

Manzanillo

April 2016

SUN

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E-MAGAZINE

a div. of Manzanillo Sun website
www.manzanillosun.com

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*Comments, brickbats and bouquets
 on our featured articles are always
 welcome.*

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Submissions for possible inclusion
 in the magazine, please send to the
 editor by 20th of each month.
 We are always looking for writers
 or ideas on what you would like us
 to write about in the magazine.
 Preferred subjects are concerning
 1.) Manzanillo or 2.) Mexico.
 All articles should be 1000 words
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 750 words if accompanied by
 photos. Pictures appropriate for
 the article are welcome.



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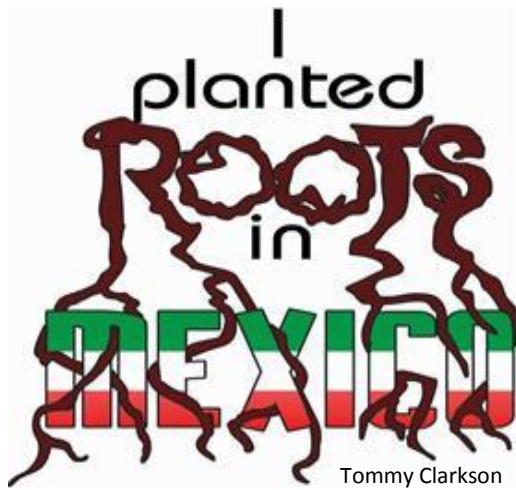
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Silver Fittonia, *Fittonia argyroneura*
 Family: *Acanthaceae*

Also known as Fittonia, Nerve Plant, Silver-Net Plant, Silver Fittonia, Fittonia Net Leaf, Silver Nerve, Silver Threads, Painted Net Leaf, Mosaic Plant, Lace leaf, Snakeskin Plant or Silver-Net Leaf 'White Brocade'.

(While doing secondary research, somewhere along my ongoing tropical plant trek, I came across an article - with supporting pictures - wherein this was called Window Pane Plant. I was elated as theretofore, I didn't know its name. This piece described how a variety of geometrical forms could be found in the vein structure of these plants. As a result of this, ever since, I have called it such when giving tours of Ola Brisa Gardens. Upon deciding to write about it - lo and behold - I find that this name may be incorrect. To these folks I apologize at my, possibly, imparting, incorrect data. . . . but then again, I've never made claims of being anywhere near the upper reaches of wizened, botanical academic knowledge!)

So noted, I have since discerned that this attractive, stem rooting, ground cover plant is one of species of creeping, perennial herbs from South America. *(It's a ground hugger!)* One has simply so see it to recognize that its natural environment, quite logically, is the moist rainforest understory. Given these native environs, it follows that it prefers a high humidity environment and - dependent upon where it is to be grown - misting may be necessary to maintain its naturally preferred humid-like conditions.



One look at the silver white tracery pattern of its leaves and it's easy to see how it came by its various names.

While the leaves of this plant – and species kin – have a silver white tracery pattern, the *F. Verschaffeltii* has veins of red. *F. pearcei* is a carmine pink-veined beauty. All are short-stalked, elliptically shaped and heavily veined. It may be as short as six inches (15.24 cm) or fully stretching as tall as it can reach twelve (30.48 cm) in height. Riffle, correctly observes that what with their (up to) four inch (10.16 cm) long “dark green (leaves) with a network of white or scarlet. . . (it) is difficult to imagine a more beautiful low groundcover.”

Conversely, its flowers are rather “unremarkable” and greenish yellow on short leafy bracts. Being rather inconsequential, they tend to meld into the remainder of the foliage.

The Silver Fittonia requires regular water – moist, but never soggy - well-draining, humusy soil, and does not like direct sun, preferring partial to full shade. If it gets too much hot sun, even indoors, the leaves may turn brown and burn.

None of these species care one tiny bit for the cool and should one's evening get so, we encourage that they be pot planted so it can be taken indoors during the chill of the night. Accordingly it should come as no surprise that many folks use the *Fittonia argyroneura* hanging baskets, dish garden or terrariums.

Given the year around temperatures here on the central Pacific coast of Mexico, ours grow in a small bed on the Casita Terrace, beneath – delightfully complementary in appearance – Climbing Fig that are scaling the wall directly behind their *terra firma* home.

Propagation can be attained through rooted stem pieces or tip cuttings of three to four pairs of leaves, making sure to include at least two growing nodes. Note: use of a root hormone might enhance your chances of success.

Because it is, by nature, a trailing plant, the Silver Fittonia can take on a straggly appearance. Simply, prune the tips to create a bushier plant. If grown in a pot, re-pot annually.

It has few natural enemies. However, carefully avoid overwatering as this can lead to root rot. Beyond that, Xanthomonas leaf spot, which causes vein necrosis and mosaic virus can be problems. Legged pests include fungus gnats, aphids, mealybugs and thrips.

As to general parental oversight on your “plant child”, yellowed, wilting leaves are a sign of overwatering. Shriveled leaves indicate that the air is too dry or in too much light. Whereas, a collapsed plant signals it isn't had enough to drink but – if it hasn't been too dry, for more than a few hours - will generally will perk back up with watering.

I've come across one reference to a *F. gigantea* which has purple stems with dark green leaves and crimson veins and, which supposedly can (I'm assuming height-wise) reach 24 inches (60.96 cm) – the article does not elaborate.

As to how it came about its primary name - the Fittonia plant is named for Irish sisters Elizabeth and Sarah Fitton, who, in 1817, wrote Conversations on Botany.



Its flowers are rather “unremarkable” and greenish yellow on short leafy bracts.



The Silver Fittonia, a creeping, perennial herb from South America, is a ground hugger!

