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Free Seed Library comes to Moraga

By Vera Kochan



Something for everyone at the Moraga Seed Library Photo Vera Kochan
not more.

As winter turns to spring, amateur gardeners everywhere begin to make plans for the appearance of their yards. Buying already developed plants can be costly, so the Moraga Library and the Moraga Garden Club are sponsoring a Seed Library that allows patrons to "check out" flower, vegetable and herb seed packets for free (only six per visit).

The first seed library began at the Berkeley Ecology Center in 1999. It was called the Bay Area Seed Interchange Library (BASIL). The first seed library that was offered in a public library was located at the Gardiner Public Library (Gardiner, N.Y.) in 2004. The concept became so popular that the idea has spread throughout the world at hundreds of libraries, with the United States taking the lead. Even college libraries have joined the program.

The Moraga Seed Library's official opening was Feb. 15, and in just three days at least 85 people came by to "check out" approximately 280 packets of seeds. MGC collected over 2,500 seed packets from more than 20 vendors and garden groups. Thanks to the efforts of BSA Scout Troop 402 (one of the largest all-girl troops in the nation), who helped stamp, sort and alphabetize the seed packets prior to placement in three separate card catalogs, patrons could easily look through labeled drawers and find exactly what they were looking for, if

"Teaching kids to garden and where their food comes from is the way to start them off on a lifetime of healthy eating," stated Bobbie Preston, Moraga Seed Library's founder. "It sounds hokey, but kids eat what they grow and love what they grow." To that end, the Moraga Library has provided gardening-related books for enthusiasts to check out or purchase, as well as many free pamphlets to help get novices started.

Some first-day "customers" were searching for seeds that didn't need a lot of maintenance. "I came to get native plants and flowers," said Ferenc Kovac. "They don't require much water. I'm trying to plant things to take the place of lawn. I'm looking for unusual seeds that look like fun."

Andrew Ku was interested in growing thyme and other ground covering plants. His fledgling business specializes in selling succulents that he's grown himself. He plans on donating the profits to organizations that are into preserving and restoring native plants.

"I'm very impressed with the large assortment of seeds for vegetables, flowers and herbs," stated avid gardener and Lamorinda Weekly reporter Sora O'Doherty. "I'm also delighted to see how much information on growing the seeds is available as part of the Seed Library."

Additionally, there's a comprehensive chart available for anyone interested in growing plants that help support the monarch population. While not all of those particular seeds are in the Library, the information is noteworthy. There are plans to add a basket of native California pollinator seeds that will attract bees, butterflies, insects and birds to a garden. "While the Rancho Laguna Monarch Garden was begun because the monarchs were in trouble, I've become committed to protecting all our pollinators, many of which are endangered," explained Preston. "And, the way we do that is to protect and expand their habitat. Helping my neighbors grow flowering and productive gardens is my way of making our community a supportive one for all pollinators."

Community Library Manager Rita Carrasco and Adult Services Librarian Janae Diaz have been a big help to Preston with regards to getting the project off the ground. Carrasco noted that a variety of patrons from individuals to couples and even families stopped by to browse the seed selections. A favorite choice for kids was carrots. "People were enthusiastic, grateful and excited," she said. "It's bigger than we anticipated! It exceeded our expectations. It seemed like people came in for the Seed Library and stayed to check out a book." So far, the most popular vegetable seed choices were beans, squash, lettuce, carrots, peas, kale and chard. All of the herbs were sampled with basil and parsley in the lead. The most prevalent flower choices were milkweed, zinnias, poppies, daisies, sunflowers and sweet peas.

Preston is certain that "those gardens will be beautiful and bountiful and engaging the kids of Lamorinda. Supporting the pollinators is a real win-win."

For more information, email MoragaSeedLibrary@gmail.com.

Reach the reporter at: vera@lamorindaweekly.com

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