. There! Now the path on top of the island was visible again. The Salvia Gracias was also taking over, so it got a trimming, too. (Note to self: sometimes the labels underestimate the size of the plant!)

Have you ever read the children’s book, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*? It’s a cute story of how one thing leads to another. Now that the garden looked a little, how shall I say, needy? I pulled up or cut off the California poppies and took the shears to the Lipstick salvias. The buckwheat in the shade of the Palo Verde tree was getting out of hand, so it got whacked back, too. I still need to prune, trim, or pull a volunteer sage that decided to grow in a less than ideal spot. And the Texas Rangers could use some shaping. But that has to wait till later. Right now I’m still recovering from the mess that the recent windstorms made of the mesquite tree. The whole top of the tree was leaning on the ground. I had to prop it up with supports, tie it with rope to get it to stay upright, and then pruned the heck out of it. No power tools were used, just loppers and a pruning saw. The mesquite now stands upright, looking a little like it got a major haircut.

Before it gets too hot, I’ll make a trip to the nursery to see if there are any Winnifred Gilman sages that need to come home with me. I like Winnifred, since she is well mannered and has beautiful flower shish-ka-bobs.

Well, by now you should know that a garden (my garden, anyway) is a work in progress. So I’ll keep on planting natives and tweaking, and pruning when I have to. And when once in a while there’s nothing to do in the garden, just enjoy!

For more information about pruning, I recommend “*Care & Maintenance of Southern California Native Plant Gardens,*” by Bart O’Brien, Betsey Landis and Ellen Mackey. It has all kinds of great information and is available through our CNPS chapter.

For readers desiring a tour of my garden, I have a few dates available. Please contact me in advance at dosportas@msn.com or 661 808 8387.