

Lamorinda

OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 13 Issue 4 Wednesday, April 17, 2019



Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

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When native plants share space with a mini-farm



Ed McAlpine and Anne Chambers in their Moraga garden.

Photo Sophie Braccini

By Sophie Braccini

Anne Chambers and her husband, Ed McAlpine, view the utility of a garden with different eyes. For Chambers it is a place where the local flora is nurtured for the pleasure of the eyes and to reminisce the many hikes she loves to go on in the area; while for McAlpine, a garden is a place where useful production is conducted, where food is grown, where tree branches become furni-

ture, and where food waste is turned into compost. Like any marriage, theirs is made of compromise, up to the garden, where both of their visions mix harmoniously to create an arbor of useful peace and beauty.

This year, the Chambers-McAlpine Moraga garden near Campolindo will be part of the Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour on May 5. The tour creator Kathy Kramer always said that gardens featured on the tour had to be at least 60 percent or more natives, but

that food does not count. She says she is very happy with this latest addition to the tour where so many fruit trees and edible plants live side by side with the valley oak, coast siltassel, toyon, manzanita, ceanothus, salvias, Monkey flowers, coral bells, coffee berries, native roses and so many more. This is the first year for the Chambers-McAlpine's garden on the tour, one of the 35 gardens featured in Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

Approaching the house, a beautiful apple tree graces the front yard with its many pink blossoms. The garden boasts 26 varieties of fruit trees, including Violette de Bordeaux fig, Lamb Abbey Pearmain and Spitzenburg apples, and Clergeau and Comice pears, among others. McAlpine's philosophy about pruning the fruit trees appears immediately: the footprint is reduced and all the fruits are easily within reach. McAlpine is now retired and spends quite a great deal of time in the quarter-acre garden. It is a family tradition for him, coming straight from his mother, who already in the '50s and '60s had an organic garden where he, the older child, was often in charge of the weeding, necessary for good production.

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Lamorinda home sales recorded

City	Last reported	Lowest amount	Highest amount
LAFAYETTE	4	\$1,385,000	\$2,505,000
MORAGA	4	\$555,000	\$1,120,000
ORINDA	7	\$1,310,000	\$2,200,000

Home sales are compiled by Cal REsource, an Oakland real estate information company. Sale prices are computed from the county transfer tax information shown on the deeds that record at close of escrow and are published five to eight weeks after such recording. This information is obtained from public county records and is provided to us by California REsource. Neither Cal REsource nor this publication are liable for errors or omissions.

LAFAYETTE

- 1064 Oak Hill Road, \$1,385,000, 2 Bdrms, 1638 SqFt, 1953 YrBlt, 03-08-19,
Previous Sale: \$745,000, 09-11-12
- 3875 Quail Ridge Road, \$2,225,000, 6 Bdrms, 3830 SqFt, 1969 YrBlt, 03-08-19,
Previous Sale: \$1,614,000, 04-08-16
- 3717 Rose Court, \$2,505,000, 4 Bdrms, 2859 SqFt, 1965 YrBlt, 02-27-19
- 65 Silverwood Drive, \$1,750,000, 4 Bdrms, 3055 SqFt, 1961 YrBlt, 02-28-19,
Previous Sale: \$1,460,000, 01-06-17

MORAGA

- 104 Alta Mesa Court, \$1,120,000, 3 Bdrms, 1954 SqFt, 1974 YrBlt, 02-26-19,
Previous Sale: \$760,000, 06-22-04
- 116 Alta Mesa Court, \$850,000, 2 Bdrms, 1698 SqFt, 1974 YrBlt, 03-06-19,
Previous Sale: \$696,500, 03-23-15
- 1954 Ascot Drive, \$555,000, 2 Bdrms, 1234 SqFt, 1972 YrBlt, 03-08-19
- 740 Country Club Drive, \$935,000, 2 Bdrms, 1464 SqFt, 1973 YrBlt, 03-04-19,
Previous Sale: \$650,000, 04-27-15

