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## Bringing Back the Natives Annual Garden Tour on May 2nd

By Sophie Braccini



The Mead-Reynolds garden features an antique lithograph press; in the foreground is California Gooseberry (*Ribes californicum*), behind the press grows a native grass, California Fescue (*Festuca californica*) Photo Sophie Braccini

grandfather used for his own art, into the garden. "We designed the garden together, so you could walk down a path and discover a piece of art at a time."

The garden needed the addition of copious quantities of dirt to create mounds for the plants, a new drainage system, and the installation of a drip irrigation structure that was used, especially during the first two years, to establish the natives. "After this first period we only have to water a bit at the peak of the dry season," says Reynolds. Since she was never a gardener, Reynolds also appreciates the low maintenance needed to keep her garden beautiful. "The way native flowers reseed themselves is fantastic," she says, "we just have to do a bit of weeding and the rest takes care of itself."

Reynolds' next artistic project will be a mosaic table for the garden. "Each year I am inspired to do more," she says, "somehow the garden and the art are symbiotic. The garden has also changed what I like and appreciate in flowers and plants. I used to like long-stemmed roses to make bouquets. Now, with my native flowers, I create very different flower arrangements that I like just as much, if not more."

For Al Kyte, native gardening is a matter of vision and philosophy. A native gardener for 35 years, the Moraga resident is a local icon when it comes to native plant gardening. "To create a landscape exclusively of native plants is forward-looking in terms of water conservation," explains Kyte, "it integrates with the surrounding areas, maintains the semi-rural feel, and can be beautiful and distinctive as well." His garden is an absolute must-see with over 100 species of California natives, displaying an amazing array of colors and landscaping styles from a manzanita-based chaparral in front to a varied, open woodland with a twenty-five foot long stream in the back. Most of the established plants receive no summer water.

The gardens are excellent habitats for local wild life, an additional benefit of planting a native plant garden. Barbara Leitner, whose Orinda garden will be open to visitors this year, is very motivated by this aspect of native plants; or to be true to her pursuit, of local plants indigenous to our watersheds. "I have worked with the City of Orinda as a consultant about creek-friendly plants and stream-side planting that would provide wild life habitat," says Leitner, "one of the recommendations was to use local plants because they fit better with the environment, and they will have no negative impact on the wild population in and outside the planting area." To plant her garden, Leitner gave seeds she collected at salvage sites to a local nursery to grow. The garden is now three years old and has not required watering since its second year.

To register for the 2010 Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour, go to [www.bringingbackthenatives.net](http://www.bringingbackthenatives.net).

In 2006, Lois Reynolds and Terry Mead went on the "Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour." The Orinda couple had always wanted to transform their side and back gardens from concrete and dirt to something more appealing and sustainable; it was not until they visited the garden of landscape architect Rick Alatorre during the tour that they decided to act. This season, the couple's property will be featured in the 2010 tour which will take place on Sunday, May 2nd. This year's tour will include two other Lamorinda gardens; Al Kyte's native garden in Moraga, which has been growing for over 30 years making it one of the oldest in the area, and Barbara Leitner's garden in Orinda, planted only with natives local to the San Pablo Creek watershed.

Reynolds and Mead asked Alatorre to help them create their own native garden, and they are thrilled with the result. Reynolds (known to Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School students as art teacher Mrs. Mead, who retired last year), says that her garden is part of her inspiration to develop her art in new directions.

"When we decided to completely re-do our garden I started making my first mosaic stepping stones in anticipation," she says, "and I had them ready when he (Alatorre) started moving the dirt." One of the things Reynolds appreciates about Alatorre is that he proposed a solution to integrate the old lithograph press, which her



Lois Reynolds and a "Tranquilon Ridge" Pink Flowering Currant



San Francisco Wallflower Photos Andy Scheck



Farewell-to-Spring 'Aurora'



Clarkia flower bouquet Photo provided



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