



Are Frankenstein plants living in your garden?



Gardening A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

Watching a fun, not-so-scary, Halloween movie has become my Halloween tradition. I think I'm going to watch "Young Frankenstein" this year, which got me thinking about grafting and how that has become such an important part of our landscapes.

OK. That probably needs a little explanation. Just in case you're not sure what I'm talking about, indulge me for a minute. It was approximately 200 years ago that the young author, Mary Shelley, wrote a story about the monster that moaned and groaned his way into a book that was eventually made into several renditions of movies; and the rest is history.

This story was actually considered the first true science fiction novel rather than a mere fiction piece because it drew on the scientific concepts of grafting. The story tells of a monster, named Frankenstein, that was put together from pieces of cadavers. Through a jolt of electricity from lighting, the monster comes to life. A much more lighthearted movie version of Frankenstein, "Young Frankenstein" by Mel Brooks, came out in 1974.

I think we never give it much thought, but today we actually seek out and use grafted "creatures" in our landscapes. Grafting is really nothing new though. It's been used for thousands of years to create new and improved plants. And we don't even need a lightning bolt to accomplish it.

Grafting is simply joining two living plants from the same family into one by uniting a piece

of the grafting plant or bud with the living plant. The purpose is to create a plant with desirable characteristics. Grafting can provide us with plants that are sturdier, more disease resistant, or even a different size than the original. It's can make some plants more cold hardy or adapted to a variety of soil types. We can have fruit trees that will be ready to produce in a few short years rather than a more lengthy time. It can even produce a better tasting product.

Grafting is how we get different cultivars of the same fruit on a tree. Fruits such as Honeycrisp apples or Cresthaven peaches are from grafted rootstock. Did you know that through grafting you could even have four, five, even six different fruit varieties on a single trunk?

I don't know if the tree is still there, but at one time there was a tree across the street from the entrance to the Star Drive-In in Montrose that would bloom in the spring with a canopy of white flowers on one side and pink on the other half. What a great tree! Through grafting we can end up with fruit trees that are "self-pollinating" so you don't need a male and a female tree for it to produce. That's really nice for homeowners.

Last summer, the Montrose Botanic Society grafted a historic apricot tree that was discovered growing on an old homestead site in Cerise Park. This old tree was a hidden treasure that had grown undetected and neglected for years. When found, it was showing its age and neglect and would not survive much longer. Because it was such an exciting discovery, people wanted the history of this tree to live on for future generations to enjoy. So the tree was grafted. How great is that!

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The haunting nature of the Gold Camp tunnels



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Having spent a lifetime in the great outdoors, I can't count the number of times I have been scared. From bears in camp terrorizing coolers looking for food, being shot at, a boat motor that wouldn't start 40 miles into the Everglades, all the way to being lost on a mountain in a blizzard, I have had more than my share of gut wrenching terror episodes.

Getting scared seems to be part of the lure of the outdoors, or maybe it is what you get as a side effect when you screw up. Either way, I openly admit that being scared is not an emotion I would intentionally seek out, especially in the woods.

Yet, there are people who like to be scared. There is a crowd that will watch all the scary movies, and become terrified to the point of tears, all the while claiming to have fun. These people drive hundreds of miles for a chance to visit a haunted house. My daughter is part of that crowd.

Sarah, who is my youngest child, has always loved the haunted and unexplained. She has taken the nighttime haunted tour in Key West, which includes a midnight stop in a cemetery, and countless similar tours in Colorado mountain mining towns. I have always refused the invitation to accompany her on such jaunts.

Part of the reason people like to be scared out of their wits from monster movies or roller coasters is because deep down, your brain knows you are safe. The human body releases dopamine when you are scared, creating a state of arousal similar to when you are excited.

Anyone who is an adrenaline junkie, similar to yours truly, enjoys the challenges and thrills of getting scared. In my case, getting scared involves going fast in offshore boats and taking chances, but never messing with the dark side and supernatural. Ghosts, goblins and evil spirits need to stay where they are. At least in my race boat, I was driving. If you are one of those thrill seekers, I have a place for you.



