

APL Volumes

Season 2, Episode 3: SEED BETWEEN THE LINES

This episode was transcribed by APL volunteer Martha Ladyman.

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

LETICIA: Hey, y'all! Welcome to Season Two of APL Volumes, Austin Public Library's podcast about all the cool things at the library and the staff who are passionate about them. I'm Leticia Leal, your host for this season and a Teen Program Specialist at APL Central Library.

The theme of this season is Everything But The Books, where we explore parts of APL's collection and programming that you might not expect to find at a library. This episode is all about gardening, and I'm talking to Kate Abel, Adult Services Librarian at Central, and Monica Jones, the Branch Manager at Howson.

Let's dig in!

MUSIC

LETICIA: Hello. Welcome to APL Volumes. I am here today with Kate Abel and Monica Jones and we are talking about seeds and gardening. I'm really excited to see how this episode grows.

I did it already! Made a pun!

KATE: We're ready to dig in.

MONICA: We're ready to see what sprouts? No, that wasn't as good.

LETICIA: I liked it! I can't think of another pun. So let's just jump into things.

MONICA: We'll let it be an organic process.

LETICIA: We'll see what we can harvest from this conversation. Let's see if I can get a trowel and we can ... no, just kidding. We'll cut all those parts out.

But we're here and we're talking about the seed library and about gardening.

I'd like to start with Kate, and I want to ask you, what got you interested in developing a seed library for APL?

KATE: Well, once upon a time, in a far away place in library school, I took a class on collections in museums, libraries and archives. We pursued research on unconventional collections. A friend of mine suggested, "Why don't you do seeds?" From there research and the paper were born. But at the time it was considered a bit controversial.

There was a library in Pennsylvania that had started a seed collection and then they got in trouble with the Department of Agriculture.

LETICIA: Oh no! Why was that?

KATE: As I recall, they had some concerns about how the seeds were labeled, making sure that each packet contained the same number of seeds, various little fine print details. So the Department of Agriculture shut them down for a while.

And I thought, "I can't bring this up at APL. I don't want to introduce something"

LETICIA: Right. We do not want to be shut down by the Department of Agriculture.

KATE: Right! But fast forward a few years. I was chatting with our then Assistant Director, getting to know her in our new building, our current Central Library building. And she asked about different collections and different projects that we might want to pursue to help promote the library and get people excited about it. When I mentioned the seed paper she mentioned that she had worked at that library in Pennsylvania, and that they had gotten right past that pesky little problem with the Department of Agriculture, and that now everything was fine.

She introduced me to our then landscape technician, who was a member of the Central Texas Seed Savers. They had a number of seeds that they wanted to distribute to the public. But they didn't have a place with a lot of foot traffic. So they were hoping to find a partner in the library, somewhere where the public would be and would find them.

We got together, and then in 2019 the seed collection was born.

LETICIA: I like that you were able to overcome and then build. And now we have a beautiful seed library.

Monica, you are known throughout the APL system for your beautiful garden. Can you tell us how you started gardening and maybe some of your favorite plants?

MONICA: Yeah! It started in childhood. My grandmother had a massive garden growing up, and actually it started of chores that I really resented. She had about a half-acre sized garden north of Dallas. You know, when I would go stay with her over the summer it was my job to weed and water and pick. So every morning I would start out in the July Dallas heat, and I'd get out there and I'd be weeding and watering and picking from this garden that was full of things that I didn't like to eat anyway.

But as I did it I started enjoying seeing the process of things grow. I was a young kid, so I was a little more picky back then. But we grew everything from cantaloupe to luffa gourds and we would use them. You'd come to the breakfast table and there would be a bowl of cantaloupe. And she'd have all of her tomatoes and we'd have that for lunch in sandwiches. Whenever we took our showers we would bathe with luffas, which I found very scratchy as a child but now I really appreciate.

But really it was through my family. One of my mother's friends taught me to grow flowers, which kind of turned into my passion. But when my mom was in nursing school one of her fellow students was a gardener in central Austin, and she let me come to her garden and pick out all these seedlings and place them at my parent's house. They still grow! I planted them probably when I was about eight years old and I'm forty-two and they still reseed.

So that I found to be a phenomenal kind of legacy almost. I wouldn't have said that when I was that young.

LETICIA: Yeah! You are really getting to see the literal fruits of your labor.

MONICA: For decades and decades. Although they are not the same plants as they were when I planted them as a kid. They've changed and they've traveled to new parts of the yard. Which kind of annoys my dad, but there they are. And it's still a reminder of them. I get a call every year and it's like, "Oh, well, the larkspur you planted, it's blooming again."

I don't know. It's been really fun.

LETICIA: I'm a very amateur, and I think amateur is even a strong word, gardener. Can you remind me, what is the difference between perennials and annuals?

MONICA: So an annual is a plant, and Kate, you're also a gardener, right? An incredible gardener so correct me if I am wrong. But a perennial is a plant that will come up year after year, the same plant. And an annual is a plant that you have to replant every year. You have to replant the seeds.

