

# Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 12 Issue 6 Wednesday, May 16, 2018



*Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian*

*...read on page D12*

## Locals take part in world's largest citizen scientist project

By Sora O'Doherty



*Liz Bittner, park supervisor of the Tilden Park Botanical Garden, collects samples in Orinda during Sudden Oak Death Blitz.*  
*Photos Sora O'Doherty*

**S**udden Oak Death is an emerging infectious disease, and citizen scientists can help predict its spread. On April 28 in the Orinda Library, Matteo Garbelotto, professor of environmental policy at UC Berkeley, brought his Sudden Oak Death Blitz to town, lecturing on the disease and training citizens to go out and collect specimens to add to the database. Although the disease kills oak trees, it is spread by carrier trees, mainly tanoaks and California bay laurels. Laurels can actually recover from the disease, which is fatal to nearby oak trees.

After the training, participants went out to examine trees. If an infected tree was found, 6 to 10 leaves were to be collected and labeled as to the exact location, latitude and longitude, of the tree, which was also marked with a blue plastic strip tied loosely around a limb. Non-infected trees were also to be noted. The collected specimens were then returned within 48 hours to a collection site at Orinda Fire Station 45, picked up by local naturalist William Hudson and returned to the UC Berkeley Forest Pathology Lab for DNA identification to determine if the disease is actually present.

The expensive testing takes a number of months and is funded by the U.S. Forestry Service and a number of private donors, according to Hudson. The results of the spring blitz will be available in October. In the fall, Garbelotto offers comprehensive workshops on dealing with SOD, particularly how to protect uninfected trees.

The Blitz is the first plant disease citizen science project in the world and one of the largest in the country. Data is collected by over 500 collectors and accessed by over a million people. Sudden Oak Death is ramorum blight, caused by the pathogen *Phytophthora ramorum*. Over 200 species of ornamental plants are affected by the disease, which also infects coastal live oaks, black oaks, tanoaks, California bay laurels and Manzanita trees.



... continued on page D4

