

Volume 1 Issue 7

July 2025

# The RECap

*A newsletter from South Coast Research and Extension Center  
and UC Cooperative Extension Orange County*



Happy tomato season! The GROW Program is testing out growing some different tomato varieties to see which would work well for a u-pick, so SCREC staff get the pleasure of tasting some really cool varieties, like the 'Gezahnte' variety pictured above.

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## Featuring:

- Event Recap
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In this issue we are excited to spotlight the 4-H Youth Development Program, the Watershed Resilience Research Program and smart irrigation month, and our Urban Agriculture & Small Farms Advisor, Amrita Mukherjee. There are also a few upcoming events to check out, especially our Open House which is scheduled for October 11th!

Sincerely,  
Lindsey Pedroncelli, Ph.D., Interim Director of South Coast REC  
and  
Rita Clemons, Director of UCCE Orange County

P.S. If you do not wish to receive this newsletter in the future, please unsubscribe at the bottom of this email.

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## Event Recap

### 4-H Youth Development at the OC Fair

Last week was Market Livestock week at the OC Fair and the 4-H Youth Development Livestock Auction was on



*4-H'ers getting ready to show*

Saturday, July 26th. The 4-H'ers, who spent countless preparing for this moment, had the opportunity to show their animals during the auction. The buyers were extremely generous to the kids, and we are so grateful for the support!



*Our 4-H'ers really do love their animals!*



*Auctioning the projects.*



*4-H'ers saying the pledge at the auction.*



Though Market Livestock week is over, you can still stop by the fair until August 17th...and guess who else is there? The [UC Master Gardeners](#) and the [UC Master Food Preservers](#)!

## Research Spotlight

*Information from our advisor-led research programs.*

### Smart Irrigation Month: Small Changes, Big Impact

By Esther Lofton, Watershed Resilience Advisor  
serving Orange, Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino

**July is Smart Irrigation Month**, a time to highlight how efficient outdoor watering can help Southern California communities conserve water, reduce utility bills, and build long-term climate





## **Rebates & Giveaways**

Take advantage of **rebates available through [SoCalWaterSmart.com](https://www.socalwatersmart.com)** to install or upgrade your irrigation system with smart technology. These upgrades not only help reduce water waste but also qualify for financial incentives that make the transition easier for homeowners and landscapers alike.

Plus, don't miss out on **local events and giveaways hosted by your regional water agencies** during Smart Irrigation Month!

- **Inland Empire Utilities Agency (IEUA)** is giving away free shut-off hose nozzles at their headquarters (6075 Kimball Ave, Chino) from Monday to Thursday, 8 AM – 5 PM. Limit 4 per household; while supplies last.
- **Santa Margarita Water District (SMWD)** is offering educational events and hands-on opportunities, including: *Home Depot Booth (Rancho Santa Margarita)* on August 1, 12:30–5:30 PM.

**Haga clic aquí para leer en español**

resilience. With more than 50% of residential water use in the region going to irrigation, even small upgrades can make a major difference.

Smart irrigation systems utilize tools such as **weather-based irrigation controllers (WBICs)**, **soil moisture sensors**, and **high-efficiency nozzles** to water only when and where it's needed. These technologies not only protect landscapes—they prevent waste and support the region's long-term water supply.

**According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's WaterSense program**, households that install smart irrigation controllers can save up to **15,000 gallons of water each year** ([EPA WaterSense, 2023](https://www.epa.gov/watersense)). On a national scale, if every home in the U.S. with an automatic sprinkler system were to install and properly operate a WaterSense-labeled controller, the country could collectively save approximately **390 billion gallons of water** and up to **\$4.5 billion in water costs annually**—simply by avoiding the overwatering of lawns and landscapes. When this efficiency is multiplied across thousands of households, the potential impact on water conservation becomes monumental.



## **References and further reading:**

**Irrigation Association – Smart Irrigation Month**

**[SoCalWaterSmart Rebates](https://www.socalwatersmart.com)**

**[Santa Margarita Water District \(SMWD\)](https://www.socalwatersmart.com)**

Click the [link](#) to learn more about Smart Irrigation Month! Be sure to follow us on social media for updates on local programs, events, and valuable water-saving tips.

☐ **Follow us** on [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#) and [X/Twitter](#)

☐ **Subscribe** to our blog: [Smart Water Living: Urban Water Efficiency in SoCal](#)

☐ *Smart irrigation is more than a summer campaign; it's a movement toward a sustainable future.*

## Program Spotlight

### 4-H Youth Development Program



**Welcome 2025-2026!**

**Enrollment is open!**  
All youth and adult volunteers are welcome!

[Find enrollment instructions here](#)

**Interested in learning about 4-H?**  
Our final two summer opportunities are coming up!

#### Growing Your 4-H Opportunities

**Tuesday, August 12 at 7pm via Zoom**

- Program overview
- Hear member experiences
- Q & A time to get the info you need

[Register Here](#)

#### Open House & Enrollment Extravaganza

**Sunday, August 24 2-5pm at SCREC**

- Enrollment discounts
- Club & project displays
- Tractor rides
- Games & prizes
- 4-H merch
- Meet 4-H families
- Snack table supporting our Home School Project & plenty of family fun!

