

Growing their backyard garden

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Space for the garden after the pool was removed.

Photo provided



The greenhouse is modest – an aluminum frame and polycarbonate window affair. They purchased the 6-foot by 8-foot shed from a big box store 10 years ago and assembled it on site.

“It was a day project,” said husband, Mike Metcalf, former Moraga mayor and council member, before explaining that the wooden deck supporting the greenhouse was a separate project.

“When this (shed) falls apart we’re going to make a real one out of wood,” Sharon Metcalf promised.

There is no thermometer to measure the temperature difference, but direct sun has been warm enough to warrant opening the greenhouse vent and necessitate the installation of mesh screens on the roof to filter the sunlight. Mother nature will provide some shade once the nearby apple tree blossoms.

A greenhouse does more than simply extend the planting season. Even in the relative mildness of a Mediterranean climate a greenhouse provides protection against temperature swings, blustery wind and damaging rain; it also limits exposure to critters and insects. A greenhouse allows plants to be grown year-round.

The Metcalf backyard was not originally sunny. When the couple bought the house in 1985 their lot contained six large pine trees that obscured the view and cut down on sunlight. Their slopes held plenty of juniper too. The pines and juniper were removed earlier and “last summer we pulled the (backyard) pool,” Mike Metcalf said, adding “I’m glad it’s gone now.”

The pool was an above ground model nestled into the yard and surrounded by decking; Sharon Metcalf insisted the deck be left in place when they developed their new 30-foot by 15-foot garden plot. She had Mike build stairs into each end of the oval garden. He grumbled about that project, Sharon says, but Mike Metcalf said the hardest part was installing the plumbing.

The area has two cedar plank raised garden beds on a watering system. As prefab kits ordered online, their installation was a snap. “There’s not a nail in the place,” Mike Metcalf said, pointing to the slotted metal corner posts. “It’s all screwed.”

The result is a sunny, bark dust and stepping stone enclave four feet below deck level, which offers full sun exposure and plenty of wind protection. Latticed wood outlines the oval garden. A fabric screen can be quickly mounted on the boxes’ metal arches to keep out avian invaders, but Mike Metcalf expects that circling birds of prey will discourage the smaller breeds from lingering in the garden or even on the ground.

Sharon Metcalf plans her winter plantings in late summer. That crop has already yielded broccoli, Brussels sprouts and golden beets. She says homegrown food simply tastes better. When the summer garden is established in May, the Metcalfs look forward to harvesting a salad full of greenery.

The rest of their lot includes plum, apricot and cherry trees, a blood orange, lime and lemon tree, pomegranate, persimmon, grapes, a rose bed and a



While the winter garden is coming to an end, Sharon can still enjoy picking fresh broccoli.

Photo Andy Scheck

Granny Smith apple tree.

Mike Metcalf knows his wife just loves working in the garden.

“My first love is roses,” Sharon Metcalf says, eyeing her blossoming buds, “then the garden.” She’s definitely got the green thumb, and the yard for it.