ORINDA

- 2 Charles Hill Lane, \$2,200,000, 3 Bdrms, 2848 SqFt, 1960 YrBlt, 03-06-19,
Previous Sale: \$2,011,000, 05-18-18
- 64 El Gavilan Road, \$1,700,000, 4 Bdrms, 3164 SqFt, 1962 YrBlt, 02-27-19
- 59 La Espiral, \$1,310,000, 3 Bdrms, 2564 SqFt, 1947 YrBlt, 03-07-19,
Previous Sale: \$1,345,000, 01-24-17
- 10 Lost Valley Drive, \$1,355,000, 4 Bdrms, 1689 SqFt, 1964 YrBlt, 02-28-19,
Previous Sale: \$1,030,000, 10-06-16
- 19 Moraga Viax, \$1,475,000, 4 Bdrms, 2881 SqFt, 1952 YrBlt, 03-04-19,
Previous Sale: \$1,150,000, 12-02-13
- 4 Oak Flat Road, \$1,950,000, 4 Bdrms, 3007 SqFt, 1986 YrBlt, 02-28-19
- 26 Parklane Drive, \$1,350,000, 3 Bdrms, 1806 SqFt, 1946 YrBlt, 03-05-19,
Previous Sale: \$1,075,000, 06-29-07



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When native plants share space with a mini-farm

... continued from Page D1

In his Oakland home, and now for 10 years in his Moraga home, McAlpine continues to view his property as a place to grow food for his family. He has organic compost delivered to break down the clay soil, and on all sides of the house he has set beds for his winter, then the summer crops of vegetables. The rest of the property was designed as a native garden by Four Dimensions Landscape Company, and the fruit trees are growing happily in their midst.

Chambers explains that she and her husband have been going to the Bringing Back the Natives tour for years and got some of their inspiration there. She cites Al Kytes' garden, also in Moraga and also on the tour again this year, that has a water feature that inspired both of them to add one to their property. The pleasant watery gurgle adds to the serenity of a garden, which though it is not very large, has been conceived as a peace haven for them.

Under the rustic wooden veranda stands some of the furniture made by McAlpine with wood coming from the property. Birch branches have been turned into tables, and an old cherry tree provided boards to create benches. Chambers says with a smile that she has to protect her non-fruit trees so her husband does not turn all of them into something useful, like furniture.

The tour is a great source of inspiration for those interested in local plants set in the gardens of ordinary but creative and passionate people. The theme this year is Music and Art in the Garden, and the Chambers-McAlpine's will host Stanley Middle School's Jazz Messengers. McAlpine will give a talk and share secrets for a successful orchard. One of them is their backyard cat, a semiferal but friendly feline that lives outside and keeps the rodents and squirrels at bay, so the Chambers-McAlpine can really enjoy their fruit.

... continued on Page D6



Lemons



Figs



LAFAYETTE - Walk to Trails and Town
Beautifully updated view property offers approx. 1,900 sq. ft. of single-level, light-filled living space on more than a quarter acre. Freshly painted inside and out with hardwood floors and dual-pane Andersen windows. 4BD, 2.5BA, \$1,395,000



LAFAYETTE - 1.36 Acres in Burton Valley
Modern ranch style home showcases a spacious interior, premium lot and located just minutes from Lafayette's charming downtown. There are plans from the Talon Group to expand the residence to 3,655 sq. feet. 4BD, 2BA, \$1,595,000



LAFAYETTE - 3 Acres Estate with Panoramic Views
Single-level Mediterranean villa, tastefully and brilliantly updated, stretches out to more than 6,600 sq. ft. of living space on a single level. Breathtaking sunrises and star-studded night skies are enjoyed from this exclusive gated estate. 6BD, 7.5BA, \$5,295,000



ORINDA - 1 Level Acre in Prestigious North Orinda
Celebrate the beauty and luxuriousness of California indoor/outdoor living. More than 4,500 sq. ft. of living space and surrounded in park-like landscape, this mostly single level estate is truly one-of-a-kind. 3BD, 3.5BA, \$2,950,000



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When native plants share space with a mini-farm

... continued from Page D4

Registration is necessary for the free tour at <https://www.bringing-backthenatives.net/>. The tour includes a free Garden Art and Native Plant Extravaganza from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, May 4 and 5, at various native plant nurseries in the East Bay. A percentage of the proceeds from the sale of plants at these nurseries will be donated to the Bring Back the Natives Garden Tour.



