



## LA VIE EN ROSE

Q&A With Bonnie Jo Manion

**B**onnie Jo Manion did not expect to be giving royal waves from aboard a float during the 127th Annual Tournament of Roses parade in January. Yet there she was, rolling past tens of thousands of parade-goers, being seen by tens of millions more on television, riding on Miracle-Gro's Governor's Trophy-winning float depicting a California mission. A garden blogger and lifestyle consultant based in Encinitas, Bonnie Jo was selected by Miracle-Gro for the honor. She holds a degree in avian science, co-authored *Gardening With Free-Range Chickens for Dummies* and is an award-winning home vintner. Through her writing, speaking engagements and cooking classes, she offers a distinctly Southern California take on French country living.

**Did you have any idea you were going to be selected to participate in the Tournament of Roses parade?**

I received a surprise call last September. I didn't enter a contest or anything like that. It was just from writing my blog.

**What did you have to do as part of the Miracle-Gro team?**

I was one of four California home gardeners selected. We were involved in some of the pre-parade activities, as well as riding on the float. More importantly, we were bringing plant material from our gardens to be placed on the float and using social media and our writing to talk about the journey leading up to the parade and all its events. Encinitas has a rich heritage of flower and

bulb growing, so I felt I was representing the community of Encinitas and San Diego and the heritage that they have.

**What plant material did you bring?**

I have a Mediterranean garden, which is basically drought tolerant, so I brought large pails of olive tree foliage and branches, as well as lavender and rosemary cuttings

**What does it take to put one of those floats together?**

It's really incredible, because these floats are put together in huge barns. The colors and visuals and fragrances are really amazing, just with the sheer mass of all these flowers. The floats come together very quickly in the last 24 hours before the parade. There are so many volunteers that have been helping put these floats together for years; they're really dedicated.

**Is there a little bit of panic in that last 24 hours?**

There is a certain amount of electricity or frenzy, but it's all good. You can tell that it's organized and under control. But each rose had to be placed in a little vial of water, and there were around 12,000 'Milva' roses along the skirt of the Miracle-Gro float.

**How do you think San Diego is doing in regard to the drought?**

I'm very proud of the gardeners that I know and talk to. I think San Diego County has gotten very smart about the drought and better landscaping; we simply have no





CASEY ROGERS / AP PHOTO

Miracle-Gro invited Bonnie Jo Manion and three other California home gardeners to participate in its Tournament of Roses float in January.

choice. When you can only water twice a week for 10 minutes, you just cannot have an English garden anymore. I think that gardeners have gotten onboard with the general techniques of collecting rainwater and working with plants that don't require a lot of water.

**What's your advice for gardeners dealing with the drought?**

I have gone in the direction of planting a Mediterranean garden, which means drought-tolerant plants that do very well with long, hot summers; mild winters; and drying winds. These are the same sort of workhorse plants that do well in about the same conditions in the Mediterranean. Plants that are ideally suited for your loca-

tion require less water. I compost, which is a wonderful way to bring nutrients and moisture-saving practices to plants. I also collect rainwater off of my storage shed in rain barrels. And I grow as much food as possible; I love to cook from the garden. There are many ways that you can have a beautiful garden in spite of the drought that California has been experiencing.

**San Diego has different microclimates. How can a gardener figure out what's best for where they live?**

Be aware of your location, your surroundings and your property. Of course, this takes time. Be aware if you have low spots in your garden where it stays damp. Also, tap into your local nurseries, because they're very

savvy about the areas where their customers live and how they can help them. And then also consult local garden clubs; we are very blessed with numerous garden clubs in San Diego County. The Master Gardener program has a hotline that is free, and you'll get a live person who's knowledgeable on plants and the drought and all aspects of gardening.

**What's the relation between chickens and gardening?**

There is a great relationship. I compost with my kitchen scraps and manure from my hens. They scratch and aerate the soil. They eat bugs. Chickens are garden companions as well as helpers. You can train them, and they have a lot of personality. ❖