

# GOOD DIRT

## THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ANDERSON VALLEY LAND TRUST

SUMMER, 2020

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### ***Calycanthus occidentalis***

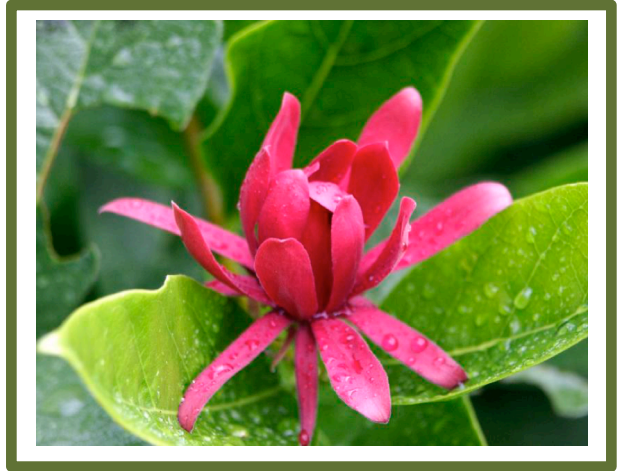
*Calycanthus occidentalis* should be pretty well leafed-out by the time this newsletter reaches you. A deciduous shrub to about 12 feet tall, spice bush, aka sweet-shrub, has a dense growth pattern of many crowded light brown woody stems arising from the underground roots that form the vehicle for how the plants spread. Foliage comprises large oval rich green rough-feeling leaves that when bruised exude a pleasant sweet/spicy fragrance that *Sunset Western Garden Book* likens to smelling like an “old wine barrel”. The leaves turn a pleasant pale yellow in autumn before dropping. In summer, the understated flowers offer their own quiet beauty, scattered amongst the foliage at the branch ends. Composed of numerous narrow maroon petals held upward, they are reminiscent of lotus flowers, and are followed by distinctive urn-shaped seed pods that become woody and persist on the branch tips, even when the plants are leafless. These pods are quite decorative, can be used in flower arrangements, and provide a good identification clue during the winter months when plants are otherwise bare.

*Calycanthus occidentalis* grows naturally where soil moisture is abundant - canyons and streamsides being its preferred habitat, where at least dappled shade is available. Spice bush ranges mostly from central California northward into Washington, at elevations from sea level to about 5,000 feet.

Indigenous peoples used spice bush for medicinal purposes as well as to make arrows and in basketweaving. The aromatic bark can be scraped and dried for a cinnamon substitute, but that use is more commonly attributed to its eastern cousin, *Calycanthus floridus*.

If you are able to get out and about, you may encounter this understated but charming shrub upon your forays into nature. And in these topsy-turvy days, weeks, months, perhaps you can find some solace in musing with the plants, as they grow, flower and fruit, blissfully unperturbed by what’s happening in the world around them.

Written by Jane E. Miller



### **Promoting Sustainable Agriculture**

Though AVLT’s primary focus is Anderson Valley and the Navarro River watershed, we are also a member of the proactive Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation committee (SALC) in Mendocino County. The group began in 2017 as a result of Mendocino County’s receipt of a grant from the CA Department of Conservation, which was administered by the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District (MCRCD). It was designed to research how to help protect Mendocino County farm and rangelands from conversion to non-agricultural uses, create a resilient agricultural community, and promote climate-beneficial agricultural practices. A mapping and assessment of farm and rangelands at risk of conversion was conducted with recommendations for policies and actions that could be undertaken by the County and community partners to conserve agricultural land resources.

The CA State program <[www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/grant-programs/SALCP](http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/grant-programs/SALCP)> invests in agricultural land conservation with revenue from the California Climate Investments (CCI) Fund. This fund is derived from cap-and-trade auctions that are administered by the California Air Resources Board. The funds are available for projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions while providing additional benefits for communities.

The primary goal of the Mendocino County SALC committee is to conserve farm, ranch, and natural resource lands throughout Mendocino County while encouraging responsible and balanced development by:

- Raising awareness among Mendocino County communities about how agricultural land contributes to the economy, ecosystem, and quality of life;
- Encouraging a county planning process that includes the use of conservation tools such as conservation easements, tax incentives, urban growth boundaries, zoning, and ag mitigation programs to conserve agricultural land; and
- Increasing communication and collaboration with diverse stakeholders and decision makers.