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A Day at the Beach

by John Chalmers



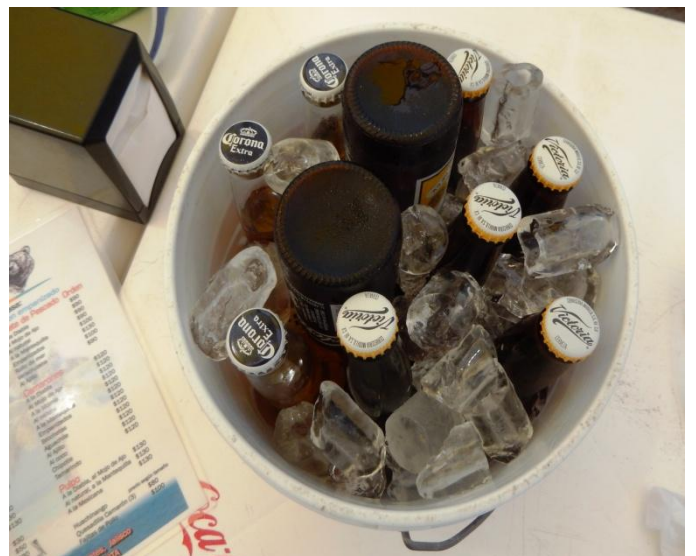
The many charms and attractions of the Manzanillo area include nearby beaches along the west coast. They are frequented by locals, vacationers and folks from places inland who come to enjoy the sun, the sand and the surf. In mid-March, my wife Linda and I joined six other couples spending winter months near Manzanillo for a day trip to the beach at Cuastecomates. North of Manzanillo on Highway 200, the town is about an hour's drive from the port city, depending upon your starting point.

waiter promptly welcomed us and set out lounge chairs for our use to help us enjoy the view. A new boardwalk along the front of the restaurants makes it easy to stroll along the waterfront and select a location for your visit to sit on the beach, go for a swim, or select a table inside or on the sand.

After staking out our place on the beach, the first item business was to order a bucket of ten cervezas on ice. Added to that for starter snacks were platters of ceviche de pescado and guacamole with taco chips. Then we were set for the afternoon. Some of our group went snorkeling, others were content to watch the pelicans and terns diving like arrows in the sea to catch fresh fish for their lunch.



The beach of the small town with the long name is at the edge of a sheltered cove lined with restaurants. After parking our vehicles, we settled in at Restaurant El Oso, one of the establishments that offers dining under a palapa, or under umbrellas on the beach. A



For our lunch, most ordered a hamburguesa con queso or quesadillas camarones, both served with tasty papas fritas. More buckets of beer were ordered as needed! Local color was provided by men and women offering a variety of merchandise including necklaces and other jewelry, woven goods, dresses, beach cover-ups and inflatable beach toys, while little boys become merchants early in life by selling chewing gum.

Near the end of our stay, a mariachi band stopped by to provide music at our tables. Song, music and the beautiful costumes of the musicians capped off another perfect day in México. Major construction in rebuilding the streets of Cuastecomates will make that charming town even more appealing when the work is complete.

Mary makes a beachside purchase while Robin studies the merchandise. Bob, Mary and Cindy show off their new bottle holsters, which were immediately put to use! Lower left, Irene is ready to wade out and go snorkeling. She returns at right with Dean and Mary.



Nancy and Dave are on their way to snorkel and brown pelicans are constantly on patrol, diving to catch fish.



A partial view of the bay from where we sat, and Mariachi musicians. Gotta love México!



"Warning...Warning...Danger Will Robinson!"

by Señor Tech

A few days ago I was listening to CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) and an interview caught my attention. My first article in the February 2013 issue of the Manzanillo Sun dealt with computer security and social engineering.

It appears the main cause of telephone fraud in Canada has now become the issue I discussed in that article. The caller starts by claiming to be from an official sounding organization, which is totally fictitious (Something like Windows Internet Security or ISC -- Internet Security Commission).

The fraudster will insist that they have knowledge of a virus on the call recipient's computer. Unless the recipient complies with the fraudster's request for access to their computer, the fraudster will become more aggressive. The objective of the fraudster's call is to get remote access to the recipient's computer.

If you receive one of these calls, either hang up or ask them to hold while you call the fraud department of your police to verify their legitimacy. Either way, the call will be terminated.

If you do as the caller asks, your computer will be infected with a lock that will make your computer inaccessible. The cost for the unlock code is \$100.00 and even once paid, you will never be sure that they cannot access your computer remotely, now or in the future.

Do not pay them. I advise a clean install of your Operating System and a complete restore of your back-up data. If you do not feel comfortable doing so, take your computer to a reputable computer technician and ask them to do the clean install. A clean install wipes all data and is like the computer was when new. All security updates will also have to be installed. This process will take 2-3 hours and then the restoration of your data.

If you have not backed-up your data, you may have to pay the fraudsters in order to do a complete a full data back-up, prior to doing the clean install. Only you will know how much your data is worth, but if you have years of family photos; well you know what the data is worth to you.

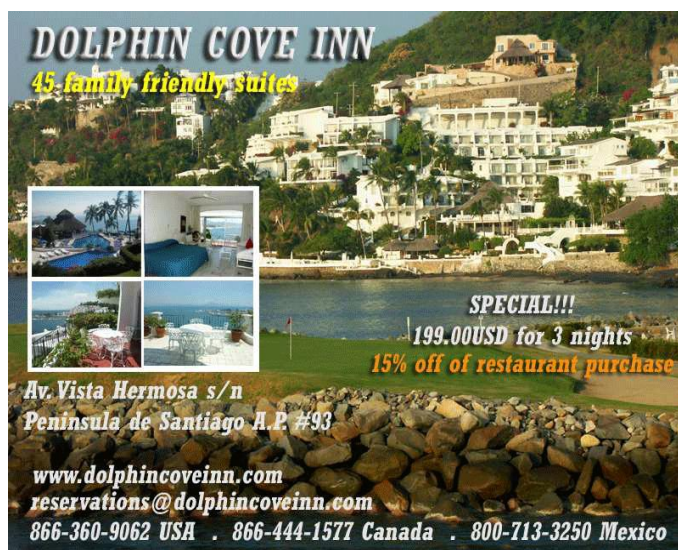


If you do not have a back-up strategy, consider some of the following;

- www.carbonite.com
- www.dropbox.com
- Microsoft offers 1 Terabyte of storage if you purchase a subscription to Office365 www.microsoft.com

These are all cloud solutions and you can access them even if your computer is compromised.

