

# Habitat Gardening at Camino Pablo Elementary



Photo provided

By Jenn Freedman

As commercial and residential developments spread into wilderness areas, they infringe on the habitats that would otherwise supply the food, water, and shelter that wildlife species need to survive. Habitat gardening incorporates these resources into landscapes to attract and support birds, butterflies, bees, and other creatures as their native habitats disappear.

Habitat gardens are generally characterized by a more natural aesthetic with a wide variety of plants that specifically add positive benefits to the environment. Native plants provide an unrivaled habitat because native flora and fauna have co-evolved over thousands of years.

Laura Osteen, Moraga resident and owner of Secret Garden Landscapes, incorporates habitat gardening into all of her designs. She especially enjoys educating her clients about the importance of habitat creation for wildlife like pollinators. "By promoting pollinators' needs for habitat, we are supporting our own need for food and diversity in the natural world," Osteen says. By creating habitats for pollinators, we enable them to fertilize plants. Only then can the plants produce fruits, nuts, or seeds that humans need for a healthy diet.

One prominent example of her habitat gardening design is at Camino Pablo Elementary School in Moraga. Back in 2016, landscape improvements were already un-

derway at the school. A group of parents, lead by Shweta Srivastava and Tammy Roake, had created a beautiful mural across the entire front wall of the school, capturing the beauty of the surrounding Moraga hills. "It felt like a shame to leave the front circle as-is with its overgrown juniper and chain-linked fence," they said. And so the gardening project launched to complement the mural, extending the natural habitat into the landscape.

The habitat garden was installed on Earth Day 2017, with the help of the Camino Pablo community. Parents and students (including a handful of Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops) worked together to dig holes, level soil, lay gold fine dust, stack moss rock and mulch.

The new Camino Pablo front circle is focused on pollinator plants like California poppies, verbena, salvia, rudbeckia, and California lilac. As people drive by at different times throughout the year, the garden is constantly evolving. While in winter many of the flowers are dormant, the plants are still providing places for wildlife to forage. And plants like manzanita bloom in late winter, providing food for hummingbirds.

As the seasons change, various plants provide pollination, food for birds and butterfly larvae, material for birds' nests, spaces for butterflies to lay eggs, and places for wildlife to hide. Osteen also planted a California Native Oak in the circle, which aids wildlife in many

ways, like providing food (acorns), shade, and habitat. In addition, since Oaks are slow-growing, she thought the Camino Pablo graduates would enjoy coming back years later and seeing the change in the tree's size. "It helps provide a symbol associated with their own growth from childhood," she explains.

In summer 2018, the wooden "Camino Pablo Elementary" sign was installed by Boy Scout Troop 246, led by Kellen Clancy, who gained his Eagle Scout rank from creation and installation of the sign. The wood sign blends in with the aesthetic of the native landscape and mural as well.

As spring approaches and residents contemplate new home outdoor landscaping, consider supporting wildlife by bringing back some of their native resources in your home garden. "When a landscape becomes 'alive' it is so much more enjoyable. Plus, it teaches children to value our natural environment around us," Osteen highlights. When she designs home gardens, her goal is to create beautiful, sustainable, and functional landscapes that meets her clients' unique styles.

# Buy Nothing groups offer random acts of kindness

By Diane Claytor

An unused designer wallet, discovered in the back of a drawer, was handed over – for free – to a mom whose college-age daughter had been coveting one, but couldn't afford it. A PBK rocking horse, well-loved by three grandkids who had outgrown it, was given, at no cost, to a grandmother whose grandson was just reaching the age to ride it enthusiastically. An abundance of lemons was shared with a mom whose daughter really wanted to open a lemonade stand. Used books, games, furniture and clothing, half-used packages of diapers, light bulbs, costume jewelry and candles all found new homes with neighbors, thanks to the popular Facebook group, Buy Nothing.

It's true what they say: "one person's junk is another person's treasure." And that's what Buy Nothing counts on; their model is to give you the opportunity to offer your neighbors something you no longer need or ask for something you do – at no cost to anyone.

Started in 2013 by two friends who created what they called an experimental hyper-local gift economy in their Washington state neighborhood, from that humble beginning, Buy Nothing has

grown into a worldwide social movement with more than 500,000 members in 30 nations. As their website states, Buy Nothing rules are simple: "Post anything you'd like to give away, lend or share amongst neighbors. Ask for anything you'd like to borrow or receive for free. Keep it legal. Keep it civil." There is no buying or selling, no trading or bartering because "we're not a community bulletin board or charity, we're strictly a hyper-local gift economy," their website explains.

Buy Nothing groups are, as noted above, hyper-local and intentionally kept reasonably sized. This makes it easier to build a community of neighbors who get to know each other by giving or asking – and then not having to drive 25 miles to receive their "gift." There are approximately 100 Bay Area Buy Nothing groups and three of those are in Lamorinda, one in each of the towns. Each group has its own administrator to help foster community, remind people how Buy Nothing is different than other social networking groups and encourage members to tell stories about what they're gifting or requesting.

A recent offer of pink and purple yarn prompted a response from a mom who said she'd love these "for our finger knitting crazy kid."

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