So most wildflowers are annuals. Kate, am I getting this right?

KATE: Ooooh. That's a toughie. I would say that most wildflowers, when they come up the next year it's from their own seeds.

MONICA: They reseed themselves. But the plant doesn't survive.

KATE: I would agree with you. One of our many gardening listeners can call in and correct us.

MONICA: You say you are an amateur gardener, but I learn things new every single season. I am just floored about what I don't know. And I garden now in a community garden, so I am surrounded by actual master gardeners. And they school me constantly. It's hilarious.

So I think calling yourself an amateur gardener, I'm still an amateur gardener. I still have things that I learn consistently from all over.

LETICIA: What is one tip that you've received recently from the master gardener?

MONICA: So I was moving plots and so I was moving some established plants from my old pot to a bigger pot. And my friend Marsha, who is an illustrator here in Austin, Marsha Riti, you can read her book *The Picky Little Witch*. She's a master gardener. She's a gardener at Sunshine Community Gardens. And she was like, "You need to mud them in."

And I was like, "What does that even mean?"

LETICIA: Mud them in?

MONICA: So she showed me, and she learned it when she was taking a class at the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center. So you dig your hole, the appropriate-sized hole for your plant, and then you water that hole until it fills up. You soak the ground before you even put the plant in. You water the hole, you fill it up with water, and you put the seedling in. You cover it up and then you water it again.

So essentially you are surrounding that seedling with moisture and enough water. Because when you water from the top it takes awhile for that water to get down to the root ball. So mudding it in is where you give sufficient water where the roots are.

LETICIA: Like preheating an oven.

MONICA: Yeah!

LETICIA: But don't put any plants in the oven.

MONICA: Don't do it. Unless you want to eat them.

LETICIA: And what are some of your favorite early memories of gardening, Kate?

KATE: Along the same lines as Monica. My mom was a fantastic gardener. We really didn't have to worry about raking or mowing the lawn because we didn't have lawn to speak of. It was just all gardens. So she'd have me help her with the watering can or the hose.

But also like Monica, I wasn't super thrilled to participate. And she always seemed to have woes about the garden. "Oh, there's so much weeding! It's raining too much. It's not raining enough. The cute little baby bunnies are eating everything that I just toiled over."

LETICIA: One of them was wearing a sports jacket.

KATE: So to me at the time it seemed like a little more trouble than it was worth. And we lived in Minnesota so it seemed like as soon as it got warm enough to plant the garden, then we'd have a short period to complain about the garden, and then the garden would die.

LETICIA: Coming from Minnesota, that's a big difference coming here to Austin. The climate. So you've probably had to make adjustments in your gardening style to work with the native plants?

KATE: I never really picked it up there. It was kind of like starting from scratch. Like a child who is raised bilingual and then they don't really use the family language. But it comes back to them easily when they devote themselves to it again.

Once I got here and I realized that I could garden all year around, and even be more successful with some varieties in the winter than in the summer, it became a lot of fun. I really got hooked on kale and spinach and winter greens. So I would say winter is probably my favorite gardening season.

MONICA: I agree with you. Fall gardening is the easiest in Texas. It's the most fruitful for me. And it's really attractive. It's a really beautiful garden.

KATE: No mosquitos.

MONICA: No mosquitos. That's the best part.

LETICIA: That's a big bonus. One of my only successful gardens was a winter garden. It was so much leafy greens. So much Swiss chard.

MONICA: Yeah, it's great! In Texas we have two growing seasons. We have fall and we have spring. My family is from Canada, and when they talk about over wintering their garden, I talk about over summering our garden here. Because our summer is essentially our winter.

So how is your garden doing, Kate?

KATE: My mom just asked me that. She finally got her garden going. Very excited. The baby bunnies are back, but otherwise it's going well. And I said, "Well, mine's going into dormancy. A lot of tomatoes. A lot of peppers. Just got to keep watering them."

MONICA: Yeah, it's the best part. It's kind of funny. You just mulch and you water and you pick it back up in October.

KATE: Right. Plenty of seeds lined up for the fall.

LETICIA: So is that hobby a perennial or an annual?

So let's talk a little bit more about the seed library. So where is the seed library located here in Central? I haven't visited it yet.

KATE: It's up top, on the sixth floor, in the northwest corner. One of the favorite features that we were able to establish is the use of our old classic card catalog cabinet, with the little drawers for the seed packets.

LETICIA: Oh, that's awesome.

KATE: When we were starting the collection we recalled that we had that furniture, and I thought, "Cross your fingers that we can get permission to use it." We did. And everybody loves it. It makes a great fixture to store the seeds. And it's a way to harken back to the libraries of the past, even while people are searching for books at the computer station.

We've got some gardening books over there as well. And we publicize our seed gatherings and upcoming programs.

LETICIA: Nice! I did see that there is a community seed swap coming up sometime soon. What kind of seeds are you hoping that the community will bring in?

