

# When native plants share space with a mini-farm

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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.

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**Lemons**



**Figs**