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Lamorinda in Bloom

Moraga Junior Women's Club and the Lafayette Garden Club host Garden Tours in May

By Andrea A. Firth



Wendi Shively's garden in Lafayette Photo A. Firth

variety of styles from resort/tropical to four California gardens described individually as woodland, cottage, romantic, and natural. "We have built relationships with local landscapers and designers over the years," notes Moraga Juniors' Garden Tour Co-Chair Denise Duff. "We visited more than 15 gardens to choose the gardens for this tour. They all had unique elements. Water conservation was a popular theme."

One of the gardens on the tour, which clearly had water conservation top of mind, is located in the Sunrise Hill neighborhood of Orinda. "The homeowners had me come in to identify ways to reduce the garden's water needs," states Kim Larsen of Dragonfly Designs based in Orinda. Larsen suggested several changes to the water-greedy grass and non-native plantings that were part of the property's original landscape design, which ultimately resulted in a rebate from the East Bay Municipal Utility District's water saving program.

Art elements throughout the garden reflect the family's culture. A stone patio, which now serves as an overflow space for outdoor gatherings, replaced a lawn and includes heart shaped stones for each family member. Three horny toad sculptures grace the patio-mascots for the owner, an alumnus of Texas Christian University. As you progress down the railroad tie steps, wooden posts with signage serve as memorials for the family's pets that have moved on.

A leisurely stroll on the gravel pathways enables you to see both the plantings and views from the steeply sloped back yard. "They didn't fight the wildlife," states Larsen noting that deer and other local critters are often seen roaming the yard. Native redwood trees were added to provide screening and require no irrigation. A bridge over a rocky creek bed with Mexican Elderberry and juncos creates a natural wetland in the rainy season and wonderful native effect in the summer. For a bit of meditative space, the garden also includes a gravel and stone labyrinth now blooming with daffodils. A little further up the hill, the garden goes edible with avocado, persimmon, apricot, and apple trees, and a lighted pathway highlighting a citrus walk.

For over two years, Larsen and the homeowners have worked to create a native, climate appropriate, drought tolerant garden-and it looks like they have achieved their goals.

To reach Kim Larsen and Dragonfly Designs go to dragonfly-designs.org.

With April's plentiful showers behind us and May's bountiful flowers in bloom, it is the perfect time to visit the spectacular gardens that can be found in Lamorinda. Two upcoming garden tours provide access through the garden gate and into several very special gardens enabling you to take in the view, and yes, even smell the roses. The Moraga Junior Women's Club hosts its 7th Annual Lamorinda Garden Tour, Through the Garden Gate, on Saturday, May 1st and the Lafayette Garden Club presents the Gardens for Gardeners Tour on Thursday, May 13th. (See sidebars for details.)

The Lamorinda Weekly was able to get an early sneak peek of one of the gardens on each of these great tours that we share with you over the next few pages.

Moraga Junior Women's Club Hosts Through the Garden Gate

The Moraga Juniors annual Lamorinda garden tour always attracts a crowd-last year over 500 people attended the event. The tour, now in its seventh year, features premier gardens created by leading landscape designers from the area. This year's tour includes five gardens with a

Through the Garden Gate

7th Annual Lamorinda Garden Tour

Hosted by Moraga Junior's Women's Club

Saturday, May 1st

10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Tickets on sale for \$30 at Across the Way in Moraga, McDonnell Nursery in Orinda, Orchard Nursery in Lafayette, and online at www.moragajuniors.org.

All proceeds will benefit Farm 2 Kids and the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano. Tickets are \$25 tax deductible.



Denise Duff and Sue

Milby, Co-Chairs of the Moraga Juniors Women's Club Garden Tour





The water conserving garden on the Through the Garden Gate Tour.

Lafayette Garden Club Presents the Gardens for Gardeners Tour

Established over 40 years ago, the Lafayette Garden Club has over 150 active members and is one of the largest garden clubs in the Bay Area. The Club's Gardens for Gardeners Tour features four private gardens in Lafayette and the Burton Valley School Garden classroom. The gardens have been lovingly planted and cared for by the homeowners who have been actively involved with the design and maintenance and know what is in their gardens.

One of the highlights of the tour is Wendi Shively's garden, which she describes as controlled chaos with a California cottage and farm aspect—it's that and much, much more. If there is such a thing as a California garden with an English twist, this is it. Native plants abound and intermingle comfortably with wisteria and roses all fed by a well that catches the rainwater that rolls down the nearby hills.