KATE: Well, a lot of opportunities. We have seed gatherings on the second Monday of each month from 3:00 to 4:30 PM down on the first floor in the demo area. Those are usually pretty small. People can bring in whatever kinds of seeds they have. We had one yesterday and we had some seniors from the County Guerrero Senior Center bring in cilantro from the garden that they have there.

We had, one of the participants brought in seeds that she had found at different parks, on the trail nearby. Some cottonwood trees. She had some maple seeds from Lost Maples State Park. So that was a lot of fun.

LETICIA: That's awesome. That's a great addition to our seed library.

KATE: And you don't have to bring your own seeds. We have donations throughout the month. So whatever we have available we bring down to the demo area, and then people can just get together to put them into the little envelopes and label them for checkout, and talk about their gardens, and get to know each other. Just a fun way to build community.

LETICIA: Yes. Gardening really is all about community. And I remember talking to you and you saying you wanted to partner with some community gardens. Have you been able to reach out to anyone about that?

KATE: We're especially hopeful that we can set up some partnerships between our branch library collections and whatever community garden is nearest to them. We've got most of our branches offering seed collections now that are smaller versions of the collection here.

But the big request that they always have is for more seeds. They have lots of seeds checked out and they don't have as many donated seeds coming in. So, looking to the future, we would love to see each of those collections have a nearby community garden partner, and then the members of that community garden can of course pick up seeds at the branch and then bring seeds back when they have them.

LETICIA: You brought up that we have a bunch of different kinds of gardening books. What is one of the more interesting or useful gardening books that you've found in our collection?

KATE: When we were talking earlier, we both confessed to being lazy gardeners. And a lot of people have this confession if they are willing to admit it. We have a book called *The Deck Chair Gardener*, which could also be called *The Lazy Gardener*. It's really funny. It takes a lighthearted approach. And it's also really helpful.

You don't have to labor as hard as my mom or maybe Monica's grandma did. You can follow those tips, see what grows well. There are a lot of time savers that the author offers. And your garden still looks great. Everybody enjoys it. And you can relax in it instead of always sweating and working so hard.

LETICIA: Yes, that is my goal.

Monica, do you have a favorite?

MONICA: A favorite gardening book?

LETICIA: Yeah, a favorite gardening book.

MONICA: Or book pertaining to gardening?

LETICIA: Just favorite book in general. No, I'm just kidding.

MONICA: Well, how long do you have?

I think, if I was going to talk about books that discuss growing and how to grow, I would really love *The Cut Flower Garden* as far as learning to grow flowers. I think it really changed my mind about how to approach flowers. And also I love the book called *Vegetables Love Flowers*. It's just learning to plant flowers and vegetables together to increase your pollinators, to support your pollinators and also to support your own kitchen garden.

And then I also love, like, there's plenty of fun books out there that teach you how to use your garden supplies. As a gardener, you sometimes just have a bunch of one thing and you are like, "What do I even do with this?"

Well, I love *Floral Libations* because it shows me how to incorporate flowers into my booze. It's one of those little things where if you have a little bit of time and you can make something extra pretty, it increases my personal enjoyment. I'm like, "Oh, look at that. Not only does it taste good, but it looks good. And I did it."

LETICIA: I agree. I like aesthetically pleasing things as well.

MONICA: Yeah. And you know, I'm not very fancy with the way I dress or the way I do my hair. I wear Birkenstocks every day. But if I can make something a little fancy in my life, then I'm like, "Oh, look at me!"

LETICIA: I think that Birkenstocks are a classic gardening footwear.

MONICA: They are very supportive. I definitely enjoy them.

KATE: Can we make drinks with our winter kale?

MONICA: I'm sure we could. I'm sure we could put it in our Bloody Mary mix if we wanted to be extra healthful.

LETICIA: Speaking of pollinators, you brought up pollinators just now. I just learned, because I was learning about, well, I knew what pollinators were. But I was like, "Oh, bees and birds." But I learned that small mammals and reptiles, lizards, and bats! Yes! A favorite in Austin.

So I was learning about all the different pollinators here. What are some plants that you can plant to attract the different pollinators here in Austin?

MONICA: Oh, man! I think that just planting natives is probably the most important thing that you can plant. Native flowering plants. I just planted for the first time, and Kate, you may know the actual name for this, but Mexican sunflowers?

KATE: Tithonia.

MONICA: I planted those for the first time. And man, the pollinators love them. They are gorgeous, too. And you can cut them. They have a good vase life.

LETICIA: I love sunflowers. I accidentally grew some. Speaking of lazy gardening.

MONICA: Now these will reseed. But these are not yellow. They are traffic cone orange. They are vibrant.

KATE: Or stop sign red.

MONICA: Or stop sign red. They are a very, very vibrant color.

LETICIA: That sounds lovely. Orange is one of my favorite colors. It feel it is an underrated color, actually.

KATE: Gorgeous color. So yeah, I agree with you. Orange is spectacular.

MONICA: Can you say the name of that plant again?

