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## Lafayette Community Garden Opens on Earth Day

By Sophie Braccini



Holding a map of the garden are, from left: Leah Ingram, Beth Ferree, Janet Thomas, Susanne Frey  
Photo Sophie Braccini

It's been a long time coming, and it required the tenacity of the Sustainable Lafayette Food Group, including Janet Thomas, to finally create a community garden in Lafayette.

The community can visit the community garden site on Earth Day, April 22, along Mt. Diablo Blvd. across from the Reservoir. But if you want to become a member of the garden, you must work there two hours a week, take your crop home - and sign up early. The first plants are not in the soil yet but 50 families have already signed up and only four spots are left for this year. The garden will also serve as an outdoor education center, free and open to the public.

It took more than two years to find the site, get the City's support and raise the \$83,000 that was necessary to launch the project. "We owe a big thank you to the Mulvaney family who gave us \$25,000 in a matching fund," says Thomas. "There were 90 other contributors to our fund, who gave what they could, including Girl Scout troop 32153 who gave more than \$300."

Susanne Frey, science and math teacher and horticulturist, designed the garden that incorporates raised beds for the vegetables, restored native plant areas, and sitting areas for picnics and teaching. For example, a number of beds have been set in a wide circle with seating

in the middle for enjoyment and/or classes.

Gardener Beth Ferree is the volunteer in charge of the classes that the Outdoor Education Center will offer. "We will have one free class every month on a Saturday," she says. "The first one will present the riparian ecosystem, we'll teach about edible natives, then about 'the good, the bad and the ugly,' or the role of insects in the garden."

Leah Ingram was hired part-time to manage the garden, and she has started planning what will go in the beds. "We've talked with the families who are members of the garden, they decided what they wanted to plant and harvest," she says. The garden will mainly produce for the members who pay \$150 per family - the donations constituted the seed money (literally!) - "but no one is turned down for lack of funds," adds Ferree.

The garden group wanted a very diverse set of Lafayette residents to become members. "We have all age groups in our membership," says Thomas, "from young families to retired residents. And whether they live in multi-family dwellings or on sloped-lots, they can't have their own vegetable garden."

The April 22 open house will feature activities, informative sessions, and trail exploration. The Mount Diablo Bee Keepers Association and the Audubon Society will be there and seedlings will be sold by the Mount Diablo Nursery. The very well-organized group has scheduled its first harvest festival Oct. 13 which will be open to the whole community.

At this time, they still need volunteers to construct the beds that will be double-dug and amended with soil from Acapulco Soil in Richmond. Thomas noted that so far the project has received a lot from the community, from builders such as Overaa Construction who worked for free, or Heather Hamilton owner of Ecomulch in Martinez who says she would give them all the mulch they'd need. "Starting with the Mulvaney family we got wonderful community support," says Thomas. The quote by environmental pioneer Rachel Carson that will be at the entrance of the garden says it all: "In Nature Nothing Exists Alone."

To donate time, tools or other items, visit the Garden's site at [lafayettecommunitygarden.org](http://lafayettecommunitygarden.org).

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