The article title was borrowed from the TV Series (1965-1968) Lost In Space



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Delicious Enchiladas Suizas

We've all seen these appear on Mexican menus alongside Chilaquiles, another breakfast favourite. Many won't miss an opportunity for these enchiladas (Swiss-style as they are known in Mexico) as they bring the best of the salsa chiles in a creamy-textured sauce, usually served with corn tortilla-wrapped chicken. If you're going to make them at home, it's worth making your own sauce, too!

Prep Time: 45 minutes

Cook Time: 50 minutes

Serving Size: 6 servings

Ingredients

For the Swiss Sauce

- 4 cups salsa verde*
- 1 cup Mexican Crema (substitute for heavy cream or crème fraiche)
- 12 fresh corn tortillas or 6-inch store-bought corn tortillas
- 1/4 cup vegetable or light olive oil if using store-bought tortillas
- 4 cups cooked shredded chicken, from store-bought rotisserie chicken

For the Toppings

- 1 1/2 cups (about 6 ounces) shredded Chihuahua or Emmental or Meunster cheese
- 1 cup finely chopped white onion
- 1/3 cup chopped cilantro

*For the Salsa Verde

- 2 pounds tomatillos, husked and washed
- 2 jalapeños, stems removed
- 3 small garlic cloves
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 bunch cilantro, thick bottom stems removed; the rest washed and shaken dry
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon salt or to taste

Directions

For the Salsa Verde

- 1) Put the tomatillos and jalapeños in a 3-quart saucepan. Pour in enough cold water to barely cover (about 3 1/2 cups). Bring to a boil and cook until the jalapeños are soft and the tomatillos are tender.
- 2) Remove from the heat and let stand 15 minutes to finish cooking the inside of the tomatillos.
- 3) Drain the tomatillos and chilies (gently to avoid breaking the tomatillos) in a colander. Wipe out the pan and set aside.
- 4) Put the tomatillos, jalapeños, garlic and cumin in a blender jar.
- 5) Blend a few seconds, just until the tomatillos are coarsely chopped.
- 6) Add the cilantro and blend until the sauce is smooth and speckled with finely chopped cilantro. Do not over-blend or you will grind the seeds and make a thick and pasty rather than smooth and shiny sauce.
- 7) Heat the oil in the cleaned pan over medium heat. Pour in the contents of the blender. Bring to a simmer and simmer until lightly thickened, about 10 minutes.
- 8) Season with salt.

The sauce can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. Reheat over low heat before using.



Courtesy of Mexican-Authentic-Recipes.com



Courtesy of PaleoSpirit.com

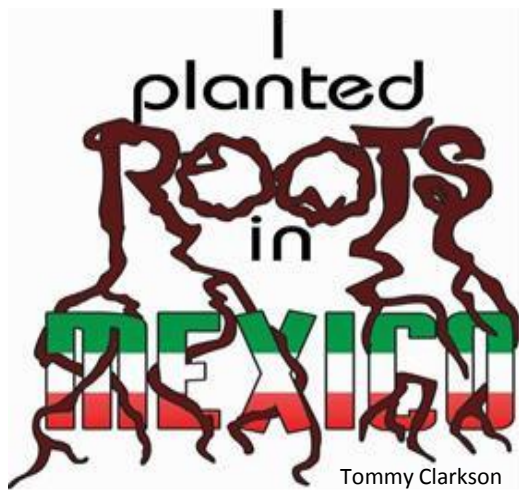


Courtesy of Complaciendo Paladares

For the Enchiladas

- 1) Preheat the oven to 375° F
- 2) To make the sauce: mix green sauce and cream, bring to a simmer over low heat. The sauce may be prepared up to a day in advance and refrigerate. Reheat before ladling over the enchiladas.
- 3) Soften the tortillas in the oil and drain them. Using 1/3 cup of the chicken, fill and roll the tortillas. Place the enchiladas seam side down in a 9 x 13-inch baking dish.
- 4) Pour the hot sauce over the enchiladas. Wiggle the dish so the sauce settles in between the enchiladas. Sprinkle the cheese evenly over the top. Bake until the sauce around the edges is bubbling and the cheese is melted and light gold brown, about 30 minutes. Let stand 5 minutes before serving.
- 5) Scatter the onion and cilantro over the casserole. To serve, scoop two enchiladas and plenty of sauce onto each serving plate.

Courtesy of Food Republic



Florida Thatch Palm (*Thrinax radiata*) Family: *Arecaceae*

Also known as: Silk-top Thatch Palm, Sea Thatch Palm, Jamaican Thatch Palm and Thatch Palm

Somewhat obviously, the origin of these is in the Florida Keys and the Northwestern Caribbean area. Today they can be found in the Bahamas, western Cuba, Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, the Yucatan Peninsula, Honduras and Nicaragua.

With its “weepy” fan leaves and narrow gray trunk, they are more commonly seen, by folks like us, along coastal highways in South Florida. (By way of further growth zone description, Naples is about as far north as they care to grow. Like Patty and me, they are quite cold sensitive!) Beyond these areas – more or less in the proverbial “wild” -they make wonderful landscape or container specimens.

A very slow grower, the *Thrinax radiata* will ultimately reach a height of around fifteen to twenty feet (meters) 15 to as high as 30 feet (4 ½ - 9 meters), with weepy fan leaves and a narrow gray trunk. Atop this will be 12-20 palmate, circular, slightly folded, fronds that are four to five feet wide.