KATE: It's called Tithonia. And it could go straight into the lazy gardener book that we are all cowriting. You scatter the seeds. It will take care of itself. It's beautiful. It's very well adapted to the local environment here. You can watch the pollinators and cut the flowers and until we get another Snowvid, it won't die.

MONICA: It's pretty big. It can get up to, what, four feet?

KATE: It grows fast, it grows tall, but it's not aggressive. It's not going to jump out your other plants.

MONICA: Give it a little bit of room.

LETICIA: So what has excited you about seeing the community interact, coming in and getting different seeds? Have we heard any cool stories, some success stories about them growing something special or having any successes with harvests, with crops? Any big success stories that come from the seed library, from any patrons?

MONICA: What I think is most exciting is when people check out seeds and then bring back their own seeds, because they have successfully grown those seeds to the point where they can collect more and donate it.

And they are always, I don't know, in my experience they are incredibly proud. And it's an experience that I have had myself. When I first saw the seed library at Central Library and I went to a program that Kate presented at with the Central Texas Seed Savers...

KATE: That's right, those are our founding partners. Central Texas Seed Savers.

LETICIA: Central Texas Seed Savers. Let's all say it.

MONICA: I had never really practiced saving seeds. I just threw them right back into my garden and then go through the process of weeding them out when I had too many the next season. So being conscious of the seeds was a real game changer for me. It made me appreciate the changing of the seasons more. It's like you have a second harvest from your plants. Not only do you get the fruit, not only do you get the flower, but then also there is, you leave some so you can harvest the seeds later.

It was kind of transformative for me, Kate. I really loved it.

LETICIA: That's a really lovely way to think about it. I guess a new way to give. The plant is continuously providing.

MONICA: It is. And they are really beautiful in their own way. Kate has a book she can talk about. But like seeds are beautiful.

KATE: They are gorgeous. I think you are alluding to *The Hidden Life of Seeds*? Now I can't get the title right. But we can find it in our catalog or you can find it. It's an oversized photography book with just huge blowups of some common seeds but some quite rare seeds. They look like alien life forms. But they are right here amongst us. Just super tiny so we don't always get that view of them.

MONICA: Yeah, they are just packaged, preserved life for months and months until the perfect conditions come around and they can grow all over again. It's magical, really.

LETICIA: Wow! When you put it like that it really does make it seem like a really beautiful and magical process. And you know what? It is.

MONICA: It is. It's pretty spectacular.

LETICIA: There's one book that we have in our system that is called *Don't Throw It, Grow It*. And it's about growing plants and things from your food scraps. And I thought that was really interesting.

MONICA: I have an onion growing on my windowsill right now because we were grilling with friends and my friend Bret was like, "Don't throw that away." And I was like, "I was going to compost it." And he was like, "Don't even compost it. Let's grow another." And I was like, "OK." And so we're doing it.

LETICIA: And is it growing?

MONICA: Yeah, it's growing. Now, will it grow a bulbous red onion like it used to be? I don't know. Kate, what do you think?

KATE: We have teeny tiny little potatoes that grew from composted potatoes. Much smaller, but just as delicious as the original. We have more large tomatoes that we did not plant than we have cherry tomatoes which we did plant. So I say if it grows, stick with it.

MONICA AND LETICIA TOGETHER: Don't throw it! Grow it!

LETICIA: I'm into that! I think we should say more things in unison.

MONICA: I'm all about it.

LETICIA: But that book was really interesting. Like you could grow a mango from a mango pit. Or carrots from the carrot tops. I just checked it out. I checked it out and I read it. But I did not implement it.

But one time I accidentally, no it wasn't an accident. It was an experiment. I told you about my potato experiment, how we threw some potatoes into the back yard. And we kind of put dirt over them. And it worked! It grew! We grew potatoes.

The dog dug them up and then I cooked them later. But I was like, wow, we made these just by throwing some old potatoes in the yard. So I think that is the true actual definition of lazy gardening. It couldn't be any lazier.

MONICA: And that's a part of gardening, just seeing what will grow. It's amazing what wants to live and thrive. It's kind of remarkable.

KATE: Every child is amazed to see a seed sprout.

MONICA: That's true.

KATE: And then we lose track of that. You have an experience with your composted potatoes and you recover some of that magic.

LETICIA: Yes. I always did like it when you would grow from a bean sprout in elementary school, and you would watch it unfurl and grow. It's fascinating that all of that is seemingly inside of that little bean.

MONICA: Well, it is. It engages so many of our senses when we garden. It's not like sitting down and reading, which I thoroughly enjoy. But it engages your sight and your smell and your touch and your taste. It engages all of you. Even listening to the seeds rattle, hearing the branches move. It engages all of your senses in really unique ways. That's one of the nicest things about gardening and getting out there. It's immersive.

LETICIA: I agree. So pollinators, they need plants for nectar. And then they need pollen as well. Where am I going with this? I actually have no idea where. I'm sorry.