Al Kyte's Moraga garden is a popular stop on the Tour.

Photo Kathy Kramer



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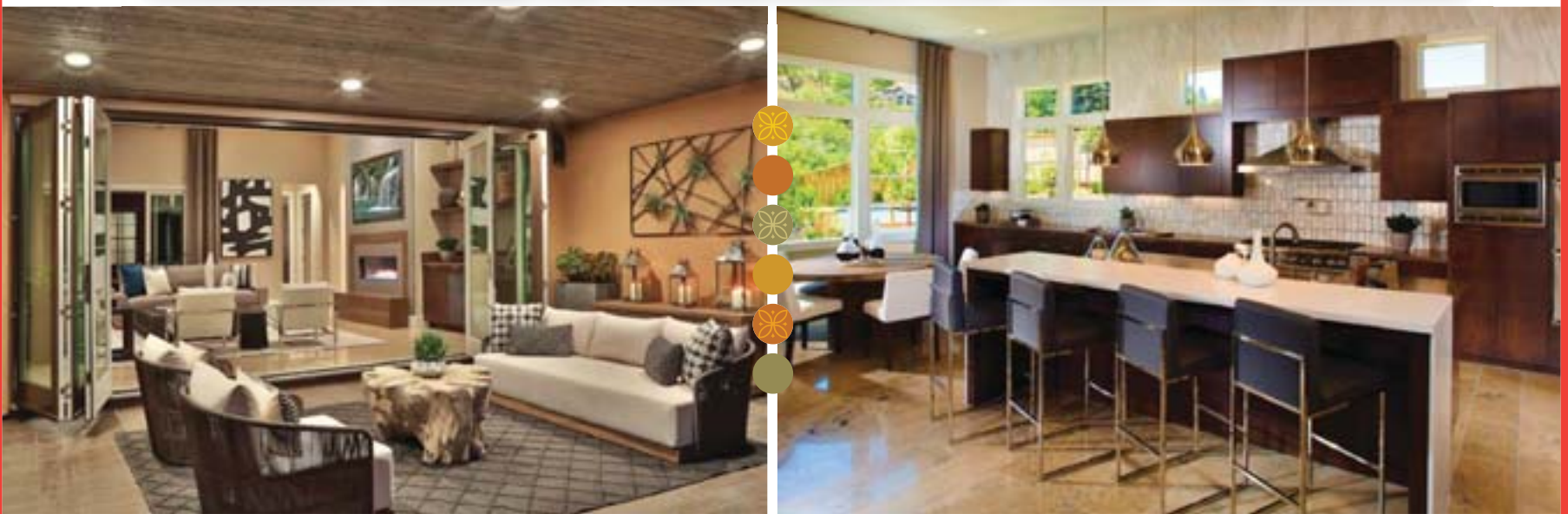
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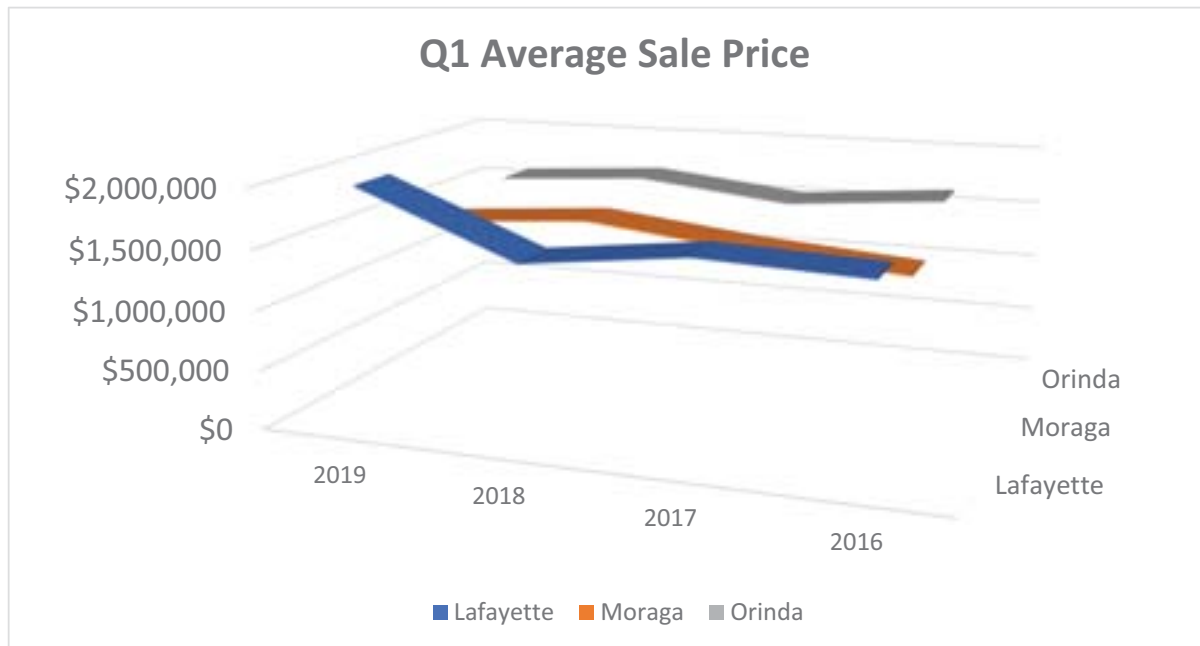
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The Real Estate Quarter in Review