These palms are slow growers. Accordingly, mine is effectively used as a container plant. A small sized juvenile, it thrives in a large pot, with bright, indirect sunlight, under our Dining Palapa. In fact, I have not been to their native area for some time and, as a result,



OK, let's review key aspects of this palm. Solitary? Correct. Palmate? Right. Non-armed? Absolutely. Self cleaning? Nope.

have not seen any larger ones “live and up close” enough to get any pictures. So, hopefully, the accompanying shots and my description will suffice in helping you identify one should opportunity present.

As a rule one sees them in solitary form, however, they can be grown in a multiple trunk form. Either way, they grow slowly and commences their growth appearing as a “palmetto type of plant” that is rather low to the ground. In this form, they make a great privacy screening growth.

Equally comfortable in sun or shade, it will only but grow slower when it receives less direct sunlight. Eventually, however, it commences to form that thin trunk. Some have observed that, as such, it lends itself to fitting in tight spaces.

Two other nice aspects to the Florida Thatch Palm are that its fruit are a good food source for birds and, in that – once established - it is quite drought and salt tolerant, as a result being a good selection for beach-side locations.

When planting the, remember that they are hardy sorts – their natural environment is sandy soil . . . thus they don't like wet areas or where the soil is thick and clay-like. But, generally speaking, they demand no soil additions when planting. (Though we always sprinkle a bit of Raizal 400 on the root ball (for root growth stimulation) and add a bit of *tierra negra* (rich top soil) as well as some *estiércol de vaca* (dried cow manure) for natural nutrients. And, in our area, we actually have to add some *arena de río* (river sand to ensure good drainage. (Because of its natural salinity, do not use sand from the beach for your plants.)

The Florida Thatch Palms are not self-cleaners, accordingly, they will appreciate your gracious help in trimming off the dead fronds. (In this regard, however, remember my Number One Palm Rule – NEVER cut off a palm frond until it is completely dead and brown!)

But up in those vibrant, live fronds, grow white flowers on yellow stems of three to four foot (.9 – 1.2 meters) in length, followed by round, green 1-1½" (2.5 – 3.8 cm) fruit that turns white when it is ripe.

Your *Thrinax radiate* likes fertilization three times yearly - in the 12/4/12 NPK range, with some micronutrients.

Singles of this species can be planted five to ten feet (1 ½ to three meters) apart or, should you wish to employ multi-trunk specimens, they can be placed close together to form a screening effect . . . when the palms are young.

So, just how all might one effectively use this guy in landscaping around one's home? Beyond the earlier discussed privacy screen, they might be situated so as to be the principal feature in a small garden bed. They could be used in a smallish courtyard, entryway or for lining your driveway. Perhaps placement near a swimming pool or containerized as a patio plant would best suit your needs. Or, in a larger area, what about using them as a superlative accent under the canopy of a large palm?

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Its long, unarmed petioles are quite elegant.



Its circular leaves are segmented about two thirds of the way down.

The Unexpected

by Suzanne A. Marshall

We have finally begun some of our 'bucket list' adventures. This means, of course, that we want to have some new eventful experiences before we "kick the bucket". With good health and good luck we hope to pursue numerous activities.

Of course, the whole idea began to take shape with our various steps toward retirement. Having bought our retirement condo on the shores of Manzanillo a number of years ago, we have upgraded to permanent residency and now have a perfect location for exploring Mexico, Central and South America and so on. The biggest challenge so far has, of course, been taking the 'downsizing' plunge by selling our home in Canada and beginning what some call the 'third act' of our lives. It will be evolutionary. Actually we aren't exactly sure what we're doing yet.

It's a bit daunting when one has led a fairly regimented lifestyle with the commitments and routines of a working career, having children and basically trotting along on the treadmill of life. Suddenly we've found ourselves feeling quite liberated and honestly a wee bit displaced as we seek new rhythms in life and follow our hearts.

It was decided that our next major adventure was to be a Caribbean cruise. Who hasn't (especially Canadians) dreamed of a winter escape to tropical isles, palm trees, sandy beaches and exotic music played on steel drums? Of course we've pretty much got these criteria covered living in Manzanillo but a cruise ship is a big event and many of our friends have shared their stories and experiences with us.

So we decided to take the plunge, meet some dear friends from Canada and hop aboard a gigantic floating city. It's hard to believe how accessible the world is these days. But one must still plan carefully,

pay attention to the details and, above all, leave room and time for the unexpected.



Manzanillo Bus Terminal – the adventure begins!

Our travel itinerary to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida involved a luxury bus to the Guadalajara airport from Manzanillo. The bus comes complete with foot rests, lunch, drink and wifi. We didn't want to worry about parking our vehicle in the big city. There were absolutely no problems and it was quite restful after the chaos of packing and arranging all the details of our trip. We had decided to stay overnight in the city near the airport to ensure lots of time for connecting and to avoid the stress of late night flying as well as finding our way around in unfamiliar territory. The wisdom of this decision proved to be extremely fortunate since we truly ran smack into the 'unexpected'.



Guadalajara – the freeway

We arrived in Guadalajara at our airport drop-off location to traffic gridlock and a chaotic scene of protesters blocking airport parking lots and access areas. We would later learn that the protests involved agricultural land ownership disputes in the airport area.

At the same time, the taxi industry was demonstrating against the new competition called "Uber" which are a private economy taxi or ride alternative. What better way to get media attention than to interrupt air travel and have thousands of people scrambling.



Guadalajara – the big city

Of course at this time neither the bus driver nor we passengers knew what was happening except that there was one hell of a traffic jam. We were dropped at an airport bus exchange station complete with our luggage, wherein the bus turned back and left us to our own devices. Well, the original plan was a simple cab ride to our nearby hotel and then the airport shuttle from the hotel the next morning. It wasn't going to be that simple.

We stood on the sidewalk waiting for taxis or shuttles wherein we finally began to notice that there weren't any, except, of course, for the stream of them across the four lane road going in the opposite direction. In our stilted Spanish, we spoke to a few others who were also waiting, only to find out that they were just

as mystified as we were and hoped to catch the next city bus that might get through the traffic.