Those are the two things that pollinators need. But I have nowhere to go with that.

MONICA: Where you are going with that is what the plants need. The plants need the pollinators too. It's a symbiotic relationship.

LETICIA: My favorite relationship.

MONICA: Balanced. So balanced. But yeah, we talk about pollinators all the time. But we are also simultaneously discussing the need of the plant. We talk about the incredible migration of Monarchs as pollinators. But then our native milkweeds are some of the most incredible plants out there.

All right, Kate, what is your favorite milkweed?

KATE: Antelope horn.

MONICA: Me too. It's the best milkweed.

KATE: It's so pretty. I didn't know it was milkweed when I got here, and I didn't know why people were so excited about milkweed. Because I was picturing what I knew in Minnesota. It has a big fun brown pod but it's just not that attractive. It doesn't have any cool flowers to speak of.

Antelope horns are just gorgeous. I understand why they immediately disappear from the seed collection whenever we have them.

LETICIA: What do they look like when they bloom?

MONICA: Nature's fireworks.

LETICIA: My goodness! That sounds lovely! That sounds like the Mexican sunflowers.

MONICA: Yeah. It's really a ball of, what? How many other flowers? Tons of small flowers creating a ball. It's a pale green color, and it's kind of low lying, don't you think? It doesn't get too tall.

KATE: Part of me thinks we shouldn't say too much. We should encourage people to plant the seeds and watch what develops. Also, they are cold sensitive, and every winter mine disappears. But they come back on their own every spring. And it's just such a delight to see them.

So don't worry if your tropical milkweed or your antelope horns doesn't seem to be lasting very long. It will be back.

MONICA: It will be back.

And so we plant all these incredible things to support our Monarchs, but then they bring so much joy all on their own. The antelope horn milkweed is a spectacular plant. It's native to Texas and our beautiful Monarchs need it.

LETICIA: Are there any other native plants that you would suggest that just a regular old gardener plant in their garden?

MONICA: Oh, man. One of my favorites is fall aster. Am I getting that right, Kate? That purple one?

KATE: I don't have it, but that sounds right.

MONICA: Purple aster. It's a small kind of like miniature daisy but it is purple. And it grows in the shade, it grows in partial sun, and it just blooms prolifically in the fall. And it's that important kind of fall blooming plant that has the nectar that will support Monarchs and other migratory pollinators on their migration journey. Because at that point we're not having as many blooming plants.

So the golden rod and fall aster are just beautiful plants for your fall garden, to bring the color to your fall garden, but they are really important because they are nontraditional blooming periods that really support migrating pollinators.

How about you? Do you have a favorite native plant?

KATE: It's not a native per se, but I love watching pollinators on my giant artichoke blossoms. At this point I don't even try to harvest and eat the artichokes because that's complicated and the insects love them so much and they are so beautiful. It's just a lovely purple, like a gigantic purple thistle.

MONICA: Can you even call it purple? It's like ultraviolet. The color is insane.

KATE: Good point. That would be my favorite for now and going into the fall. In the spring – at first when I planted dill I thought, "Oh no, the caterpillars are eating all my dill." And then I realized that the caterpillars need to eat all my dill. And really how much dill do I need?

So now I just plant a ridiculous amount of dill and when the caterpillars eat 85% of it, they leave 15% for me and everybody is happy. And then they turn into beautiful butterflies.

LETICIA: I learned that today, that caterpillars love dill.

MONICA: They also love your passion flowers. I was really frustrated, much like Kate with her dill. You are growing beautiful passion flowers and you want them to survive. And then you just see them covered in these caterpillars, and you are like, "Hey! That was mine!"

But then they turn into incredible butterflies, and I think they are called Pipe, the pipe, I don't know. I'll have to look it up later. But yeah, each flower, each plant, has its own pollinator. We get upset as human beings because we are cultivating these things for our own consumption. But they are made to be eaten and consumed and used by these particular plants because that is their process of growth.

LETICIA: So we have our seed library, but I know Kate you were also looking into we have a tool library at Recycled Reads where you can check out different gardening tools.

KATE: Yes. I would encourage people to check out the tool library at the Recycled Reads bookstore. Come to Recycled Reads and check out the tool library. I've been meaning to take a look at the gardening set myself. It includes some gardening tools. But there are also other tools that you can check out from the library.

A lot of people don't realize this. They check out books and other traditional materials of course, and then they say, "Oh, you have seeds. Oh, you have zines." And we do. But at Recycled Reads we also have fans and ...

LETICIA: Shovels?

KATE: I don't know what else!

LETICIA: Just naming random tools. Jackhammer?

KATE: You can find them in our catalogue by doing a keyword search for tool library. They are a little bit special in that you pick them up at the Recycled Reads bookstore and bring them back there.

Also, one breaking announcement, that the title of the beautiful oversized photography book is *The Hidden Beauty of Seeds and Fruits: The Botanical Photography of Levon Biss*. It really knocked me out. And I think that even a nongardener would feel the same way. A nongardener may become a gardener by reading this book. Can't recommend it enough.