[RSVP Here](#)

## Employee Spotlight

**Get to know**

**[Amrita Mukherjee](#)**

Urban Ag/Small Farm Advisor for San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Riverside, and Orange counties



Hi, I'm Amrita Mukherjee, the Urban Ag/Small Farm Advisor serving San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Riverside, and Orange counties. I've been with UC ANR for 3 years, and before that, I spent 6 incredible years with the Horticulture Innovation Lab at UC Davis. After a brief break from grad school, I knew I wanted to return to extension work. I've always believed in the power of being close to the community—connecting with growers, learning from them, and working together toward sustainable solutions. Being part of UC ANR has only deepened that belief.

### What does a "typical" day look like for you?

My daily rhythm revolves around growers—supporting their needs, solving problems, and building relationships. No two days are the same—one day I'm setting up field trials or leading hands-on workshops, the next I'm exploring new sustainable technologies or helping organic growers find funding opportunities. From field trials to community events to troubleshooting real-time challenges, my work blends science, service, and a lot of sun exposure. Just when I think I've settled into a rhythm, a wave of new opportunities and challenges comes along keeping the work dynamic and deeply rewarding.



### What part of your work are you most excited about or proud of right now?

I'm currently excited about projects that bring new techniques to urban agriculture, especially for small farms. It's inspiring to see how passionate plant people are—and how they spread that energy within the community. My program focuses on using small-scale high tunnels for diverse crop production, transplant protection, and testing biodegradable mulch. I'm excited to share early findings from these trials soon. If your farm is working to



reduce plastic use, cut down on microplastics in the food system, or find affordable, practical solutions for small-scale growing—especially high tunnel use—I'd love to connect. Urban growers are incredibly creative with small spaces while juggling many challenges, and I'm here to help share ideas that work and make a real impact.

### What's your favorite fruit/vegetable we grow at SCREC?

Some of my visit surprises with amazing avocado or pepper in the veggie bins at SCREC. We'll see what new crop pops up this year!

To get in contact with Amrita, email [amukherjee@ucanr.edu](mailto:amukherjee@ucanr.edu)

Check out the following blogs and websites for updated research findings:

**SoCal Urban Food  
Production Blog**

**Urban Agriculture**

**LA County Urban  
Small Farms**

### Bonus fun fact:

Biodegradable mulches can break down within a growing season—helping reduce plastic use without sacrificing weed control or moisture retention.

## Pro Tips

*Tips, tricks, and advice from our program experts*

## Urban Watershed Resilience: Water Equity



### Addressing Groundwater Nitrate Contamination

By Monica Palta, UCI and  
Esther Lofton, UCANR

Groundwater nitrate contamination is emerging as a significant public health concern, particularly for communities that rely on groundwater as their primary source of drinking water. Recent studies highlight the risks associated with elevated nitrate levels, including methemoglobinemia in infants and potential links to various health issues, even at concentrations below regulatory limits.

Low-income communities are disproportionately affected by high

### Abordando la Contaminación por Nitratos en las Aguas Subterráneas

Por Monica Palta, UCI y Esther  
Lofton, UCANR, Daniel Gonzalez II,  
Grizzly Corps Fellow

La contaminación por nitratos en las aguas subterráneas se está convirtiendo en un importante problema de salud pública, en particular para las comunidades que dependen de las aguas subterráneas como principal fuente de agua potable. Estudios recientes destacan los riesgos asociados a los niveles elevados de nitratos, como la metahemoglobinemia en bebés, y su posible relación con diversos problemas de salud, incluso en concentraciones inferiores a los límites

nitrate levels and face significant health risks. To combat this pressing issue, experts recommend investing in advanced water treatment technologies, enforcing regulations to limit agricultural contributions to nitrate pollution, and increasing public awareness.

Local organizations are urging community members to engage in discussions about water safety and tap water testing. Collaborative efforts among water providers, regulators, and researchers are essential to foster safer drinking water resources for all.

*For more information and actionable solutions, visit our [blog](#) and [follow us](#) on [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#) and [X/Twitter](#) for updates on local programs and events related to water equity. Together, we can work towards a healthier future for ALL Californians!*



reglamentarios.

Las comunidades de bajos ingresos se ven afectadas de forma desproporcionada por los altos niveles de nitratos y enfrentan importantes riesgos para la salud. Para combatir este acuciante problema, los expertos recomiendan invertir en tecnologías avanzadas de tratamiento del agua, aplicar normativas para limitar la contribución de la agricultura a la contaminación por nitratos y aumentar la concienciación pública.