When a city bus finally arrived, we explained our need to get to our nearby hotel. Looking back, I believe the bus driver knew what was actually going on and took pity on us. Thank you to this kind gentleman who saved our butts.

Through a couple of English-speaking people waiting with us, the bus driver offered to make a special stop for us along his route (apparently not affected by the local traffic situation as we moved away from the airport). I have to comment, at this point, on the graciousness of the Mexican people around us who helped us more than we knew at the time.

A six-year old boy, who appeared to be the drivers' son, hopped out of the bus and with great gusto and authority showed us that we could place our two, fifty-pound suitcases in compartments under the bus. That was a huge relief since they would have blocked the aisles if we could even drag them up the stairs. As a point of interest, wheels on suitcases are almost useless on city buses!!

So now we're on the bus with standing room only, suffering a little bit of shock and wondering how this adventure will play out. Soon we are away from the airport and rattling down an eight-lane freeway. Within ten minutes, the bus driver pulls over and indicates that this is where we get off.



Guadalajara – find the hotel!

We find ourselves on a sidewalk, at the side of the freeway, with our gargantuan luggage and assorted carry bags. There are a couple of hotels on our side of the road but not the one we are booked with. We finally spot our hotel but unfortunately it's on the other side of the freeway.

As we get our bearings, we realized that we're going to have to maneuver our luggage up and over a pedway ramp for pedestrians to cross the freeway. It's steep and requires pulling our bags up and down four zigzagged sloping pathways on each side. We begin our daunting journey up and down passing curious locals in running gear or riding bikes.

On the other side, we drag our way through freshly-watered muddy grass and across a never-ending parking lot. But we made it!! Yahoo for the aging, bedraggled foreign retirees on a great adventure; we rule!! Nothing is stopping us from getting to our destination. I so wish I could say this was the end of our great adventure. We simply wanted to board a cruise ship and have some fun.



Guadalajara International Airport – photo courtesy of ITESM.mx

It's five-thirty AM the next morning. A phone is ringing. We've eaten the night before at a restaurant near the hotel and fallen into bed exhausted with a 4:45 wake-up call in place. As a backup measure, we've also programmed the cell phone alarm. (We figure out later that the setting was for PM not AM). International departures require passengers to be at the airport two hours in advance. The wake-up call never happened. We will never know why. The desk clerk is telling us that our ride to the airport is waiting. Seriously, this is not a script for an upcoming comedy film. This is really happening. I'll spare the

details of no showers, scrambled wardrobes and no coffee. We make it down stairs in ten minutes.

There is an old superstition that bad things tend to happen in 'threes'. My experience confirms this. We leave for the airport with our driver, still unaware of the issues at the airport. We hadn't even turned on the television the night before. So here we are again unable to get into the airport to check in and stuck in grid-lock traffic.

But here is where I can underscore the absolute resourcefulness of the Mexican people. With a phone call for information completed, our young and courteous driver has assessed the situation and we are now being taken down some back roads around aircraft hangers and eventually to the end of a road where we can actually see the terminal. It's a distance of half a block or more and I'm not sure my body can drag all our stuff down the road again. But to his credit, the driver jumps out and grabs some of our luggage and we all land in a flurry at the entry doors to the airline check-in locations.



Fort Lauderdale Port, and the journey really begins!

As we finally hear the news on television and check the internet later in Ft. Lauderdale, we can scarcely believe that we somehow muddled through this maze of chaotic events. Or for that matter, that the flights out of Guadalajara were still operating. The rest of our adventure was about to begin and we were ready for it. After surviving the totally 'unexpected', nothing was going to stop us now. Tally ho!!

Stock Market Getting You Down? Decide Not to Panic

by Yann Kostic

The headlines aren't very comforting: A collapse in Chinese stocks has pushed the Dow Jones Industrial Average down by triple digits several times recently, even forcing Chinese regulators to halt trading. And, also recently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) cut its 2016 global growth forecast from 3.6 percent to 3.4 percent, citing challenges such as falling commodity prices and rising interest rates in the U.S. as well as slower growth in emerging markets. China, for example, grew by only 6.9 percent in 2015, its slowest pace of economic expansion since 1990.

One might conclude that there are a host of unforeseen instabilities that will play havoc with our investments in the future. But we may be drawing the wrong conclusions. True, we can't predict the future, but it's important not to assume the worst when events like these occur.

First, we've seen similar events before. For example, last summer, in July and August, the Shanghai Composite Index fell 30 percent, sending the Dow down 11 percent. But Chinese and U.S. stocks rebounded.

And while the stock market - one of 10 components of the Conference Board Leading Economic Index - is definitely a leading indicator, not all corrections signal a looming recession.

Still, investors are prone to panic when corrections arise. It's like the first big snowstorm of the year, one analyst suggests: people forget how to drive in the snow.

So how should you drive in these snowstorms? Simple: don't panic. Look at the overall picture, speak to your advisor, ensure you have a solid plan in place and decide to stay the course but always make sure you have appropriate protection to the downside in case this turns into the snowstorm of the century.

Yann Kostic is an Investment Advisor (RIA) & Money Manager with Atlantis Wealth Management. Yann specializes in retirees (or soon to be), self-reliant women and expats in Mexico. The international custodian Atlantis is working with allows multiple international currencies in a single account. Yann splits his time between the Lake Chapala area, Manzanillo & Central Florida. Comments, questions or to request his newsletter, "News you can use" contact him at yannk@atlantisgrp.com in Mexico, (376) 106-1613 or in the US (321) 574-1521.



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For the Love of Vanilla

by Kirby Vickery

A few months ago I wrote about all the different foods which were given to the world by being taken by Hernán Cortés de Monroy y Pizarro and his ilk in the early 1500's. As with most things established by the Aztec, several of these foods had some really good mythological legends about how mankind wound up with them. There was even a blue tree frog that got into the act.

