

# Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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## Bringing Back the Natives Goes Hands On

By Sophie Braccini



*The Sorensons' creek restoration*

It is quite remarkable, driving along Sleepy Hollow streets on the way to Bob and Stephanie Sorenson's, to witness the number of homes that have foregone front lawns for native/Mediterranean/low-irrigation plant displays. While most of them are not part of this year's annual Bringing Back the Natives Tour on May 5, they are testimony to Lamorinda residents' growing desire to save water and conform to native vegetation.

The Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour encourages such efforts, allowing residents a way to

visit some of the most beautiful native gardens around. This year there will also be a series of hands-on 'Select Tours' offered before and after the free self-guided tour, where participants can learn techniques to help them create their own native gardens.

"I had the idea of the Select Tours for people who want to see more gardens or who want to learn something about a specific theme," says tour organizer Kathy Kramer. "The objective is to help people move ahead, on their own." For example, six months ago the Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour held



*The Home Designer with Brandon Neff ...read on page D8*

a "Mow no Mo'!" sheet mulching workshop at Craig Somberg's garden in Lafayette, and 1,750 square feet of lawn disappeared in one day.

Kramer said that people came with their gloves and shovels to help and to learn how to do it. Afterward, Somberg's garden was ready for drip irrigation and a Smart Timer to be installed, and for the plants to get into the ground.

There are some old favorites on this year's tour, like Al Kyte's garden in Moraga. Kyte has been a native gardener for 40 years and has a wealth of information. There are also several new Lamorinda participants on the tour, including the Sorensons.

Bob Sorenson was raised in Orinda and grew up by a creek; he moved to his current house in 1989. "I wanted to buy a home with a creek and to be part of nature," he said. "The creek behind my house must have been grazed by cattle at some point and was invaded by weeds. I started learning about the native plants and over the years replaced the weeds with natives."

It took Sorenson 10 years to restore the creek to its original state. As he learned about native plants, Sorenson also collected seeds in the San Pablo watershed and learned to propagate the plants. Once the creek project was complete, he started talking to his wife about replacing the front lawn.

At first she was happy with the European-looking front lawn, but as her desire to attract birds and wildlife to her garden grew, she learned that native plants are the best way to do it. "She gave me the okay 18 months ago," said Sorenson. He planted native oaks as the backbone of the garden. Then Sorenson started collecting more seeds and propagating more plants. ...continued on page D4