

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Saving Water In The Garden Can Be Magical

By Sophie Braccini



A flagstone path meanders through this native backyard oasis.

Photo provided

Adding your house to the list of East Bay homes featured in the May 3 Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour says a lot about pride of a job well done. Lafayette residents Sandy and Richard Brehmer transformed their garden into a native beauty one and a half years ago. In the beautiful 7,000 square foot space, they enjoy the outdoors more now than they ever have before.

When the Brehmers decided to replace their lawn, they took a hard look at the large flat surface and thought it was time to create something a little more interesting.

"For years we had been concerned about our water bill," remembers Richard Brehmer. "At one point it reached \$600 and our very large lawn was not even as beautiful as Sandy would have liked it to be."

A neighbor had already "gone native."

"We liked what she had done a lot, and we asked her the name of her landscape architect," says Sandy Brehmer.

Roxy Wolosenko, owner of Roxy Designs, came over and started imagining how to transform the Brehmer's level space into something more remarkable. Wolosenko focuses on drought-resistant

landscaping "because it just makes sense to plant what is naturally thriving in an area," she says. "I create gardens that are about 80 percent native, adding plants that are drought tolerant, but from other regions. Not everything flowers at the same time and it makes for a more interesting display."

Although they had several discussions about concepts and plants, the Brehmers gave carte blanche to Wolosenko.

First, she created a new backbone for the garden. Wolosenko constructed berms and flagstone alleyways meandering between them. Each berm is different from the others and offers a different visual presentation. Large grasses sit next to flowers or cacti-like plants. Large purple bushes planted alongside colorful ground cover. Wolosenko and the Brehmers chose rocks to place among the plants, creating a more natural look.

Their garden invites discovery. When the Brehmers' grandchildren come to visit, they love to explore the pathways. A few quiet areas of the garden are perfect for reading. There, when Richard Brehmer isn't enjoying a book, he is observing the wildlife that now populates his garden. "I watch the bees on their daily forage for nectar, and the hummingbirds that now come all the time," he says with a peaceful smile.

Wolosenko says she loves the moment plants arrive in their pots on a site. "Immediately the insects start showing up, and the magic begins," she says.

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