I have found that I inadvertently left one very important food out of the mix and would like to tell you that it was done because it wasn't an Aztec find. But that's not the reason. I had just forgotten to add it into the article and am going to rectify that right now. But it is true that the discovery of vanilla and its first producers were not the Aztecs. It was discovered by a people known as the Totonac who lived in and around the area where Veracruz exists today.

First of all, I believe that vanilla is the only food we eat which comes from the orchid plant. I'm not going to go into its popularity because everyone I know can name six of seven major foods which are flavored with it and no one would duplicate another's list. Currently there are five different kinds on the market and Madagascar, Indonesia or India has the lead in producing it for the world, depending on which source you want to believe.

The fruit the Aztec called *tlixochitl*, or "black flower," after the matured fruit, shrivels and turns black shortly after it is picked. Its production is very labor intensive, with workers having to take many steps to obtain a quality product.

It comes from an Orchid of the same name and is derived from the diminutive of the Spanish word *vaina* (*vaina* itself meaning sheath or pod), translates simply as "little pod." In its native valleys in southern Mexico it is pollinated by the melipona bee which exists nowhere else in the world. This gave the vanilla plant's expansion a very slow start until a slave discovered that these plants take well to hand pollination.

The Aztec were a warlike people and demanded constant tribute from the peoples they concurred. This was mostly fulfilled by giving slaves for the Sun altar or gold and silver. However, the Aztec really liked the flavor of

vanilla and, from the Totonac, they demanded a tribute of processed vanilla.

The legend tells us that the eldest daughter of a family of high placed Totonac aristocrats was a girl of incredible beauty who lived in a palace close to the ceremonial centre of Tajin. One day, Xanath was going to deposit an offering on the statue of Chac-Mool (the divine messenger) when she noticed some beautiful music drifting from behind a courtyard in the ceremonial centre. She peered through the door and saw a young man playing a small flute. It was a handsome and strong young fellow called Tzarahuin.



Now Xanath loved music, and soon they were exchanging tunes, songs and laughter. One could say that it was love at first sight. They tried to meet as often as possible.

Their love grew and matured although Xanath was a noblewoman, and Tzarahuin was nothing more than a lowly artist. But, what an artist! He played music, particularly wind conches, the magical instruments with which to summon people to the ceremonies.

He was also a painter. He had been sent as a young lad to the school in the temple, where the teachers soon discovered his ability for the arts and soon he was allowed to be part of a troupe of artist craftsmen who painted and decorated the hundreds of niches in the ceremonial centre.

He came from a family of farmers and, when he was free from his duties in the temple, he helped them tend their orchard plants. He was often very busy working in the upkeep of the temple, but always liked to help his family, especially during the harvest season, which is where he was coming when he met Xanath.

One day, as Xanath was on her way to meet Tzarahuin, when she caught the eye of the fat god of Happiness (His Aztec name is Xochipilli but I can't find any reference to what he was called by the Totonac. So I will use the Aztec name.). His eyes followed her as she ran through the ceremonial centre. He admired the fragility of her frame, and the agility of her movements. The more he saw of her, the more he wanted her. He probably wasn't stalking her but if he wasn't he was coming very close to it. Twice, he approached her and tried to speak to her, but she ran away, frightened that the Xochipilli would wish to speak to a human Totonac girl. He was not to be dissuaded easily and tried a third time to approach Xanath. This time, she stayed and listened to what the god had to tell her.



Xanath listened carefully and after the god of Happiness confessed his love for her, she sadly told him that she could not marry him, because her heart already belonged to another. Xochipilli was angry that a simple Totonac girl would refuse him. He went to visit the girl's father and gave him secrets that were only known to the gods.

So the wealth and prestige of Xanath's father increased greatly. Soon, after this, Xanath was ordered by her father to marry Xochipilli. However, Xanath, full of inner strength, defied both her father and the god of Happiness. She refused to leave Tzarahuin. In total rage, the god of Happiness transformed Xanath into a feeble, delicate plant, with lovely white flowers and an intoxicating smell. When Tzarahuin found out what had happened to Xanath, he took his own life, at the foot of the plant.



The legend tells us however, that he comes back every spring in the form of a humble melipona bee and spends hours tenderly circling around the petals of the vanilla flower. making love to his Xanath.

monkey's
POLLO • BURGERS • BEER



Rancho Colina de San Miguel

by Ken Waldie

Within minutes or hours of Manzanillo you can find many destinations worth a day or overnight trip. One such place is Rancho Colina de San Miguel (colina means hill), a place to spend a leisurely afternoon enjoying a spectacular view of the Colima's most active volcano and the valleys below.

Just outside of Colima is Ocotillo. If your fellow travelers don't know their way around these areas, you can ask the townsfolk when you get to Ocotillo, about how to find the ranch and restaurant. Mostly, though, it's a straight shot uphill.

Just as you get past the municipal complex on the Colima highway, heading out of Colima toward Guadalajara, keep an eye out for exit signs to Ocotillo on the right.

our large table without a reservation and we were soon enjoying freshly-prepared natural Jamaica (hibiscus flower drink) and a few spirits.

Not long into the late lunch hour, a trio of musicians arrived and delighted us with very lovely local-flavoured music. We enjoyed both watching and listening.



For the younger ones among us, the owners have their entertainment covered. There was a pony named Gasparin (Casper, in English) to ride, a crafts and painting hut and a zip line for the young as well as the young-at-heart!

<https://www.facebook.com/ranchocolinadesanmiguel>

The day we went, a few weeks ago now, there were twelve of us in all, 3 cars, 4 families. Our group included young children up to grandmothers and there was something in it for everyone. We hadn't known what to expect and the destination left us looking forward to another visit soon.

The main gathering of the ranch is the restaurant with a large, covered patio and plenty of seating. The food is traditional Mexican barbeque meats and accompaniments. It didn't take the staff long to serve





While there, the volcano did not disappoint, puffing out a number of exhalations and giving us a close-up view. Down below the restaurant, there are stables, barns and rodeo rings and we were able to watch while one group prepared for an equestrian event, in full regalia!