"I do spend a lot of time out here," says Wendi. She has happily toiled on her two-acre property located on Old Jonas Road for the past six years and considers it a work in progress. Wendi, who takes a do-it-yourself approach to her garden, has propagated hundreds of plants and learned to man a jackhammer and drive a hydraulic bobcat along the way. She admits to moving a plant two, three, or more times until she finds the right spot and right combination. "When you garden, you are never done. It's always changing," says Wendi.

After moving from Moraga to Lafayette, Wendi joined the garden club and set to work on a new vision for the property that overflowed with ivy and agapanthus. "It's a wonderful garden club," says Wendi adding that she and her garden club pals frequent nurseries like some women go to Nordstrom. Wendi's husband Jim, a retired orthopedic surgeon, has also played a role in the garden revamping. He has drawn on his fix-it skill set to handle the irrigation, drainage, and pathways. "If it is ground level or below, it's my problem," says Jim, who seems to be continually tinkering with a garden project. He even makes the stepping stones for the garden by hand.

A modest-sized home sits in the center of the Shively's property surrounded by several different garden areas and out buildings that include a cottage, a garden shed, a storage building, and a stable. Tar and gravel paths and driveways provide comfortable walkways throughout—a cost-effective alternative to pavers and a welcome change from the asphalt that had covered the property.

Valley oaks line the perimeter as you enter the garden providing dappled shade to the front beds that are populated with hydrangeas and unique fragrant camellias. A chicken coop houses "the girls" as Wendi fondly calls her poultry. Architectural elements provide interest to each bed—trellises that support climbing roses, stone ducks, wooden birdhouses, an antique gate, and a tombstone dated 1917. An orchard of prolific apple trees, the fruit from which Wendi harvests and donates to a local food bank, is also home to two bee colonies which are housed in two-foot square bee boxes that keep the garden pollinated and provide an ample supply of honey year round.

A walk through the Shively's garden is an easy-going adventure with something new around each bend and little surprises in each bed—a great place to take a friend for a stroll or a child to explore.

Gardens for Gardeners Tour

Presented by the Lafayette Garden Club

Thursday, May 13th

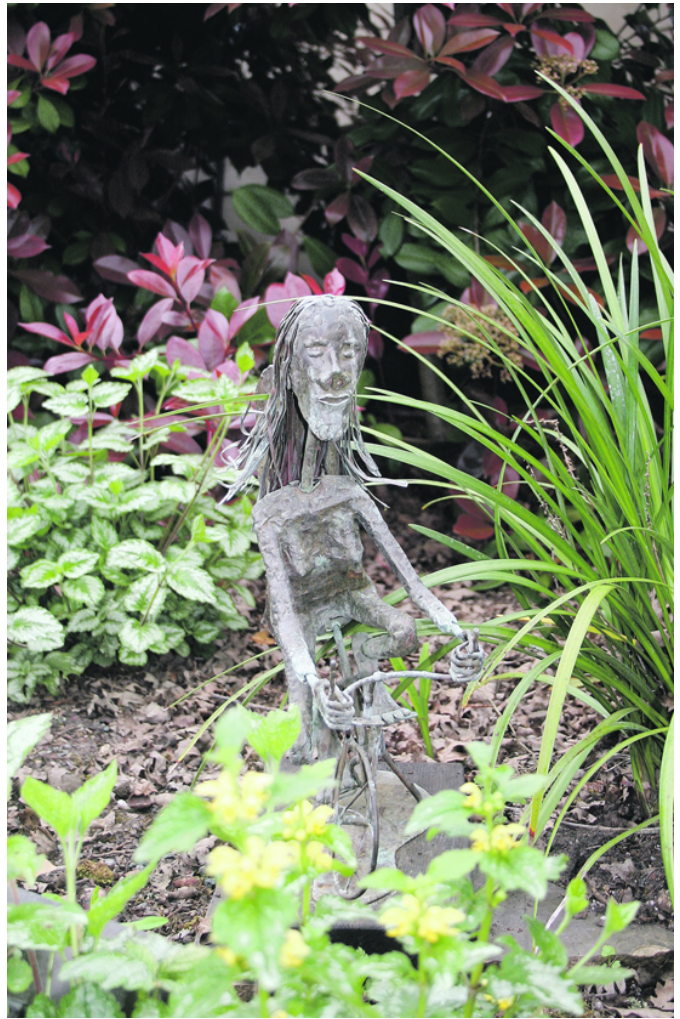
10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Tickets in advance are \$25 and \$30 on the day of the tour.

Contact Julie Carlson, jacarls@comcast.net, 925-284-7547.

Proceeds will benefit area schools and Lafayette Seniors' garden education projects.





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