

In the Back Yard

Mount Diablo Nursery & Garden

Half a Century of Tradition Revived with New Energy

By Sophie Braccini



Mt. Diablo Nursery & Garden, 3295 Mt. Diablo Blvd. Lafayette

Prologue: Harry Ide was born in Alamo, California in 1910. Early in 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 authorizing the relocation of Americans of Japanese origin to internment camps. Ide and his wife were among them. Prior to his departure, Ide was stripped of his American citizenship and forced to sell his belongings. After the war, in 1945, the Ide's returned to Contra Costa County. It was here that he started his new venture in early August of 1950, Harry's Nursery. When Ide retired in 1982, he leased the business to Jiro Mishimoto and his brother, who successfully ran it for 30 years. The footprint of the nursery stayed the same during these years, a long narrow strip of land that runs parallel to the Lafayette Park Hotel. The bamboo on the East side of the nursery is the same and the building in the back served as the Ide's home during the early days of the business.

In the early 70's, a young man by the name of Garth Jacober worked part time at Harry's Nursery to help pay for school. Jacober had been raised locally and always enjoyed plants and nature. He loved Harry and his nursery and only in his wildest dreams could he picture himself owning such a place.

That's exactly what happened last March when Jacober and his wife, Marcia, bought the lease on Harry's Nursery from the Ide family.

Between 1972 and today,

Jacober accumulated 30 years of experience in plants, landscaping and gardening. He took care of a very large property in Lafayette that was home to some 300 different types of camellias. He still owns many of the rarest plants. He worked with Magic Gardens in Berkeley and specialized in plant care, propagation, and winter pruning, held diverse positions with East Bay Parks and worked in Tilden's Botanical Garden. He's had a long standing sub-contracting agreement with Lazar Landscape in Berkeley. He has a passion for everything that grows in the ground and how to get it to prosper.

Marcia Jacober is the vegetable and rose expert of the family. A teacher and therapist by training, she worked at the Alcohol Youth Treatment Center in Concord. Marcia took a break from her profession to start the nursery with her husband, and is returning to her family practice on a limited basis.



Garth and Marcia Jacober

Photo by Sophie Braccini

When the Jacobers took over Harry's, they both wanted to infuse their own energy and personality into the business. The two have been renovating the Nursery with this in mind. Garth is constantly bringing in new plants and he selects the best quality from local California growers. Marcia is pleased to report that customers are discovering in their vibrant nursery plants they had never seen anywhere else before. In addition to their new plants, the couple is renovating the back building and patio where they plan to offer classes, hold garden meetings and organize art shows. Their interest in art is also highlighted by the beautiful California mural that Mary Frank, a talented young local artist, is painting on the West wall of the property.

"Watering once or twice daily, attending to customers, receiving and arranging plants, managing a business, this is very hard work!" says Garth with a big smile, "and this is my passion."

Master Gardeners Annual Garden Walk

By Cathy Tyson

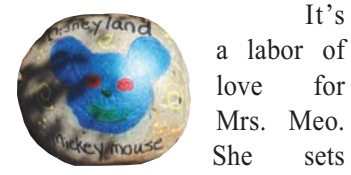
Looking for instruction and inspiration for your home garden? You don't have to go much further than the St. Perpetua School's Garden of Learning, lovingly designed and tended by Master Gardener Monette Meo.

This is just one of the six unique gardens that will be open for viewing on September 8 from 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Contra Costa Master Gardeners Annual Garden Walk. Master Gardeners will be on hand at each and every garden to answer questions. According to Eileen Linn, special topics such as composting, propagation, bees, invasive plants and healthy gardening will be addressed. Tickets and propagated plants will be available at St. Perpetua the day of the Walk. Tickets are also available in advance of the Walk, see contact information below.

Some lovely grape vines and soothing wind chimes greet visitors to the St. Perpetua Garden of Learning. Made completely of recycled materials, this organic whimsical garden features tons of fragrant flowers, strawberries, zucchini, seven kinds of tomatoes, a pink lemonade lemon tree, blueberries and much more, along with a solar powered fountain/pond, Peter Rabbit's reading room, a butterfly habitat, California native section, a greenhouse, cold frame and vegetable teepees. Throughout the space student's artwork can be found, mosaics, a kid-sized colorful picnic table, and hand painted river rocks.

Master Gardener and teacher at St. Perpetua, Monette Meo is a force of nature. Back in 2004, she received permission to transform a patch of dirt into something wonderful. This particular area had lots of sun and great drainage, but little else. With help from husband Greg and son Michael,

they started with the raised beds and went from there. "Part of me is here in the garden," says son Michael.



It's a labor of love for Mrs. Meo. She sets aside Thursdays as baking day during the school year and sells homemade zucchini bread as well as other baked goods and lattes on Fridays at school to raise money to maintain the garden. In addition, she puts up jams from the blackberries, makes pesto, tomatillo salsa, even 76 quarts of homemade minestrone soup all with ingredients from the garden to support the project. These will be available for purchase.

"The kids are really getting it," she says, referring to the connection of the garden and where their food comes from. Lessons that she gives her students include good bugs/bad bugs, how to propagate from seeds and cuttings, how the solar-powered pond works, and the how and why of "dead heading." The kids also help bring in mulch and work



The gate to the "Garden of Learning"

Photos by Andy Scheck

on composting. In addition to the fabulous St. Perpetua garden, the Walk features a "colorful combinations" garden in Lafayette and a "terraced treasure" garden in Orinda plus two Martinez gardens along with one more in Walnut Creek.

Admission to all six gardens is \$15 in advance, and goes up to \$20 after August 31. The themed gardens are all different, there's one on a hillside, one salvia-focused, one with alternatives to lawn, and more. All are close enough to drive to in the allotted time. For more information contact MGgardenwalk2007@yahoo.com or call Barbara Abbott (925) 672-2315.



Master Gardener Monette Meo with her son, Michael Meo

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- **Vegetables**
- **Meat Scraps**
- **Cheese/Dairy**
- **Much More**



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