We told the owner we'd be back soon and intend to keep our word. We enjoyed a day of visiting with friends, met new friends and got to take in one of the many beautiful scenes that Colima has to offer.

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Flora Exotica

by Freda Rumford

with many thanks to the Puerto Vallarta Botanical Gardens

Forever, it seems; orchids have been a joy to me, the delicacy of the flowers, the transparency and waxy feel of the petals and the glorious colours. Oh those glorious colours.

We were lucky, several years ago, in being able to go to an Orchid Nursery on the side of Mount Haleakala on Maui, Hawaii and spent far more time than expected in wandering through the lines of exotic flowers. The freezing chill of being at the top of the volcano before sunrise then completely forgotten as the warmth of the sun at last penetrated the skin which had been so unprepared to be frozen in the tropics.

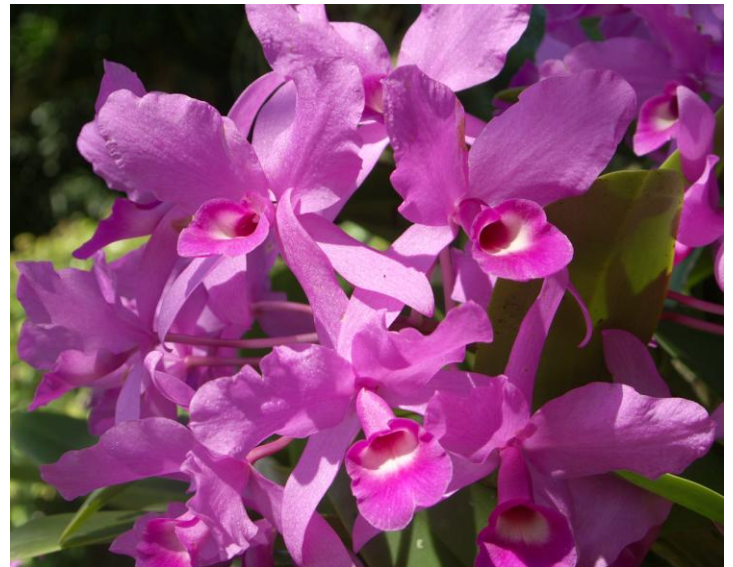
Now in Mexico, I had forgotten my previous experience and was surprised to not only find a beautiful specimen for a friend's birthday but realise how inexpensive they were to buy. Not only that, but when I finally had a beautiful mauve orchid of my own, how very unforgiving it was to a person who slaughters plants on a regular basis.

On discussing orchids one evening at a Thirsty Thursday dinner, I was delighted to hear that there was an orchid nursery not far from Manzanillo and decided that I would find its whereabouts and pay a visit just as soon as I was able. Unfortunately, perhaps due to the lack of advertising and promotion, the nursery is not to be found. Other people have been there, so I will continue to search, but in the meantime I have discovered a prize.

I have discovered the "Puerto Vallarta Botanical Gardens!" Although absolutely not a green thumb myself, I have had the pleasure of going to the annual Chelsea Flower show in London and to Kew Gardens while loving the beautiful show of dahlias that my husband grew in our greenhouse as a novice gardener. I can appreciate the beauty, perfume, colours and everything about plant life. Just don't leave it with me to tend.

Not being in a position currently to go physically to the Botanical Gardens, I discovered contact names and emails on the web and wrote asking permission to use excerpts or perhaps an article from one of the subscribers to the web site. What I actually got in very short order was immediate permission from the board of directors to use whatever material I needed from the website. This was help indeed.

I browsed the material, getting more and more excited and enthralled as I went. This was absolutely wonderful and whatever I did not visit, this is now an absolute must for me to see.



In the beginning

The following is taken from the Web site for the Botanical Gardens:

"The Vallarta Botanical Gardens started in 2004 with a vision of building Mexico's greatest botanical garden in the enchanted tropical highlands of Jalisco, Mexico. The twenty acres that are now the Gardens were ranch property, nearly half of which was overgrazed cattle

pasture, the other half, old growth tropical deciduous forest.

“The first building constructed was the Hacienda de Oro Visitor Center and Restaurant, the centerpiece structure of the Gardens. Next came the nurseries for plant propagation, trails throughout the property, a statuary making facility and of course many plants.

“Over 6000 Blue Agaves (*Agave tequilana*) adorn our ‘Blue Agave Hills’ while this area is being re-forested with native tropical hardwood trees. Over 1000 native *tabebuia*, mountain pine and mahogany trees, have been planted in this former cattle-grazing area, deforested over 30 years ago. Native oak species are being grown from acorns to establish our Mexican Oak Collection. Considering that Mexico is the world leader in oak diversity with over 160 different species, this is sure to become a prized feature of the Garden.

“The success of the Vallarta Botanical Gardens has allowed us to give back to our community in a variety of ways. We provide free admission to the Gardens to over 1,000 visiting school children each year. We have collaborated with Grassroots Natural Resource Conservation and indigenous knowledge proponents including the Maya Nut Institute and the Center for Traditional Medicine. We have participated in tropical plant research with the American Orchid Society and Sam Houston State University.”

“The Botanical Gardens are situated about 20 kms. from the southern outskirts of Puerto Vallarta and can be reached by the local bus service.

“This is an ideal place for those wishing to see a little more of Mexico but concerned about the potential dangers of travelling within Mexico currently. There are many hotels that offer reasonably-priced accommodation and dozens of places to dine and maybe dance a little. A visit would make a nice weekend, even though in the middle of the week maybe? Ranked #9 of 70 attractions in Puerto Vallarta.”

