

# Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 07 Issue 16 Wednesday, October 9, 2013



## Let's Eat!

*Lamorinda gardeners get the most from their gardens*

By Chris Lavin



Ellen Bier grows dozens of edibles in her Sleepy Hollow neighborhood in Orinda.

Photo Chris Lavin

Walk through any gate into an edible garden here, but don't tap the gardener on the shoulder unless you're prepared for a quick tour and a baffling list of names and varieties. That's not a bean, but a roma, and that's not a tomato but an "Esther's Mortgage Lifter." Not a pumpkin but a kabocha.

You get the picture.

Throughout Lamorinda edible gardens produce way more, at times, than the family can handle, which turns out to be a boon for the neighbors, even the postman. More than churn out food for the family, the gardens connect their owners to the land, immersing them in the outdoors, revealing microclimates, and attracting so many birds some gardens look like aviaries.

"The towhees are going absolutely crazy right now," said Ellen Bier, an Orinda gardener who tore out the backyard pool a few years ago to get more garden space. A nut-brown towhee almost flew between her legs, where she stood next to a zucchini. "We still call this area 'the deep end.'"

According to the National Gardening Association, 13 percent of the U.S. population picks up a trowel to plant something each year. But a brief survey of nurseries puts the local figure at closer to half.

"A lot of people garden here," said Kenny Murakami, who runs Moraga Garden Center. "It's a broad spectrum. There are people with huge gardens, and people with backyard gardens that are very productive. And there a lot of people who are extremely knowledgeable."

Murakami's customers speak of him like a rock star, a fountain of information. While he has reached hero status among his clientele, "I'm just a guy who likes plants," he said. And he's not the only one who likes to give tips. Most gardeners can't contain themselves, and will spout a tip about gardening (or eating) every third step or so.

**TIP: To de-stem a strawberry, insert a stiff straw into the top a half inch, and twist. Stem can then be shot through said straw at a neighboring gardener. (Bobbie Preston, Moraga)**

While Murakami's advice might help, gardeners themselves must get to know their yards and space the hard way, by living with it through the years to become familiar with their particular microclimates. The front yard, even, can be different than the back.

...continued on page D4