

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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