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## PRESIDENTS MESSAGE: SHELTERING IN PLACE

At the time of this writing most of us have been sheltering in place since mid-March. The spring landscape in Anderson Valley is bursting with life all around us, undeterred by the effects of a global pandemic, although this crisis has brought change to our lives in ways we never thought possible. One of the most significant is distancing ourselves and how that affects our programs. This time of year is often a time we look forward to getting together for special gatherings, wildflower shows, festivals, and educational outings. Our events in collaboration with the Galbreath Preserve are one example, and these programs have been re-scheduled until such time it is deemed safe to share these experiences with you. Throughout the year, AVLT schedules visits with landowners who have entrusted our organization to steward a conservation easement on their land. These in-person interactions are also largely on hold, although we continue to look at other ways of communication, including virtual alternatives and other technology to do so. In the mean time, visit our website for updates on upcoming events and other information about the work we do.

At a time like this when it is especially important to reflect on the positive, it gives us a sense of satisfaction about the work we do when we receive letters from easement holders such as the one we have included in this issue from Maureen Bowman. Maureen recently sold her property here, but she and her late husband Michael left their mark on Anderson Valley in many ways, including the creation of a conservation easement on their land that will protect it for future generations. Michael's interest in providing children in Anderson Valley an outlet for their bounding energy, curiosity and enthusiasm led to the creation of the "Bowman Blue" tennis courts at AV High School. His forward thinking included constructing the courts with three distinct sets of lines for different age groups. And yes Maureen, as you once remarked, the AVLT cannot manage climate change by itself, although every conservation easement, such as the one you created for your property, does help sequester carbon. Or in the mind set of the Scottish town planner and social activist Patrick Geddes, it is not too far fetched to say you and the AVLT "think globally, act local".

Dear readers, stay healthy and thank you for your continued support and generosity.

Sincerely,  
Patrick Miller, President, AVLT Board of Directors

### A NOTE FROM MAUREEN BOWMAN

Dear AV Land Trust Board and Staff,

With sadness, relief and an abundance of fabulous memories I am leaving my property in the hands of new owners. I am very fortunate. I am sure they will continue to care for and respect this land.

Michael and I always believed we were stewards of the land not owners. We sought to improve the land for forest health and safety, plus the pleasure of nature lovers. I hope we did. We sure had a good time working and enjoying our acres for 25 years.

The AV Land Trust made it possible for us to prevent overdevelopment and commercial use of this parcel in perpetuity. I wish you had control over climate change. Asking a bit much of the Trust?!!?

Barbara, this Fall may be a good time to finally get your walk into the lower portion.

Thank you all so much for the endless hours you put in making the Trust a viable endeavor. I wish you success in keeping this valley special.

Gratefully,  
Maureen

### A STEWARDSHIP PRIMER – ONE ROLE OF THE AVLT

All the easements that AVLT accepts are contracts in perpetuity, and forever is a very long time. An easement attaches to the land and rides along as time passes and owners change through sale or inheritance. The Land Trust monitors compliance with the easement terms regularly and is required to preserve and enforce the agreement. That responsibility may become more involved over time as new owners explore their own visions and may test them against the easement's terms.

A Conservation Easement is a binding contract between the AVLT and a property owner who voluntarily gives up certain rights to develop or use their land. In effect, it molds future use of the land by others in line with the original owner's vision. Every conservation easement includes a list of specific "conservation values" selected by owner, and restrictions on the land's use to protect those values.

Each easement is custom-written to reflect choices made by the original donor of the easement and unique land characteristics. Thus none of the twenty-seven easements held by AVLT are identical. Indeed, some specifically prohibit conduct that others specifically allow. As time goes on, it is the Land Trust's responsibility to monitor and enforce compliance with the conditions in the easement; it is the owner's responsibility to respect the conditions of the easement as they use their land.

It is not surprising that we have had no instances where the original donors living on their property did not adhere to their own easement conditions. However, over the years, about 1/2 of the

easements the AVLT holds have changed hands. Whether this happens by inheritance or sale, the easement and its conditions transfer automatically and are binding on the new owner. Each such transfer is a crucial moment in the life of an easement. We often work with real estate representatives or prospective buyers to answer questions they have about easement conditions prior to purchase.

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## **A STEWARDSHIP PRIMER – CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2**

When we monitor an easement we are often asked, particularly by new owners, if an easement condition can be eliminated or changed. Generally the answer is simply no, it cannot. However, there are rare instances where the answer might be yes. In considering proposed easement amendments, the AVLT subscribes to the principles and standards of the Land Trust Alliance. Generally an easement can be changed only if it clearly has a net beneficial or neutral effect on the relevant conservation values protected by the easement, it is consistent with the documented intent of the original donor, and it is able to be enforced by the land trust. Any proposed change must also comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws, not jeopardize the land trust's tax-exempt status, and be consistent with the land trust's mission.