MONICA: Thanks for getting the official title for that.

LETICIA: Yeah, I would like to look at it, so I'm glad.

So do you have any exciting gardening or seed-related programs in the pipeline?

MONICA: You know, I think looking at the City of Austin or the Austin Public Library's event calendar, because we have gardening programs throughout the year. We will be having a regular gardening program at Howson branch.

We'll be bringing in the professionals and we're providing a lot of the supplies for these programs because becoming a gardener is done in steps. Very rarely do you have the opportunity to just dig up a whole bunch of ground and create a garden. It takes time. Growing things, just starting small, is one of the nicest ways that you can begin.

So we'll be doing some microgreens, we'll be doing some mushroom blocks. And also being around people who like to grow things I think is one of the great pleasures of gardening. It's how I've done a lot of my learning. Like when I met Kate with the Central Texas Seed Savers, talking to people who save seeds and reuse them and then collect those seeds later on, it just changed my whole outlook.

So looking at the APL Event calendar and just looking for gardening programs. We're going to have them all over the system, and regularly throughout. I think Roots and Wings is going to be in October. And that's just a phenomenal city-wide program where we celebrate pollinators and trees. It's put on by Austin Parks and Recreation, but the library is a partner for that. And we go out in a big way. We give away seedlings, we give away trees. We invite professionals in to talk about the different ways that we can support our pollinators as they migrate, and therefore support our communities.

It's really just a lovely event. So keep your eye open for that in October or November. And then October is the beginning of tree planting season for Central Texas.

Yeah, Austin Arbor Day is in October.

So we plant our trees in the fall and the winter so they can survive the summer. And that's exactly what Kate and I were talking about. Over wintering, over summering our gardens. Preparing our trees for the heat of summer is the most important step in planting new trees. And we want to really advocate for our urban forest.

So yeah, keep an eye out for Roots and Wings. It's going to be great.

LETICIA: What is one way to summarize – ha! Summer-wise, get our trees ready for summer?

MONICA: I think when you are preparing your trees, so pruning your trees needs to take place in the winter, when they are dormant and when the insect population is at its lowest levels in Austin. So we prune our trees in January and February. At the end of February sometimes it's a little too late.

But you want to be really conscious of that, and then you want to paint immediately after you prune, especially if you are pruning live oaks. And there is a lot of information about this online. Kate, do you know where we can find information on oak wilt?

I feel like there is a lot on the Tree Folks website.

KATE: Tree Folks for sure. And I always recommend Texas A&M to people for their gardening questions. But I can't say that I've read about pruning trees, but I would be shocked if they didn't have something.

MONICA: They definitely do. You are right. They have a whole section on oak wilt. And that's just something we have to be cognizant of.

And then as it starts to heat up you've got to mulch your trees. They recommend I think it is three inches of the mulch. Which is not an insignificant amount. It's not one bag. And they like you to mulch the whole root area. And that's a pretty big area. The canopy of the tree is the root area, so I've never successfully done that. I've never gone out that far.

But mulching your trees and then watering consistently over the summer, especially if they are young. So we have a young tree that we planted. We planted a burr oak. We water it every three days on low for fifteen minutes. Just

to make sure it gets the water it needs because over the next two years are gonna be when it is really establishing itself. By its third year we won't have to water it as much.

And we don't water it that much in the fall and wintertime. But when it's 100 degrees out, it's important.

LETICIA: Which it became 100 degrees very quickly. I was commenting with a friend, "Oh, it's June. It feels so nice outside for it being June." And then the next day it was 100 degrees. So I apologize for that.

MONICA: You jinxed us. It's all your fault.

LETICIA: Well, thank you for that information. I have three live oaks on my property. And I don't do any of that. But maybe I will to take better care of them.

MONICA: Well, if they are established they are obviously happy. It's more when you are growing new trees and you are trying to shape them, or when you have damage to your trees and you need to prune them and help them along.

So if they are stressed out, because they had a lot of damage like we had in the ice storm, or if they are young, that's when you really need to work on them.

But established trees, they kind of take care of us in a weird way. They shade our properties. They keep our cities cooler. They take care of the animal population. They pull their weight.

LETICIA: They do. It was really crushing during this last ice storm to drive around and see all the trees that got damaged. I was like, "Look at all these trees." They just couldn't handle the weight. They said it was like fifteen hundred Corgis. They made an image, they made a graphic with a bunch of Corgis in the trees, I guess, that simple minded people like me could understand.

MONICA: It was really traumatic to see all of the trees. But also it was an opportunity for us to plant more.

And I know, Kate, you grow fruit trees. You have peaches, don't you?

LETICIA: Oh, I love peaches.

KATE: Just yesterday at the seed gathering I had our intrepid team of seed gathering participants working on some peach pits from my garden. I think I picked those peaches' ancestors maybe five or six years ago, not too long ago, from neighbor's yards, public places in Austin. Really sort of haphazardly planted some of the peach pits around the yard. And this was the first year, I think in March, not too long after the ice storm, I noticed tiny little peaches.

