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Trailside Chickens Amuse and Educate

By Cathy Dausman



Marchiano's brood. Photos Cathy Dausman

Mike Marchiano simply crows about his chickens. "I love to garden," said the Lafayette resident, who explained that his becoming a Master Gardener led him to keeping chickens.

"A Walnut Creek friend gave me a book [about chickens]," Marchiano said.

Thinking the project would keep his children off the computer, he started small, buying three hens five years ago. "My first coop was a galvanized bucket with saw dust."

Over time he expanded to 10 hens, among them a Brama, Andalusian, Naked Neck, Silkie, Frizzle, Polish, Ameraucana and Barred Rock, and several coops with artwork he has painted himself. "Papa John (Kiefer, a local sustainable living advocate, see <http://tinyurl.com/mhcmtxq>) is my mentor," Marchiano said.

Why does Marchiano keep chickens? Good quality for a start - his backyard eggs are Omega-3 enriched and are "yolkier, and more orange than store bought eggs," he said. Plus, he added, it's fun, it promotes community and a more sustainable lifestyle. All that, and his children learned to appreciate the cycle of life.

Marchiano called the work good therapy. "I like to move things around," he said.

He's had to make some gardening adjustments; he can't grow vegetables (the chickens would eat them), so he grows herbs. His son and daughter learned a bit about business costs through egg collection and delivery. The family has also learned some more difficult life lessons - over time they have lost six hens to raccoons, and almost lost a seventh to a gray fox. But the children nursed the latter back to life treating the deep wound themselves and feeding the hen parmesan cheese laced with sulfa drugs.

With his back yard abutting the Lafayette Moraga Trail, Marchiano loves to educate the people who stop to observe his brood. He patiently answers questions like, "Do you get eggs every day?" (Yes. Each chicken lays one egg nearly every day) or "Why don't you have a rooster?" (Because they're noisy; hens merely cluck). He strives for good communication among his neighbors and he keeps his yard picked up. But even Marchiano draws the line on just how involved he will be with his brood.

When asked if his chicken dinner ever comes from the back yard, Marchiano replied: "I'm not ready to take that step."



"This one looks like Phyllis Diller," Marchiano says of his Polish hen.



From left, Roberto Mendoza, age 3, with brother Benjamin, 2, admire Marchiano's brood.

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