

# TOTALLY SOILED

Acclaimed local master gardener Yvonne Savio shares her secrets to creating a home garden.

BY LINDA BROOKS



**D**uring her time as coordinator of the UC Master Gardener Program for Los Angeles County, Yvonne Savio educated 1,183 master gardeners and assisted 1.3 million home and community gardeners on a variety of gardening topics and issues. She was even honored in 2015 at the Celebration of Public Service by President Barack Obama.

Chatting in her three-quarter-acre hillside garden in Pasadena, where she lives with her husband of 43 years, Tom, Savio shares tips and insights from her decades-long gardening career.

**> How has the UC Master Gardener Program evolved since you came on board in 1994?**

I was hired to upgrade the Common Ground Gardening Program through UC Cooperative Extension, which became the Master Gardener Program as we know it today. At first, we were working with gardeners that were only interested in the education we offered and not volunteering to give back to a community where there was the greatest need. In 2000, I

visited community gardens to encourage members who were interested in volunteering to come to the Master Gardener Program. UC Davis scientists wrote the 700-page *California Master Gardener Handbook* based on science but written in layman's terms that I used as my text book. The program grew to create the Victory Garden Program for beginner gardeners led by UC Master Gardener volunteers to form neighborhood garden circles, and in 2015, I retired from UC Cooperative Extension and established my website of gardening-related resources.

**> What are your current projects?**

I continue as a volunteer with the Master Gardener Program by offering webinars. I write my daily newsletter and update my website *GardeningInLA.net* on a regular basis with a range of resources and information I derive from my own garden. I also offer garden consultation and coaching.

**> What first got you into gardening?**

Spending time with my parents in our garden growing and eating seasonal foods harvested at the perfect ripeness. I didn't care for pulling weeds but it's all part of the process. I stagger my planting to ensure there is always something to enjoy.

**> What is your home garden like and how much time do you spend on it?**

It's like a circus. There is always a lot going on given Pasadena's lack of extreme climate. Currently, we are enjoying our warm-season crops like tomatoes, peas, cucumbers, beets, and warm lettuce varieties. I plant seedlings for my must-haves and seek out unusual plant varieties available through seeds to play with. Global warming affects the root system so I've changed my practices to plant early, before May 1st for spring/summer harvest. Depending on the time of year for planting and harvesting, I spend about four to five hours per week with additional time taking photographs and keeping a calendar to document activity, which I use as the source for my monthly tips.

**> What is important to know about soil?**

Feed the soil not the plant. Organic fertilizers create a rich soil of microorganisms and plant material that are constantly feeding the plants. You can start small by periodically layering organic fertilizers with numbers about 5-4-3 for a good balance of N-P-K.

**> What advice would you give to someone who is trying to start their own home garden?**

Plant seasonally what your family likes to eat. It's a nice reward to harvest what you enjoy. Bulbs for color are easy care and multiply. Group herbs in pots with similar requirements for water and fertilizer. 

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