And now those became big peaches. They were eaten and enjoyed. And now peaches are back into the seed collection.

MONICA: They were delicious.

LETICIA: And to prepare a peach pit for planting, do you have to crack it open? Did I hear that?

KATE: Don't crack it open.

LETICIA: Don't. I made that up then.

KATE: Well, if you do crack it open, I learned from a book I read here that inside the peach is a sort of false almond. It's very fascinating. It looks like a little almond. It tastes very strongly of almond.

LETICIA: Is it poisonous?

KATE: It is poisonous. So don't go crazy about them. Don't eat them.

LETICIA: Don't eat the middle of the peach pit.

KATE: You don't have to worry about any of that for planting. I was told by Tree Folks that most fruit trees will germinate better and grow better if you plant those seeds right away. So I'm hoping people will check out my peach pits quickly.

And then I haven't worked long enough or hard enough to figure out what the secrets are. I did more of a quantity approach, and just planted them in different places in the yard at different depths. And then ended up with about probably a dozen small peach trees, maybe four or five of which produced peaches this year.

LETICIA: That's so exciting. That's a lot. That's a lot of trees.

KATE: They are really pretty. From the blossoms in early spring to now the peaches. They do attract quite a few pollinators themselves. And the squirrels and the birds took a fair number of the peaches, but they are not really our peaches. They are everybody's peaches. Luckily, there was a bountiful harvest.

MONICA: You say that, but I want my peaches! (LAUGHTER) Yes, they take a ton.

I think that is incredible because when we talk about seed libraries we kind of discount, like, tree seeds. And we shouldn't. Because they are something that you can absolutely grow from a seed in the ground. That's how squirrels plant acorns all day long.

I think food forests and planting fruit-bearing trees and nut-bearing trees can be a legacy that your family will have for generations. I guess peaches aren't that long lived.

LETICIA: But the tree can provide for generations.

MONICA: There you go.

KATE: I know some of the peaches came from right here near the Central Library. There are some peach trees down on the Lance Armstrong Bikeway. And for years I harvested from them. They were very gnarly. I don't know how old they are. They didn't do well during Snowvid and they didn't do well during the ice storm, so they look really, really sad this year. And I'm grateful that I may have some of their descendants in my yard.

I don't know how long these particular Lance Armstrong peach trees are going to last, but their descendants will live on.

MONICA: One of my good friends growing up, when each of the kids moved out, their mom gave them part of a house plant so they would take that plant with them. And that's kind of similar to what you are doing. You are creating a legacy with a tree.

We did that with Treaty Oak. When Treaty Oak was poisoned we took the acorns and there are little bitty Treaty Oaks all over Austin now. It's a way to preserve for generations in the future. And also provide for them. I love it. It's awesome.

KATE: Similarly, almost all the citrus trees in Austin died during Snowvid. And I have a few very tiny citrus trees growing from their seeds so we'll see what happens. None of them are nearly ready to produce fruit yet. I've got my fingers crossed and hoping other people have done the same.

MONICA: Well, if they survive, I want some citrus trees, my friend.

KATE: Put you down.

MONICA: Thank you.

LETICIA: You gotta bring those seeds in!

KATE: I'll bring them in.

LETICIA: And Monica, you do a lot of foraging, too, right? I hear Mustang grapes?

MONICA: I haven't grown Mustang grapes in a long time. I will say I am a bit of a plant criminal. So in construction sites where I see them bulldozing land, I sometimes, Kate, I am going to admit this to you, I struggle growing from seeds. And so I really wanted those really beautiful Texas roadside sunflowers. So I went in and I stole some sunflowers that were going to be mowed down and I planted them in my yard. They self-seed themselves great.

My ability to start them was not the best. But yes, I have been known to collect or swipe seeds or maybe even an entire plant if it is something that's going to get demolished.

LETICIA: I think it is OK if it is for the greater good. If it's going to be demolished.

MONICA: I don't know if they wanted me in their construction site. But I did it anyway.

LETICIA: And remember everybody, safety third.

KATE: I learned this technique from Monica so I will not criminalize you for it. I've tried it myself with bluebonnets another Texas favorite that grows all over the roadside ditches and in plenty of public and semipublic places. And the bluebonnets did great.

And from that I learned the terms prop lifting for propagation and crop lifting. So it's not shoplifting. It's prop lifting or crop lifting.

If it's somebody's yard, by all means you should know them and ask permission. But if it is some bluebonnets growing in a ditch, you are just spreading the seeds.

MONICA: Especially if you know it's about to be mowed.

LETICIA: I agree! Sowing the seeds of love! Just like Tears for Fears said.

MONICA: But I don't think the Wildflower Center is going to be happy with me saying all that.

LETICIA: Yes. Do not crop lift from the Wildflower Center.

MONICA: I just waded us into nefarious territory. I'm sorry to all of our readers. Don't steal plants. Bad karma.

