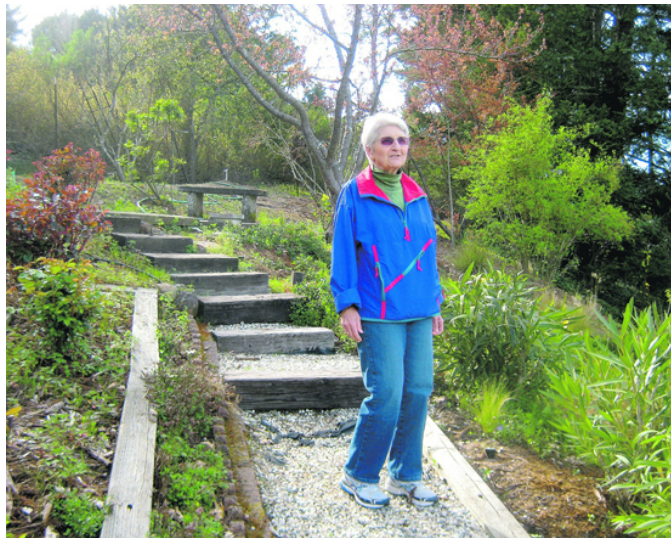


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2011 Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour

Annual event will feature new gardens in Lafayette and Orinda

By Sophie Braccini



Alma Raymond in her back yard Photo Sophie Braccini

Alma Raymond wanted to see more Orinda homes featured on the annual Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour, so she approached Tour organizer Kathy Kramer about her new front yard; Raymond's will be one of three new gardens among the five Lamorinda sites on the 2011 Tour.

6,000 people are expected to attend this year's tour of over 50 gardens located throughout Alameda and Contra Costa counties that will be showcased on Sunday, May 1.

Raymond says she has been a California Native Plant Society member on and off since the early 1960's. But while she was working, she didn't have time to do anything about the grass and junipers that were the ornaments of her front garden. "When I retired, my first objective was to reduce our water use," explains Raymond, "then we also wanted to attract wild life and stop using fertilizer."

Lafayette's Betty Nelson had similar objectives. "I like the idea of native plants and wanted to stop using so much water and chemicals," says Nelson, "and a naturalistic-type garden fits better in this area of Lafayette." For Nelson the front garden is an outside room. She works for a biotech company and sometimes uses a home office that's adjacent to her front garden. "These types of garden are so much

more interesting than lawns," she says, "I wanted to work with a landscape designer to get good design ideas and sources for plants." Nelson chose Four Dimensions Landscape in Oakland.

"There are different parts in the Raymonds' front garden," says Kim Larsen of Dragonfly Designs in Orinda, who help Raymond with her yard, "the left side is more woody looking, and in the top right front we have kept some of the original English garden plants that were there and mixed them with natives." The whole space was planted with native shrubs and perennials and sown with native flower seeds. "We also cut the use of pesticides," said Raymond, who spends a few hours every week in her garden tending to things and trying to pull weeds before they go to seed.

Raymond and Nelson have their favorite places to get their native plants. "Some local nurseries refuse to carry native plants because they think that residents do not want them," says Raymond, "Orchard and Moraga Gardens carry some." She goes to Tilden Park and the Botanical Garden to get plants. "Garden Natives Nursery in Martinez has plants that are hard to find, like an unusual cultivar of California fuchsia called Calistoga," says Nelson, "there is also Native Here Nursery in Tilden Park that grows local native plants, from local seeds they collect around here; if you want a valley oak from Lafayette, you can get it there."

This year's tour will again feature Barbara Leitner's garden in Orinda, and Al and Barbara Kyte's Moraga garden. Leitner is a botanist and native plant fan, who uses plants local to the San Pablo Creek watershed. The Kyte's garden, 35 years in development, contains over 100 species of California natives, manzanita-based chaparral in front and a Japanese garden concept in the back with a stream and fish pond.

Another garden new to the Tour is Mary Jennings and Michael Jennings' garden in Lafayette, which was developed by Michael who studied horticulture at Diablo Valley College under the legendary Stewart Winchester.

The Tour is volunteer-run and registration must be complete by April 24. For more information go to www.bringingbackthenatives.net.



Island Bush Poppy



Baby Blue Eyes in Al and Barbara Kyte's garden



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