

Mud, Sticks and Rocks- By Stan Southwick



I recently spent a week in South Lake Tahoe with my family escaping the heat and enjoying the cooler weather. That was at least the plan. It just so happened that Tahoe was having record heat that week. In any case, 90 degrees is better than 110. I took a short hike to Eagle Lake with my 21-month-old grandson. He is fascinated with sticks and rocks. The hike required several stops for him to pick up a stick or add another rock to the collection clenched in his hand. Younger children love and need interaction with nature. Some of us older ones like it and need it also.

Consultant of the Quarter

Our consultant recognition column will be presented on a quarterly basis so look for the next winner in the October issue. This will give you a few more weeks to let us know just how good you are!

The great outdoors has been the playground of the world since the beginning of time but the term “Nature Play” just recently crept into park planner’s vocabulary. Nature play provides opportunity for children to touch, feel and experience natural elements. The term “Nature Play” raises all sorts of red flags for the legal professionals. Is it safe to let kids play with rocks after all! We presented a natural play area in a local public park during one of our design review meetings. The response from the municipality was less than hoped for and bordered on mockery. That park is going to have rubber surfaces and metal play equipment... nothing natural about it.

A few years ago, we designed an entire playground for a preschool based completely around natural play. There was water + dirt = mud, sand, rocks, sticks, habitats for lizards and other critters. The intent was to let the kids get dirty. Due to funding issues, this natural playground has not been built. Many studies have been done on the beneficial effects of being “in” nature. I suppose that is why getting your hands dirty while gardening is so therapeutic.

Put on some old clothes, go outside, kick the dirt, turn a rock over and see what is underneath. It will be good for you and you might even discover something that has been right under your nose all the time.

“Man’s heart, away from nature, becomes hard; [the Lakota] knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too.”
— Luther Standing Bear

Favorite Flora:

Nassella (Stipa) tenuissima- Mexican Feather Grass- By Caryl Davies



What’s not to love about grass-like plants? This month’s favorite flora is the Mexican Feather Grass, Nassella (or Stipa) tenuissima. It is native to Argentina, northern Mexico and the southwest US and grows to 1-2 feet high and as wide. This plant has bright green delicate arching stems and wispy cream-colored seed heads that create a graceful movement even in the slightest breeze. The sun highlights the seed heads and creates a stunning photographic moment. Plant in part to full sun and provide good drainage. This plant can tolerate temperatures down to 20 degrees.

Although this beauty is easy to grow, it can get invasive. However, with its ability to readily re-seed, it can be a wonderful addition to a larger area or slope for mass

coverage. If you have a small area or want just a few plants, keep in mind you may need to remove any stray new plants. Add this delicate grass to your rock garden, dry streambed, next to landscape boulders, or place them in planter pots. Mexican Feather Grass looks great on its own, or plant with other drought and heat-resistant plants such as Purple Smoke Bush (Cotinus coggygria), Autumn Joy Sedum (Sedum v. ‘Autumn Joy’), Purple Trailing Lantana (Lantana montevidensis) , and Variegated Yucca (Yucca filamentosa ‘Variegata’).

Photo of the Month



Colosseum
Rome, Italy
Cassi Dawes