

The groove tubers of Ch. 18

Goofy, informative 'Garden Wise Guys' a back yard hit

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Flumoxed by fungus? Irritated by irrigation? Overwrought by overgrowth? Check out the wise guys. The Garden Wise guys, that is.

The brainchild of Santa Barbara city water conservation coordinator Alison Jordan, Christy Zwicke of Santa Barbara City TV and landscape architects Billy Goodnick and Owen Dell, the area's very own garden show has just completed a fifth episode and is working on a sixth.

Primetime network TV it's not: "Garden Wise Guys" airs Sundays at 9 p.m. on Channel 18.

"It's local cable TV with local production values, so there's the first level of forgiveness," said Garden Wise guy Goodnick (for viewers, he's the "professor type" guy while Dell is the taller, often hat-wearing one).

The actors aren't exactly tabloid fodder either, and they don't pull down the megabucks the network and cable TV stars make. Occasionally, though, they can wrangle an extra sandwich out of the deal. But when you can get a chance to goof off in front of the camera in the South Coast's Mediterranean climate, who needs a million dollars an episode?

It's probably not a good idea to give the stars any ideas, though.

What started off as something informational - plugging water conservation methods in gardens - spun off into a series of TV and film spoofs egged on by Goodnick and Dell, who, apart from knowing their stuff in the garden, aren't afraid to indulge in flights of fancy.

Thus, our intrepid heroes have done what many of us have done in our own back yards as kids: journeyed to exotic lands ("Journey to the Center of the Dirt," Episode 3), found enlightenment (Episode 2, "How to Water Wisely"), even solved a crime.

"Episode 4 was the most complex," said the show's director Zwicke, a 2003 UCSB film and TV grad, of the episode's film noir theme, which also involved a femme fatale and a rubber chicken taken hostage, and how to come up with an low-maintenance sustainable garden.

"We kind of got carried away with that one," Zwicke said.

"The chicken was gonna visit the Colonel, if you know what I



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Landscape architects Billy Goodnick, left, and Owen Dell are the "stars" of Channel 18's "Garden Wise."

mean," explained Goodnick.

The most recent episode has the guys traveling back in time with the unlikely aid of a sprinkler timer, where they enlighten a shear-toting, pesticide-happy backyard tender in the ways of the wise gardener. That episode was filmed in one of our own Good Land back yards, owned by SB City employee Rebecca Bjork.

"Primarily we had a lot of overgrowth and lack of pruning," said Bjork, who came away with ideas on how to maintain her yard without putting in a lot of time.

Zwicke, for her part, digs the show not only because it gave her a pretty steady gig, but also because Dell and Goodnick allow her to exercise a narrative, story-driven form along with the real intent of the show: to promote practical and necessary water conservation techniques in local gardens.

And local is what it's really all about. The show deals with issues that come up in even the most avid garden enthusiast's backyard.

"It's pretty universal as far as getting the most as they can out of their yards," said Goodnick, pointing out that many gardeners deal with less space. Environmental responsibility and low maintenance ideas are also questions he gets asked.

"We got a question from someone who wanted to know how to kill their lawn, but we're not allowed to talk about n-palm," he said.

The show may take on a more magazine format, said Zwicke, who just received a grant from to do a series of four shows on firescaping. While it might not be the flights of fantasy the previous shows have had, Zwicke vows to "keep the creative, funny part." With Garden Wise guys like Goodnick and Dell, it's an offer she can't refuse.

For more information, and to ask the Garden Wise guys a question, visit Channel 18's website at www.citytv18.com.