If a problem arises in enforcing an easement condition, our resolution process always begins, and virtually always ends, with friendly discussions and agreed-upon solutions with the landowner. We are fortunate in that in 29 years, we've had only one serious dispute over an easement where ultimately we needed to seek court guidance as a last resort to clarify understanding of the easement's terms.

The expense of monitoring and enforcing an easement is funded through a distinct Stewardship Endowment Fund we maintain. That fund has been built over time from individual donations by original easement donors, to assure enforcement of the easement conditions, particularly after the property changes owners. This is important both to respect the vision of the original owners and to satisfy the ongoing legal requirements of a Conservation Easement. Our Stewardship Endowment Fund is wholly separate from our operational funding. The latter is based on donations we receive from readers like you who support land conservation.

For more information about the ins and outs of conservation easements please visit the "FAQ's" page on our web site.



## **PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE – CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**

The Mendocino County SALC group meets monthly and is composed of a wide variety of representatives from the MCRCD; Mendocino Local Agency Formation Commission; USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service; Mendocino County Farm Bureau; Mendocino County Board of Supervisors; the Planning Commission; Ag Commissioner; farm and ranch owners; UC Cooperative Extension; and Anderson Valley, Inland, and Mendocino land trusts.

In 2019, the group initiated a successful second grant for the County, also administered by MCRCD, which builds on the research gleaned from the original grant. The current grant objectives include a growth management plan for the County that acknowledges the value of important farm and rangeland and includes the adoption of reasonable urban growth boundaries. It will develop an agricultural component for a future countywide County Climate Action Plan (CAP); the scaling up of a Carbon Farm Plan and Soil Health program; and increase landowner participation in the Williamson Act and conservation easements. A critical component of the work plan is coalition building and features an educational outreach campaign aimed at raising community awareness about farm and rangeland values and the tools and strategies available to protect important agricultural land from conversion to residential or commercial use.

With the advent of COVID 19 many of the goals of SALC, such as encouragement of a vibrant and diverse local economy, the production of local food, and the preservation of rural character, cultural heritage, and quality of life, have become even more imperative. The committee aims to provide county residents, landowners, business owners, and County officials with clear and concise information to allow for responsible and balanced development while conserving agricultural values and natural resources. By joining the SALC group AVLT hopes to protect more farm and rangeland in Anderson Valley. For more information go to <https://mcrcd.org/project/mendocino-county-sustainable-agricultural-lands-strategy-program> or send an email to AVLT at [avlt@mcn.org](mailto:avlt@mcn.org).

## **THANK YOU TREY!**

It is with regret that we say 'au revoir' to our General Manager Trey Petrey who is branching out to new horizons in the Mendocino County environmental community. Starting earlier this year, Trey accepted a full time position at the Noyo Center for Marine Science.

For six years, Trey was often defined as the glue that held the AVLT together, a designation-in-jest that did not do justice to him, his talents, his intellect, and his even demeanor. Over those years, Trey continually expanded his interest and knowledge of the AVLT to the point where the Board recognized he was indeed our General Manager and started referencing him as such. He served those on the Board, our easement holders, and you, our volunteers and contributors so well that the AVLT thrived with his presence and under his guidance. We sincerely wish him only the best of futures. He deserves it.

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“Dedicated to the Preservation and Restoration of Our Unique Rural Landscape”

**INSIDE DIRT**

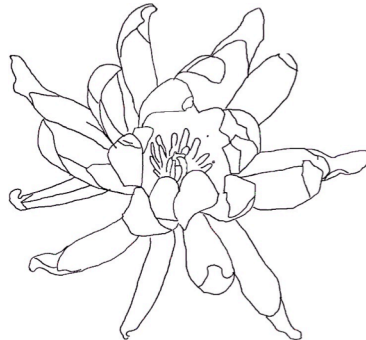
STEWARDSHIP PRIMER

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

CALYCANTHUS OCCIDENTALIS

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS



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**THANK YOU!**  
**Wee Boont Foundation**

Each year, AVLT joins a number of other Anderson Valley area non-profit organizations with a group of volunteers to assist with operational support for the Annual Legendary Boonville Beer Festival. The proceeds from the festival are returned to the community in support of these organizations, and we are grateful to be one of the beneficiaries thanks to Anderson Valley Brewing Company’s Wee Boont Foundation.

Alas, even as this years the Festival has been postponed to 2021, we sincerely want the new AVB owner Kevin McGee to know how much the contributions we have received over the years have meant to not only the AVLT but the entire non-profit community of the Anderson Valley.

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