Las organizaciones locales están instando a los miembros de la comunidad a participar en debates sobre la seguridad del agua y el análisis del agua del grifo. La colaboración entre proveedores de agua, organismos reguladores e investigadores es esencial para promover recursos de agua potable más seguros para todos.

Para más información y soluciones prácticas, visite nuestro [blog](#) y [síguenos](#) en [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#) y [X/Twitter](#) para estar al tanto de los programas y eventos locales relacionados con la equidad hídrica. ¡Juntos podemos trabajar por un futuro más saludable para TODOS los californianos!



## Upcoming Events

### California Master Beekeeper Program Events



**Interested in learning about beekeeping? Sign up for a CAMBP OC Workshop for Beekeepers!**

**Workshop topics include:**

- Checking overwinter colonies
- Managing for honey production
- Swarming & robbing prevention
- Checking for diseases & queen health
- Preparing a split to requeen
- Feeding techniques
- Completing a hive inspection
- Strategies to requeen
- Mite test load & control
- Honey extraction technique

**Upcoming workshops are on:**

- October 18, 2025

**Register Here**

**Have you ever toured an apiary? Sign up for a California Master Beekeeper Apiary Tour!**

Tours are from 10am-12pm on the following dates:

- Saturday, August 23rd
- Saturday, September 6th

**Register Here**



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## **Interested in becoming a UC Master Gardener?**

Orange County will be conducting its next volunteer training program beginning in late 2025 and continuing through mid-May 2026. Master Gardeners are volunteers who extend research-based knowledge and information on home horticulture, pest management, and sustainable landscape practices to the residents of California.

On September 4, 2025, join us either in person at 10:00am or on Zoom at 6:00pm for an information session!

[Learn more about becoming a UC Master Gardener](#)

**Register for Zoom Here**



# UC Master Gardeners of Orange County 2026 Volunteer Training Information Day

September 4, 2025 - 10:00 am In-person  
September 4, 2025 - 6:00 pm Zoom

## Would you like to become a UC Master Gardener Volunteer?

University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) Master Gardeners are volunteers who extend horticulture education to communities in Orange County. Using a variety of activities such as workshops, lectures, a gardening hotline, and information booths at local events, we educate Orange County residents about home horticulture, sustainable landscaping, and integrated pest management using research-based information. Master Gardeners help increase gardening and science literacy to support healthy plants, healthy environments, and healthy communities. This is a volunteer program. It is not a class to teach gardening solely for your personal gain.

### What is required?

- Basic knowledge and interest in landscape and food gardening
- Interest in increasing your horticulture skills as you volunteer
- Commitment to volunteer
- Basic computer skills
- Reside in Orange County

Master Gardener volunteer training classes cover a broad range of horticultural topics. The 2026 class will be conducted in-person at the UC South Coast Research and Extension Center in Irvine with a limited option to attend via Zoom. There will be a required class Orientation on November 20, 2025. Weekly classes will start January 15, 2026 and run until mid-May. All sessions will be on Thursday mornings and early afternoons. If you have other commitments that require more than one absence, we ask that you wait to apply in the future. Master Gardeners are required to complete minimum volunteer and continuing education hours each year.

To receive an application to be considered for the 2026 Master Gardeners Training program, potential applicants are required to attend **ONE** of the Information Day sessions on September 4, 2025:

#### In-person on September 4:

10:00 – 11:00 am  
UC South Coast Research & Extension Center  
7601 Irvine Blvd, Irvine, 92618

#### On Zoom on September 4:

6:00 – 7:00 pm  
Register with this link:  
<https://ucanr.zoom.us/join/register/dYXYt7rQSLqdd122FZCVzg>  
(cut and paste if link doesn't open)



**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**  
Agriculture and Natural Resources

**UC Master Gardener Program**  
Orange County

[mgorange.ucanr.edu](http://mgorange.ucanr.edu)

[https://mgorange.ucanr.edu/Be\\_A\\_Master\\_Gardener/](https://mgorange.ucanr.edu/Be_A_Master_Gardener/)

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**Mark Your Calendars!**  
**October 11, 2025 is our annual Open House**  
**Watch the recap of last year's open house below.**



**October 11, 2025 9:00am to 2:00pm**  
**7601 Irvine Blvd. Irvine, CA 92618**

**Potential activities include:**

- A tractor tour of the research center
- A pumpkin u-pick (pending harvest availability)
- Presentations from our expert researchers
- Hands-on demonstrations from our program leaders
- Prizes and giveaways

Is there a certain activity or topic you would like to see highlighted at the Open House? [Let us know here by August 1, 2025.](#)



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