LETICIA: Foraging! It's not bad karma. It's spreading seeds, love, growing. It's for a purpose.

MONICA: And then bring those seeds back to the seed library. Pay it forward.

LETICIA: And then bring those seeds back to the seed library.

So I guess to wrap things up, now that we are done talking about our criminal enterprises, do y'all have any final thoughts that you would like to say about the seed library and just gardening and the community that it builds here in Austin.

MONICA: I'd like to say that I know that gardening is sometimes difficult for people if you live in an apartment or you don't have the space for it. And that's why I'm a real advocate for community gardening. If you don't have a yard, if you don't have the space, or you have a shaded yard and you have beautiful live oaks next door and you don't have a sunny spot, community gardens can be a really great resource. They come with the tools, they come with people who are knowledgeable, they come with a community surrounding you to support you in your growing journey.

So if you don't have the space to garden, look up a community garden and get on the list. Walk through your community garden. I think getting out and seeing people's gardens and seeing what grows and what survives and what thrives in your region, in your area, is one of the coolest things.

And seeing what it kind of supports. When I walk through the Sunshine Community Garden at night, I see all the different birds that are in there, and I see all the different butterflies that are coming through. And it makes me more aware of the migratory patterns of our city. What stops by. Having a place like a community garden where you can access soil and you can access water and you can access tools for a pretty reasonable fee is a great resource.

So don't ever be deterred or let your gardening journey be diminished by your personal space that you own. There are places out there that will let you garden with them. And they are a lot of fun.

LETICIA: I think that's great. I never actually considered that, going to the community gardens. That makes a lot of sense.

MONICA: It's awesome. And I know, Kate, you do a lot of gardening in pots, I believe.

KATE: You can start with whatever you have. Start with one pot. Start with one square foot. Start with some guerrilla gardening if there is a median in your neighborhood that could benefit from some flowers.

I also have two thoughts with which I'd like to close. If you want to give seeds to your local library for their seed collection, or if they don't have one to share with another library seed collection, don't feel like you have to put them in a little envelope yourself and label them. Don't feel like you even have to remove them from the flowerhead or from the other plant material. You can just bring in the seeds or just parts of the plant in a paper bag labeled with the year and whatever kind of plant it is. You don't need the Latin name. The common name will do just fine. And that branch will either take care of it themselves if they are able or they can send it to us at the Central Library and we'll use it at our next seed gathering.

MONICA: Didn't I just give you seeds today in a salsa container?

KATE: Monica just gave me seeds today in a salsa container.

LETICIA: What were they seeds for?

MONICA: They are Lady Sings The Blues Larkspur. But yeah. Those little salsa containers are awesome. I love them.

But yeah, I do exactly what Kate said. I put seeds or flowerheads in a paper bag, like an HEB paper bag, and I just shake them once a day for like two weeks. And then at the bottom of that bag it's lined with seeds. I just shake them down.

It's shocking how many seeds you are going to get. And you can bring it to your library. Tell them Kate sent you, not Monica.

KATE: Lazy gardener.

LETICIA: Don't throw it! Grow it!

Well, I'd like to thank Kate and Monica for chatting with me today about gardening. Thank you. I am a very uninformed gardener but I feel like I've learned a lot. I'm really inspired.

MONICA: Do you feel like you've grown?

LETICIA: I feel like I've grown, that I've blossomed. It was a very fruitful conversation. And I thank you again.

KATE: Can I make two book recommendations?

LETICIA: Yes, please.

KATE: The library is a great low humidity, climate-controlled environment where we can store the seeds and keep them safe and long lived for everybody. And the library is also a great place to check out books about seeds and gardening. I just wanted to recommend two books by Ross Gay, my personal literary hero.

The Book of Delights, and his newer one, *Inciting Joy*. They are not strictly about seeds and gardening, but this man loves seeds and gardening. He loves his community garden in Indiana. And he will have you hooked if we haven't gotten you there already.

LETICIA: Well, I'm there. I'm ready. I'm going to start digging.

MONICA: Yeah, I'm going to check those out.

MUSIC

LETICIA: Thanks for listening to this episode of APL Volumes, Season Two. Check out our seed library at the sixth floor in Central, or at many of our local branches. An extra special thanks to my guests, Kate Abel and Monica Jones, for being such lovely flowers.

APL Volumes is recorded and produced in the Library's Innovation Lab, a part of the APL Innovate Digital Maker Space. Come visit the Maker Space at the Central Library and explore our recording equipment and hardware and all kinds of audiovisual software for 3D modeling, graphic design, animation, and more. Many thanks to the APL Innovate team for their help behind the scenes on this podcast.

A huge thank you to Christen Hong, our editor; Peter Hofstad, for being our marketing captain; Michael Wheat, for our insanely cool logo, and Stephen Plail, for our jaunty theme song.

Our next episode will be about music and our vinyl collection.

Thanks for listening and supporting your local public library.

MUSIC

END TRANSCRIPT