By Conrad Bassett, CRP, GMS-T; Licensed Real Estate Broker

The first quarter of 2019 showed a continued fast pace in activity on the residential side of Lamorinda real estate. Supply remains low, so the resulting sales quantities remain low. The average sales price continues to increase in Lafayette versus a year ago, while in Moraga and Orinda it eased; in the first quarter of 2018 it was the opposite. The days on market remain short, however, and the homes that have multiple offers are increasing.

Per Contra Costa Association of Realtors statistics reported from Jan. 1 through March 31, 40 single-family homes closed in Lafayette down from the 48 that closed in the same quarter in 2018. Thirty-four closed in the first quarter of 2017. Sales prices ranged from \$995,000 to \$3.848 million, with an average of 24 days on the market. The average sales price was \$1,984,125, far exceeding the \$1,469,744 in the year ago period. In 2017 first quarter it was \$1,622,848 and in 2016, \$1,570,712. This change in percentage with a small sample size is due to very few homes selling at the low end of the range and more

at the high range.

The median sales price was \$1,855,000.

In Moraga there were 15 single-family closings ... again down from the year ago period when 26 closed. Twenty-eight closed in Q1 2017 and 20 in the first quarter of 2016. Prices so far this year have ranged from \$980,000 to \$2.225 million. The average sale price was \$1,436,733 down from a year ago when it was \$1,534,007. In 2017 it was \$1,381,452, and in Q1 2016 it was \$1,278,575. The average marketing time was 23 days, versus 16 days a year ago.

In Orinda, there were 49 single-family closings, versus 40 in 2018 and 28 in 2017. Sales prices ranged from \$570,000 to \$2.525 million with an average price of \$1,587,598. This was a drop from the \$1,673,088 in 2018. In 2017 it was \$1,523,767. In the 2016 first quarter it was \$1,634,327. It took an average of 40 days on the market to sell a home in Orinda versus 43 days on the market a year ago.

In the first quarter of 2018, Lafayette homes sold at an average of \$690.74, close to the \$683.73 per square foot in Q1 2018 and the \$645.43 per square foot up in 2017. Moraga came in at \$599.38. Orinda was consistent at \$617.12 – almost identical to the

year ago quarter of \$616.89 compared with \$625.23 in the first quarter of 2017.