The last remains tunnel you can drive a vehicle through on Gold Camp Road, but enter at your own risk. If you hear laughter and giggles, or find handprints on your car, don't say I did not warn you. (Wikimedia Commons)

Visiting haunted places, seeing, hearing and feeling ghostly apparitions is a little bit different then a scary movie. I know the movie is not real, but I am not so sure about the ghosts that inhabit such "haunted" places. Perhaps they are best left alone. I sure don't need something else looking for me.

The Pikes Peak region, including Cripple Creek, has long been considered one of the most haunted places in the United States. Restless spirits are said to roam the towns, abandoned mines and old hotels. Everything from screams, moving objects, strange laughter and doors opening and closing are blamed on displaced spirits. A perfect area for me to stay away from.

The most terrifying encounters seem to be around the haunted tunnels on the Gold Camp Road. These tunnels are along the long abandoned rail bed of the Short Line Railroad. The tracks covered a twisting 31-mile trail between the mines and Colorado Springs between 1901 and 1920. As the tunnels were built in the late 1800's, it is said many workers lost their lives in the dangerous conditions.

The tracks went through a series of nine tunnels over the stretch of tracks. The tracks were removed in 1929, and the remaining bed was turned into a roadway, passing through seven of the old tunnels. People that travelled through the tunnels can still see the soot on the ceilings from the old locomotives that used them.

The tale starts with a school bus full of children passing through the tunnel 3 when a partial collapse occurred, killing all the children and the driver. Another account claims

the bus driver was suicidal and crashed into an oncoming train. The noisy spirits of these deceased children are said to inhabit the tunnel and surrounding area to this day.

Visitors have reported everything from tiny handprints in the dust on their cars parked in the area, to being scratched and groped by the unseen spirits. Hikers often report hearing the laughter and giggles of the children. The entrance to the tunnel is completely gated off but visitors stand by the entrance and claim to hear the children inside.

Other visitors report seeing cloaked individuals walking into the tunnels, while some claim to have seen devil worshippers performing rituals inside. Many other strange noises and occurrences have been reported on a regular basis.

The truth is, the bus accident never happened, or at least, there is no record of it anywhere. However, there are other documented happenings that are not easily explained away.

Many auto accidents have occurred along the Gold Camp Road over the years. Local authorities report nearly a dozen wrecked cars still resting below the road in various locations, most from long forgotten accidents.

The wickedly curved section of road before Point Sublime was notoriously dangerous, being the site of numerous fatalities caused by vehicles plummeting off the narrow road, down the gravel slope.

Time was not good to any of the tunnels. In the 1980s, an 8-mile section of road was closed because the imminent collapse tunnel 3 above Silver Cascade Falls. Many of the other tunnels have collapsed and are completely inaccessible

and the road is closed to vehicular traffic.

If you decide to visit this area, and see for yourself if it is in fact haunted, follow Gold Camp Road until the tunnels appear. You can also take Old Stage Road (US Forest Service Road 368) to the Helen Hunt Tunnel and park at the collapsed Tunnel 6.

From there, a 6-mile hike or bike ride will take you to Helen Falls tunnel, passing through tunnels 5 and 4 along the way. You can also hike from tunnel 6 to tunnel 3 on Gold Camp Road. Many people hike up to the infamous tunnel 3 at night to see just how scary it can be.

All of this road and tunnel system is part of the Gold Belt Scenic Byway. Before heading up, check with the Pike National Forest Field Office in Colorado Springs for the latest information and road conditions.

After my daughter reads this, she is going to want to take a trip to the Gold Camp tunnels. I am going to refuse the invitation for the trip, as I have all the others for such paranormal excursions. I'm not saying the place is or is not haunted; call me an agnostic. I am saying that if spirits do inhabit such a place, I think they should do so without me.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.

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