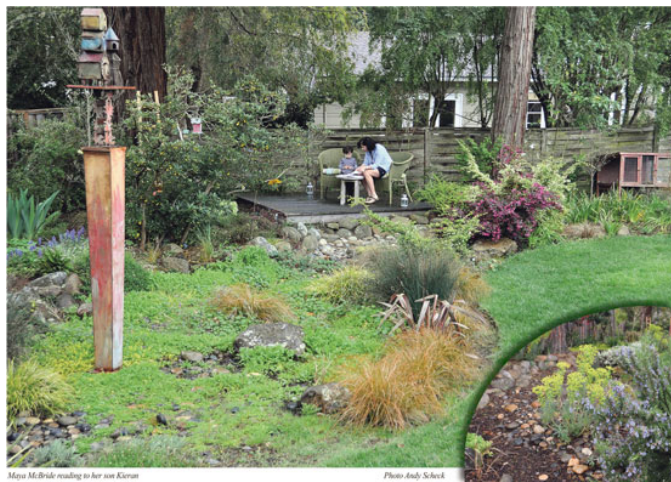


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## Maya McBride's Rain Garden

By Andrea A. Firth



Maya McBride reading to her son Kieran

Photo: Andy Scheck

Euphorbia characias wulfenii

Maya McBride reading to her son Kieran Photo Andy Scheck

2004 she created a rain garden (see sidebar) doing most of the design and much of the back-breaking work herself. She created a 150-foot creek bed that slopes slightly as it traverses along the back of her property. Hand dug and bulldozed with a small bobcat, Maya layered rock and mulch, which allows the water to slowly seep into the ground. All of her downspouts pour into the creek bed, notes Maya, who believes there is a benefit to having the rainwater diverted from storm drains due to the petrochemicals that come off the asphalt tile roof in the rainwater.

There are two areas where the water pools and the slight depressions provide channels for the water to flow toward the back corner of the yard. "In essence I created a creek bed to keep the water moving away from the house," says Maya. A permeable fabric layer on top covered by drainage and river rock allows plants to flourish and provides limited weed control. While she clearly likes to garden, it's more for the enjoyment and less about maintenance. "Weeds are weeds," according to Maya.

A 10 foot by 10 foot redwood deck, shaded by a couple of regal redwoods and few aromatic cedars, serves as nice place to relax and read and for the kids to play. Wooden birdhouses made by her boys adorn a bush nearby. Her garden art also includes a totem pole by Emeryville metalwork artist Vickie Jo Sowell, whose work was also featured in the Library Plaza as part of Orinda's Art in Public Places Program.

Maya has filled the garden with half native and half non-native but all drought tolerant plants (see sidebar). For the plants situated directly in the creek bed, "You have to have plants that can survive in a bog; plants that are able to sit in water for several hours during the rainy season as the water slowly soaks into the ground and then go dormant when it is dry," states Maya. March through May the garden is filled with the colors of spring - lush greens, bright yellows, and perky purples and pinks, and as the dry days of summer arrive Maya lets nature take its course. "You really have to go with the seasons. For someone who enjoys a natural look in the garden, this is it."

### Maya's Rain Garden Plants

Maya had three criteria for the plants that she chose for her rain garden:

Must grow in bog-like conditions during the rainy season.

Must have average to low water needs in the summer.

Using native plants was a priority, but not a requirement.

Here is a list of the several of the plants and grasses that Maya has used.

### Plants

In 2003, Maya McBride and her husband made the move east out of Berkeley to Orinda and bought what she describes as the quintessential rancher replete with a backyard shaded by tall cedar and redwood trees and covered with ivy and Bermuda grass. "It was so dark and creepy," says Maya, admitting that she has an aversion to spiders and ticks. She began to brainstorm ways to introduce light and new plant life to create a friendly backyard haven for her growing family, which now includes three boys ages 10, 7, and 4 years along with an old cat named Rosie.

Maya quickly encountered a stumbling block to her landscape remodeling plans. When it rained water pooled in a large dirt area in the yard. She subsequently learned that the prior owner of the home must have faced the same problem. Back in the 1950's, he had constructed a dry well in the middle of the yard that had been covered up by dirt over the years. "We knew that we had to take care of the drainage issue first," says Maya. As she began to investigate the alternatives, which involved sump pumps and French drains, she saw the cost of the project escalating quickly. "That's when I realized that I needed to find another way."

Maya did extensive research and over the course of the winter of

*Limnanthes douglasii* var. *sulphurea* "Pt Reyes Meadow Foam"

*Geranium pyrenaicum* "Bill Wallis"

*Achillea millefolium* 'Cassis' "Yarrow"-great for attracting butterflies.

*Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea' "Creeping Jenny" "Moneywort"-a creeping ground cover that spills over rocks into the rain garden.

*Euphorbia characias wulfenii*-a prolific reseeder.

Grasses

*Carex testacea* "Orange New Zealand Sedge"-turns green in the shade and a beautiful orange color in the sun

*Acorus gramineus* 'variegatus' "Sweet Flag"

*Imperator cylindrical* "Japanese Blood Grass"

*Juncus occidentalis* "California Western Rush"

Maya purchased many of her plants from an online source [Annie's Annuals, a [www.anniesannuals.com/](http://www.anniesannuals.com/)] and many from the Moraga Garden Center, 1400 Moraga Road by the Moraga Center. Maya says, "Talk to Kenny. He is very helpful!"

What's a Rain Garden?

A rain garden is a planted

depression that captures,

channels, and diverts storm water runoff from rooftops, driveways, walkways, and

compacted lawn areas and provides the opportunity for the water to be absorbed into the soil. Water filters through rock and soil layers before entering the groundwater system. Rain gardens can help to reduce the amount of pollution reaching creeks and streams and the erosion, flooding, and diminished groundwater associated with storm drains and surface water.



The rain garden in bloom in early Spring Photos Andy Scheck



Totem pole art by Vickie Jo Sowell

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