“Your garden is such a peaceful place”
by Monica Tudor

“YOURS GARDEN IS SUCH A PEACEFUL PLACE,” HEIDI COMMENTED when she and her grandson visited my California garden on Easter Monday. Her words were music to my ears since I totally agree with her. If given the slightest hint, I’ll talk about my garden like grandparents talk about their grandchildren. The poor victim/listener will hear all about the latest blooms and new growth until their eyes glaze over. When Heidi originally asked to see the garden, I’m not sure she knew what she was in for.

She and her grandson showed up in the early afternoon. The conditions were perfect for a visit — sunshine, but not too hot. We went to the back portion of the backyard where the garden is located. The garden is about 50 feet by 85 feet at present. (My husband and I are in light-hearted negotiations for its expansion at some future date.) Two-thirds of the garden is fully established and the remaining third is facing its first summer. Almost everything was blooming. I’d love to list everything, but it would take too much space. A list of what wasn’t blooming would be much shorter: the zuashnerias, manzanitas, milkweeds and Aster chilensis are not blooming, but will, when their season comes. As we walked around the path through the garden, I pointed out plants and gave their characteristics. For example, we looked at Allen Chickering sage and compared it to Bee’s Bliss sage. The former is tall and the latter hugs the ground. The blue of the Allen Chickering blooms are intensely blue while the Bee’s Bliss is more of a pastel blue. The various sages have different blooming periods so there will be at least one variety of sage blooming early March through June. We picked leaves and smelled their scent. I told them that I could always
"A peaceful place"... (Continued)

tell when my dogs run through the garden because they come back to the house smelling like sage. And believe it or not, I can tell if they’ve brushed against a white sage or the Allen Chickering by the scent. We looked at the still-blooming California poppies, along with elegant clarkia and bladderpod. Have I told you how much I like bladderpod? It blooms almost all year on very little water. In fact, bladderpod grows all over the Panorama Vista Preserve in north Bakersfield and practically anywhere else in Kern County. I showed Heidi and her grandson the milkweed plants. The milkweed seeds have started to sprout and are about an inch tall. I put out seeds as well as pots and the plants that came from pots are doing well. Hopefully the monarch butterflies will stop by and enjoy the garden, too. Heidi and her grandson stopped several times to look at hummingbirds and lizards, butterflies, ants and bees. I showed them my two surviving manzanitas, still alive and growing new leaves! I love manzanitas but have a knack for killing them. This time I think I’ve got it figured out. They are both planted within a foot or two of a “nurse” plant. The nurse plant provides shade and has established mycorrhizae, which helps the manzanita survive. At least that is what I think is happening.

After showing Heidi and her grandson the garden, we took the long way to the house and looked at the fruit trees: fig, nectarine, apple, pomegranate and plum, and the grape vines. I love getting little kids interested in growing things. Who knows? One day he might share his garden with his own grandkids.  

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