

DEN TOURS 2008

Invitation: Open Gardens

By Suzan Ormandy

Whether looking for ideas on how to solve that problem slope on your property or simply curious to see some especially lovely gardens in our area, three upcoming garden tours won't disappoint. Of quite different natures, so to speak, the six-garden Moraga Junior Women's Club Through the Garden Gate on Saturday, May 3, the sixty-garden (yes, sixty) Bringing Back the Natives on Sunday, May 4, and the Lafayette Garden Club's six-garden Gardens for Gardeners, Thursday, May 8th, offer both serious and casual gardeners an array of beautiful and practical ideas.

In its fifth year, the self-guided Garden Gate focuses on gardens with unique and creative features such as outdoor kitchens, unusual play areas and even a small vineyard. It also seeks to offer guests a wide range of settings, from spectacular estates to a sprawling Sanders Ranch hillside house to simpler ranches.

The Hollerbach hilltop Orinda garden, designed by the renowned Bob Clark, is an example of the sublime end. Guests approach the new brick Tudor house via a circular coach drive with central fountain. Secluded under a canopy of live oaks, we're drawn to the main rear garden along a curving path bordered by eye-level terraced beds of mostly white and often fragrant flowers and shrubs: dainty campanula spill out from under daphne, sarcococca and choisiya. After passing the fairytale-like octagonal pool house, we're rewarded with a drop-dead view of the Orinda and Oakland hills. Fairly formal in design, a semi-circle of lawn and play area create a warm, kid-friendly feeling while the jasmine-draped pergolas around the pool continue to add more grace and elegance.

You can experience this and five other gardens by purchasing \$30 tickets at McDonnell Nursery (Orinda), Orchard (Lafayette) and Across the Way (Moraga). A catered, pre-ordered box lunch provided by Whole Foods is available for pick up at Moraga Commons that day.

With more than 600 attendees last year, the Moraga Juniors should easily meet their donation goal of \$30,000. This year, two family-oriented charities, The Lamorinda Senior Transportation Program and the Contra Costa County-based We Care Services for Children, will receive all proceeds -- yet another reason not to miss going Through the Garden Gate on May 3. [www.throughthegardengate.org]

The Gardens for Gardeners Tour is the first public tour to be offered by the Lafayette Garden Club. The featured gardens are not those of Club members but of green-thumbed homeowners who simply love spending time in the garden, and their accomplishments are extraordinary.

The majestic oaks lining the front of Sandra Oneal's home are only camouflage for the display of over one hundred roses awaiting you in her sun-filled garden. Follow the gravel paths she placed herself to the raised flower beds that hold hundreds of tulips every spring and will be filled with summer vegetables shortly. Every plant and wheelbarrow of compost was lovingly dug by Oneal over the past five years. Her delight in gardening and strict "do it yourself" approach are an inspiration to all gardeners (and an alternative to the gym).

You may also visit a suburban farm and discover a diverse habitat of wildlife that mingles with native plants in a creek side garden. Whimsical sculptures peek around corners including grazing sheep in the front red fescue lawn. Plant propagation goes on year round in the greenhouse -- the homeowners spe-

cialize in California native specimens.

Gardens for Gardeners can be toured on Thursday, May 8, from 10:00a.m.-3:30p.m. Garden Club members will be on site demonstrating plant care, propagation techniques and designing garden art. Members' favorite plants will be available for purchase. Proceeds will benefit local school garden programs.

Tickets are \$25 and are available at Mt Diablo Nursery, Queen Bee Gifts, or by return mail: Diane Sasser, 16 Warwick CT Lafayette, CA 94549. Please make your check payable to the Lafayette Garden Club. Day of tour tickets will be available at St. Perpetua Children's Garden.

Truly a labor of love for its organizer, Bringing Back The Natives might be the most extensive garden tour in the world. Kathy Kramer, an award-winning environmental activist, has dedicated a large part of the last four years to organizing these annual, free native-gardens tours. Her passion for a safe and natural habitat for creatures large and small is our great fortune. It results this year in not only a 60-garden self-guided tour but also:

- An astounding website whose wealth of information and spectacular photos will bring any nature lover to tears. (Warning: if you visit www.bringingbackthenatives.net, you will have no choice on how to spend Sun., May 4)
- Several exclusive, personal \$30 'select' tours through April and May
- A native plant sale 'extravaganza' at several nurseries, many not normally open to the public, on the tour weekend
- 50 educational talks throughout the day
- Carpooling and a gardener match service
- Healthy and reasonable lunches provided [while supplies last] al fresco in Alameda by Nursery Marketplace and the Alameda Butterfly Habitat

California native plants -- because they are adapted to local soils and climate -- thrive without additives and offer incomparable habitat to wildlife. Despite stereotypes of dry Mediterranean gardens, they are often very beautiful and interesting.

Many of the gardens on this impressive tour are rich in natives if not unique in other respects:

- The 50-year-old Fleming garden in Berkeley has over 200 native species with a spectacular Bay view as well. The gardener will be available all day to field questions.
- Gail Giffen's sculpture-rich enclave in Lafayette featured in many gardening magazines, exhibits "how architecture and nature can work in harmony" and includes a talk on "Sudden Oak Death" at noon
- Five words about the Butt's garden in Pt. Richmond: prairie slopes, fruits, butterflies and bees
- Al Kyte's 8500-square foot Lafayette garden combines his passion for natives and fly fishing: there's a straight but discreet line among the shrubs for him to practice casting!

Please note that volunteers are still needed should you want this opportunity to further inform yourself as well as others.

The online registration deadline for the tour itself is April 27. This is a deadline that you don't want to miss. [see www.bringingbackthenatives.net for an amazing tour in itself and for specifics]

Lee Borrowman contributed to this article.



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Bob Tanem

Recommended by Bob Tanem. He has a "call-in" 3 hour Garden Show on KSFQ Radio San Francisco. Bob constantly recommends VF-11 for Vegetables.



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