In the condominium/town home category, Lafayette had four closings reported to the MLS and all were resales. They ranged from \$619,000 to \$795,000. Moraga had 12 ranging from \$390,000 to \$1.120 million with the highest one being on Alta Mesa. Orinda had one—on Ravenhill Road that sold at \$1.1 million.

As of April 7, there were 76 homes under contract per the MLS in the three combined communities (a year ago and in 2017 they were both at 95) with asking prices of \$749,000 to \$3.995 million.

Inventory is at 103, consistent with the 95 as of April 9, 2018, and 96 on the same date in 2017.

There are 42 Lafayette properties currently on the market versus 34 properties on the market in April 2018. Asking prices in Lafayette currently range from \$599,000 to \$13.5 million. In Moraga, buyers have their choice of 21 homes, up from 18 homes at this time in 2018. The price range is \$875,000 to \$1.39 million.

In Orinda there are 40 homes on the market. A year ago there were 43. The list prices range from \$649,000 to \$3.75 million.

There is only one Lamorinda distressed (bank-owned or a short sale) sale available, located in Lafayette.

As is the case nearly every quarter, the most active price range is in the more “affordable” price ranges. At the high end, 27 homes sold above \$2 million in the three communities combined, versus 21 a year ago and 13 in 2017. There are 39 currently available above this amount in Lamorinda.

Interest rates have dropped slightly and the “news” that several large local companies are having IPOs (like Lyft) and the “instant millionaires” will be buying high-end homes have put a continued positive spin on home prices continuing to rise. And this has increased the migration of families to the area. Lamorinda continues to be attractive with BART access and highly rated schools.

... continued on Page D12

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The Real Estate Quarter in Review

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The real estate markets in San Francisco, the peninsula, and the other side of the hill in Oakland, Berkeley and Piedmont have been even more active so there has been some spillover effect where buyers are willing to make longer commutes in order to find more “affordable housing.” Of course, Lamorinda and affordable housing are seldom mentioned in the same breath.

Lastly, it is important to look at what homes are selling for versus their list prices. Often homes come on the market at unrealistic prices and they do not sell. We also are seeing more homes listed well below

true values so that it may encourage bidding wars that sellers hope might generate a higher overall sales price. In the first quarter of this year many homes have had multiple offers and have sold at or above the list price.

Of the 40 single-family home sales that closed in Lafayette in the first quarter of 2019, 28 sold at or above the list price. In Moraga, nine of the 15 sales were at or above the asking price and in Orinda, 29 of the 49 sold at or above the final listing price. This will typically happen when a house goes pending in the first two weeks on the market. Of the 76 currently pending sales in the three Lamorinda communities combined, 48 went pending in 21 days or less. The actual

average days on the market would be markedly lower but many agents are setting up marketing plans where they hold the home open to the public and to brokers and follow with an offer date in a week or so after exposing the property to the market – pointing to a high likelihood of a continued trend in homes selling above the asking price.

In the detached home category in the first quarter of 2019, the average sale price in Lafayette was 102.5 percent of the asking price. In Moraga it was 101.2 percent and in Orinda it was 100.1 percent of the final asking price.

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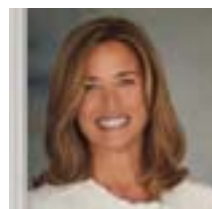


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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian for April

Nature's Natives

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better." – Albert Einstein



A broadleaf weed, cut leaf geranium needs to be pulled before it seeds.

By Cynthia Brian

Witnessed from outer space this spring, a pageant of splendor burst into bloom on hillsides, in fields, chaparrals, and desert environs. The "super blooms" of Southern California captivated hearts and cameras. Northern California is exhibiting a bountiful season of blue lupines, orange poppies, and gardens filled with flowers, just not to the degree of our neighbors to the south.

Although weeds are described as plants growing where we don't want them, weeds are in proliferation after our continual wet days. Wild cut leaf geranium resembles a ground cover when small with tiny pink petals, yet it is a weed that needs to be pulled before it scatters seeds. Hand removal of invasive grasses is also necessary as they create fire danger while outcompeting native flora for light, water, space and food.

