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~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

Bringing Back the Natives Tour features gardens in Orinda, Moraga



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Guests of the 2023 Bringing Back the Natives Tour explored native plants in the Moraga garden of Anne Chambers and Ed McAlpine, where they also received information on achieving a green home.

By Sora O'Doherty

Barbara and Phil Leitner's garden in the Glorietta neighborhood of Orinda and the green home of Anne Chambers and Ed McAlpine in the Cam-polindo area of Moraga were featured in this year's Bringing Back the Natives Tour. The 2023 tour featured 55 gardens across Alameda and Contra Costa counties designed to show that native gardens are beautiful, can be designed on budget, and are critical in supporting biodiversity.

Since 2005, the Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour, together with

passionate native plant gardeners located throughout Alameda and Contra Costa counties, has set the standard for sustainable landscaping in Northern California. Since the tour's inception in 2005, more than 200,000 garden visits have been made. The gardens on the Tour contain at least 70% native plants, are pesticide-free, water-conserving, and provide habitat for wildlife.

The Leitner's garden was designed by David Bigham and installed by Barbara Leitner. This garden was featured in the virtual tour on April 16 as well as the in-person tour on May 7. All the plants in

this garden are native to the San Pablo Creek watershed; most were grown from seed or cuttings originating locally. Leitner recommends sourcing local native plants at the Native Here Nursery in Tilden Park. Information about California natives is available from the California Native Plant Society.

During the tour, Leitner gave a talk about the garden and the connection between native plants and

wildlife. From plants to insects to birds, she points out, there is a circle of life. Local native plants have adapted and evolved with local insects and birds, which creates a natural balance.

The Leitners have lived on their Orinda property for 29 years. When they moved in, there was a Blue Spruce, a magnolia, a lot of juniper and a beautiful lawn. The Blue Spruce died, and the Leitners took out the magnolia and junipers in 1998. Little native oak seedlings appeared in their garden, and they allowed three to grow. They never watered them, but they have adapted to the area and grown into beautiful trees. The rest of the native garden was installed in 2012. Another tree on the property is the daughter of Orinda's Hospice Tree of Lights.

Barbara Leitner, who holds a botany degree from UC Berkeley and a master's in ecology from UC Davis has worked as a consultant to the City of Orinda Creek Protection. She makes the case for using local natives, arguing that using local natives is better than non-natives, but using any natives is better than non-natives. She suggests that you use

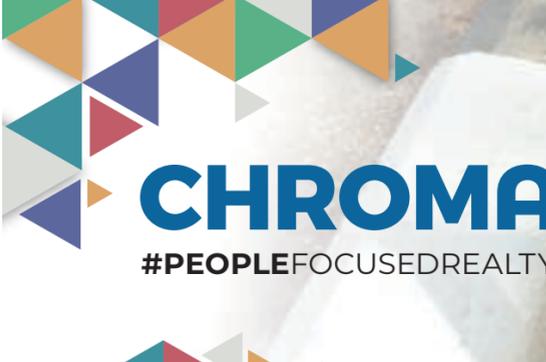
plants that are beautiful to you, and perhaps have a scent that reminds you of something pleasant, a place you have enjoyed or a hike you have taken. Leitner also spends hundreds of hours each year volunteering on the stinkwort weed abatement project, removed the very invasive weed that causes a rash if contacted.

In Moraga, Anne Chambers and Ed McAlpine, who have attended the Bringing Back the Natives Tour since its inception, hired Michael Thilgen of Four Dimensions Landscape to design their garden. They removed a swimming pool, lawn and Monterey pines to create more space for edibles, 30 varieties of fruit trees and local California native plants. The couple's green home features an electric range with an induction cooktop, Tesla solar roof tiles and two lithium Tesla PowerWall batteries, an electric whole house fan and LED lighting throughout.

During the tour on May 7, the property also hosted a talk on induction ranges and why they should be replacing gas stoves. Recycle Smart had a table on the property during the tour to educate visitors about the benefits of making and using compost to grow healthy plants, reduce the use of fertilizers and pesticides, and protect the environment.

More information on the tour and native plants can be found here:

- www.bringingbackthenatives.net/
- www.bringingbackthenatives.net/barbara-leitner%E2%80%99s-garden
- www.bringingbackthenatives.net/anne-chambers-and-ed-mcalpine%E2%80%99s-garden
- www.cnps.org/
- <https://nativeherenursery.org/>





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