Mexican Orchid of the Month:

Artorima Erubescens



Found as an epiphyte in evergreen cloud forests among the high peaks of Oaxaca and Guerrero, the *Artorima Erubescens* produces showy, fragrant flowers in the winter and early spring. Continued logging in those regions has caused this orchid to become a rare find. It is reported to require freezing nocturnal temperatures to bloom, making it a tricky plant for amateur gardeners to care for. The stigma’s T-shaped slits, which catch the feet of bees, make it unusual within the orchid family. (Many thanks to Vallarta Orchid Society President T. J. Hartung for permission to draw on information from his publication “Orchids Found ONLY in Mexico,” available in the Gardens’ gift store.)

Garden Amenities and Services

“Visit the Gardens’ Hacienda de Oro Restaurant for authentic Mexican food and brick-oven pizza. Our new menu includes delicious dishes such as fish and shrimp tacos. Hike the Gardens’ nature trails and bask in tropical mountain scenery. Experience the Orchid Conservatory, Gift Shop, plant nursery, tequila tasting and more. You can even shop the Gardens remotely through our online store. The very best of Vallarta!

“The Gardens and the Hacienda de Oro Restaurant are available for weddings and other special events.” Please contact us at: info@vbgardens.org.

“The Leaflet” Newsletter from Puerto Vallarta Botanical Gardens is available on line.

Much more information can be found at www.vbgardens.org.

There are many special days throughout the year. The following are just some of them.

Vallarta Bird Festival March 5-6 (just gone by)

The full description of this event—including tours, speakers and other activities—is now posted at www.vallartabirdfestival.org. Keep an eye on it for next year!

April

Easter/Pascua Gardens are open all week

Other events held throughout the year (check the site calendar for updates or sign up to the mailing list)

- Hummingbird Week at the VBG
- Bougainvillea Festival
- World Environment Day at the VBG.
- Blackberry Harvest Festival.
- Mexican National Arbor Day at the VBG.
- Butterfly Celebration at the VBG.
- Day of the Dead at the VBG.
- Thanksgiving at the VBG.

The Vallarta Botanical Gardens, A. C.

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Open from 10 am to 6 pm, 7 days a week, from December through March, with the exception of Christmas and New Years Day (check the web site for closures and summer season hours).

Some events require advance reservations.

The Vallarta Botanical Gardens are members of:

- Botanic Gardens Conservation International of Surrey, England *Patron HRH Charles, Prince of Wales*.
- The American Public Gardens Association of Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, USA.
- Asociacion Mexicana de Orquideologia of Mexico City (Distrito Federal).

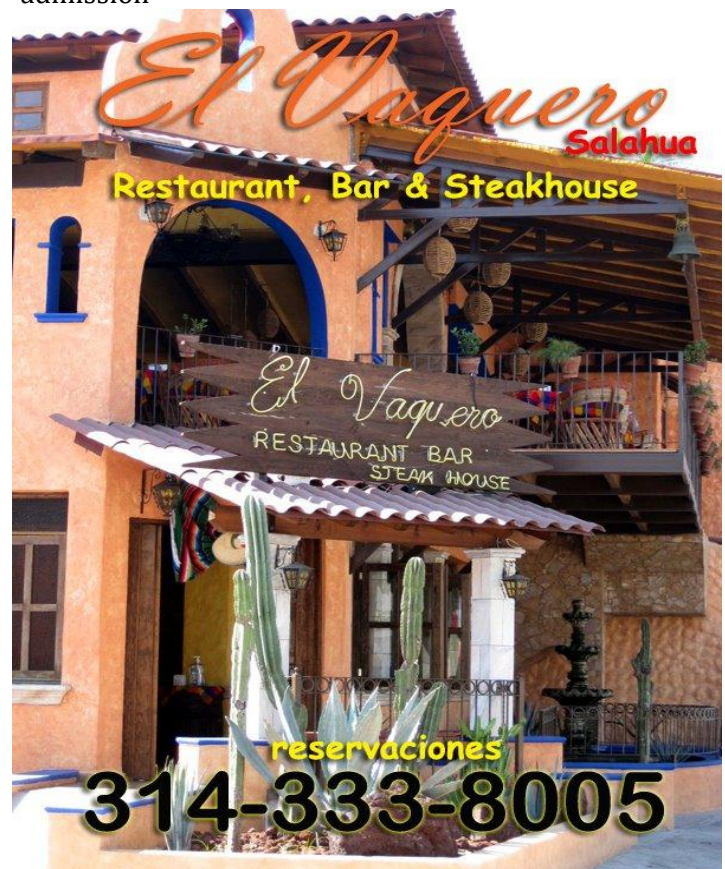
The Gardens are registered as an UMA (Unidad de Manejo Para La Conservacion De Vida Silvestre), an official Wildlife Conservation Management Unit through SEMARNAT (Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales), Mexico’s Agency of Environment and Natural Resources.

Regular membership

\$95 USD/year (seniors \$85 USD/year), with many privileges as outlined on the website

Individual membership

\$60 USD/year (seniors \$54 USD/year), all of the privileges of regular membership, but for just one individual, accompanying guests pay their own admission





At the Movies – THE BIG SHORT

by Suzanne A. Marshall

Starring: Christian Bale, Steve Carell,
Brad Pitt, Ryan Gosling

Director: Adam McKay

“Four denizens in the world of high-finance predict the credit and housing bubble collapse of the mid-2000s, and decide to take on the big banks for their greed and lack of foresight.”

The movie is based on the book: *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine* which is a non-fiction book by Michael Lewis about the build-up of the housing and credit bubble during the 2000s. It’s a fast paced and very complicated story. If you don’t follow the stock markets or have an interest in the world of financial machinations, the story may be a bit hard to follow. But well done it is as it details the unbelievable callous greed that took over the banking world and damaged or ruined so many lives. The acting and directing are superb and it’s one of those movies that I’ve decided I need to watch again.

The *Big Short* was nominated for several Oscars: Best Actor, Best Director and Best Picture. All of these were well deserved.

IMBD rated this movie as 7.8/10 based on 124,000 + viewers.