More than 18,000 plant species are native to the United States and approximately 6,000 species are endemic to California. To be considered a true California native, the plants must have grown here before the late 18th century when the Europeans arrived. Our state flower, the California poppy, as well as lupines, fuchsias, and other "natives" were actually first cultivated in the gardens of Europe, yet we have adopted them as our own. We are blessed to grow numerous flora inhabitants from the Mediterranean that have acclimated to our mild four seasons and adapted to our clay soil. I have termed these friends, such as lavender and acanthus, "the new natives" as I like to include them in my garden designs.

Natives are drought tolerant after they have been established, al-

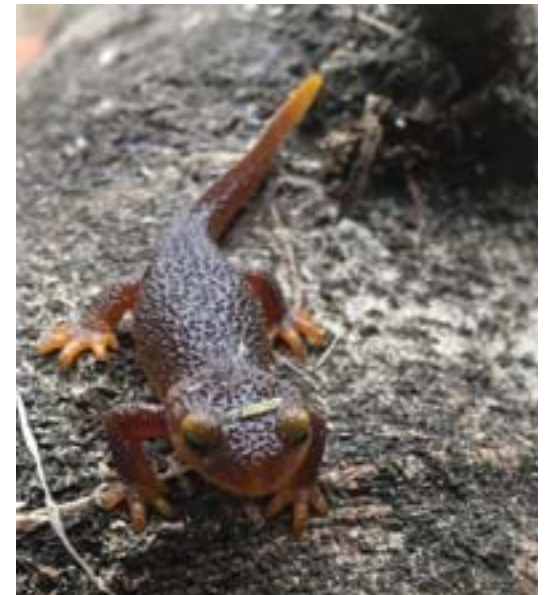


Spreading by underground runners, the Matilija fried egg poppy grows to 8 feet.

Photos Cynthia Brian

though they will require water if the weather has been exceptionally dry. They are wildlife attractors bringing songbirds, lizards, salamanders, butterflies, frogs, hummingbirds, bees, and other pollinators into the landscape. Minimal maintenance is required without dependence on pesticides or fertilizers. Top dressing all plants with mulch to maintain a constant temperature while reducing erosion and temperature fluctuations is advantageous.

For year-round interest, select a variety of natives that bloom during each of the 12 months. Wildflowers are fussy as transplants therefore for a spring show, sow seeds in the fall to allow the winter water to promote a strong root system. Plants with tiny seeds can live dormant in the underground seed bank for 80 years or more depending on the optimum conditions to coax them above ground to flower, fruit, and set seed. ... continued on next Page



Nicknamed a water dog, a juvenile salamander rests on a log.

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian for April

Nature's Natives

... continued from Page D16

A Sampling of Favorite California Natives

Trees, Grasses	Shrubs, Plants, Flowers	Native Perennials to the United States
Oak	Manzanita	Milkweed
Western Red Bud	Ceanothus (California Lilac)	Echinacea
Redwood	Sage	Black-eyed Susan
Sequoia	Currant	Butterfly Weed
Pine	Fern	Aster
Cypress	Lupine	Creeping Phlox
Cedar	Columbine	Bee Balm
Fir	California poppy	Bluebells
Yew	Heuchera	Lobelia
Willow	Dicentra	Hydrangea
Alder	Brodiaeas	Acanthus
Aspen	Blue Dicks	Gaillardia
Sycamore	Morning glory	Trillium
Blue-eyed grass	Clarkia	Coreopsis
Sedges	Wild rose	Bluestem Grass
Rushes	Wild grape	Honeysuckle
Fescue	Clematis	Switchgrass
Reed grass	Wood Strawberry	Blazing Star
Wild Rye	Matilija Fried Egg Plant	Dogwood
		Iris
		Gaura
		Trumpet vine
		Elderberry



A majestic California oak.



A field of blue lupines multiplies after a rain-filled winter.

