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Kelly and Ben Rojas and their children enjoy their new raised beds full of vegetables.

Linda Bowers raises 24 little chicks at her home for friends who want to start a new coop. Photos Sophie Braccini

Crisis brings revival of the homestead

By Sophie Braccini

It has become quite a hunting game to find some of the most coveted tomato plants or beneficial herbs at local nurseries. Growing vegetables or raising chickens in Lamorinda has definitely been on the uptick for the past two months, with chicks just as hard to find as heirloom tomatoes or borage. The desire to run less errands for food supplies may be

the motivation, but with more time at home and children to keep busy, growing the homestead has become a fruitful endeavor for many Lamorindans. Kelly and Ben Rojas moved their young family from San Francisco to Moraga last year. Growing a vegetable garden became one of Ben Rojas' priorities from the get-go, but only this year has the family devoted the time researching and planning for the new raised beds he built. Not very far, in Lafayette, Papa John Kiefer

(a.k.a. Lamorinda-chicken-guru) was stunned at the sudden unprecedented rush to his website where people can purchase plans to build the perfect coop and register for his chicken class series. He heard that the craze was such that in April, the usual month to get baby chicks, all the local suppliers were out of female poulets for sale and ordering from the Midwest would send buyers waiting until June. ... continued on Page A10

Advertising

LAMORINDA WEEKLY

Letters to the Editor	A8
How to contact us	B5
Community Service	B6
Obituaries	B6
Classified	C1
Shop Orinda	C4



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Lamorinda weed abatement deadlines fast approaching



Photo courtesy ConFire

This October vegetation fire is a stark reminder to clear away the weeds.

By Nick Marnell

Lamorinda fire agencies have ramped up their efforts to alert property owners to remove problem vegetation by the abatement deadlines before the

weeds spark a community catastrophe. The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District deadline is May 31 and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District deadline is June 15.

While Contra Costa County resi-

dents were ordered to stay at home for much of this spring, Lamorinda weeds thrived and returned with a vengeance, especially after the dry winter. To avert a potential fire season disaster when overgrown vegetation dries out, county health officials clarified in April that landscaping and gardening were permissible outdoor activities.

"With so many people at home, we are fielding many more phone calls, with people asking questions and filing complaints on neighbors," said Gorden Graham, MOFD fuels mitigation manager.

The fire district explained its process for bringing property owners into fire code compliance.

On May 1, MOFD sent parcel owners a mailer reminding them of the upcoming fire season and the steps needed to create defensible space around their property. The receipt of that letter did not mean the property owner was in violation; it was a reminder to everyone.


"Starting June 15, we will perform an assessment on every property for

violations of the fire code," Graham said. "Upon assessment, properties that are determined to need additional mitigation will be mailed the assessment letter advising of the additional steps needed on their property."

Thirty days after the district mails the assessment letter, the district reinspects the property. Properties that fail the reinspection will be mailed a Notice to Abate. Then, 15 days after that mailing, the district does one more reinspection. Parcels that fail the second reinspection will be mailed a notification that the vegetation will be abated by the district and the cost will be assessed through a lien on the property.

But the district stressed that it has no desire to punish residents. "We want to make this about education," Graham said. "It is our intention to educate the public and gain voluntary compliance to provide for a safer community." MOFD said that inspection of properties along evacuation routes was its No. 1 priority.

... continued on Page A7

Civic News A1-A10	Life in Lamorinda B1-B6	Summer Camps & Classes C2-C3	Sports C1-C4	Our Homes D1-D16
No decision on Terraces following hours long discussion - Page A3	High school graduation plans adjusted - Page B1	 - Page C2	Grant Harper heads to UC Davis this fall - Page C1	Feng Shui tips for home office success - Page D1