These are just a few of the thousands of natives you can discover at your nursery. A large variety of succulents and cacti are also available. It is important to remember that every plant is native to someplace. When choosing a species, you want to make sure it will grow well in your microclimate.

Because natives have adapted to our land, they won't struggle for survival. They are strong players requiring less work, water and food as they work in harmony with our ecosystem. Natives are an advantageous addition to any garden as they support bees, butterflies and birds, bringing beneficial insects and pollinators to our landscapes.

Cynthia Brian's Mid-Month Gardening Guide



Not to be confused with Virginia bluebells, wood hyacinths are spreading bulbs that are stellar as spring showstoppers.

BEWARE the tick. Ticks are attacking and they are not just on the deer. Keep your lawns mowed and the brush cleared. Rid your yard of Japanese barberry as this invasive species is a haven for ticks.

KEEP deer from nibbling your new sprouts by installing a 9 to 12-foot deer fence. Unfortunately, all of the natural remedies including soap, hair, sprinklers, whirlybirds, lights and noise are not effective long term.

REPOT orchids in spring if they are root bound or the planting medium has broken down. Most orchids need to be repotted every two to three years. If you notice green root tips on plump white roots, it is time to divide. Repot in lightly packed fir bark or sphagnum moss using a container large enough to allow for two more years of growth.

DIMINISH spring allergies by always removing your shoes before entering your home. Change your clothes, shower before bedtime to keep the pollen from gathering on your sheets. Ramp up your house cleaning efforts by dusting, vacuuming, and mopping often.

SHARPEN lawnmower blades for a cleaner cut. Stay off the grass if it has been raining as walking on wet grass damages the blades and the roots.

SNIP the flowers off bolting arugula kale lettuces, and other leafy vegetables to prevent the plants from going to seed. Add the flowers to salads, soups, and sauces or decorate your plates.

MARK your calendars:

April 21 is Easter. Fill baskets for garden lovers with my book, "Growing with the Goddess Gardener" available with extra freebies at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store.

April 22 is Earth Day

April 28 is the Annual Wildlife Festival at Wagner Ranch www.fwrna.org/annual-wildlife-festival.html

May 11 is the Moraga Community Faire. Visit the Be the Star You Are!@ booth to celebrate nature, books, and kids. www.bethestaryouare.org/events

Wishing you a hippity hoppity happy Bunny Day on Easter!

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing



The mahogany colored Manzanita shines with pink spring blossoms.



A native of South Africa, freesias flourish in Lamorinda along with Dutch tulips.

Photos Cynthia Brian



Edible and fragrant, the wood strawberry is a California native.



California native Western Redbud tree boasts magenta flowers.



Acanthus is a native to the Mediterranean and thrives in the shade.



Meyer lemons and a tulip magnolia blooms surround Cynthia Brian in the April garden.

Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, raised in the vineyards of Napa County, is a New York Times best-selling author, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Be the Star You Are!® 501 c3.

Tune into Cynthia's Radio show and order her books at www.StarStyleRadio.com.

Buy a copy of her new books, Growing with the Goddess Gardener and Be the Star You Are! Millennials to Boomers at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store.

Hire Cynthia for projects, consults, and lectures.

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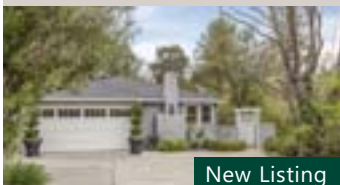
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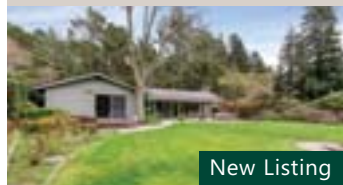


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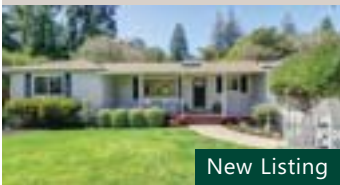
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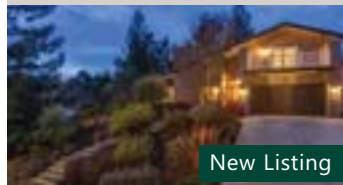


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