

Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour

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2017 Final Report

[A nine-year study of water use, green waste generation, maintenance hours, and maintenance labor costs](#) between a traditional garden and a California native plant garden was conducted by the City of Santa Monica between 2004 and 2013. *The results of this study showed that the native garden used 83% less water; generated 56% less green waste, and required 68% less maintenance hours than the traditional garden.*

From the [City of Santa Monica's garden/garden](#) study

Why a Native Plant Garden Tour?

The spring 2017, Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour was held in order to showcase pesticide-free, water-conserving gardens that provide habitat for wildlife, reduce solid waste, and contain 60% or more native plants.

The tour enlists local residents to demonstrate by example that seasoned and novice gardeners can garden with good results without the use of synthetic chemicals, and with minimal supplemental water, while providing food, shelter, and nesting areas for wildlife. The gardens on this tour show that it is possible to implement sustainable garden practices and still have beautiful places for people to relax in and enjoy. The goals of the Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour are to motivate attendees to eliminate pesticide use, reduce water use, generate less solid waste, and provide habitat for wildlife in their own gardens.

Why California natives? Once established in the garden setting, California native plants need little or no summer water, as they survive naturally with only fall-to-spring rainfall. In addition to being water-conserving, California natives are hardy, and they do not require the use of pesticides and fertilizers, as many non-natives do. Native plants need less pruning than many non-natives, such as lawn, ivy, or cotoneaster, thus generating less green waste. As this [terrific article demonstrates](#), native plants also provide the best habitat for birds, butterflies,

beneficial insects, and other forms of wildlife. (The article, “The Chickadees Guide to Gardening” will also be found at the bottom of this report.)

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Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour gardens contain minimal or no lawn. This is of particular value since the majority of the chemicals purchased by homeowners support lawn care, and the majority of water used in home gardens is applied to lawns. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in their, “Homeowner’s Guide to Protecting Frogs – Lawn and Garden Care,” homeowners use up to ten times more chemical pesticides per acre on their lawns than farmers use on crops. In addition, half of the water used by the average household is applied to the landscape – with most of that water being used to keep turf green.

2017 Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour events: Garden Tour; Native Plant Sale Extravaganzas; and Workshops

The Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour has now expanded its offerings to include not only the spring Tour, but also three Native Plant sales (October, Valentines Day, and the week-end of the Tour), as well as a series of workshops that are offered in the fall, winter, and spring. These are described below.

Garden Tour

The Thirteenth Annual Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour, which took place on Sunday, May 7, 2017, showcased forty gardens and six native plant nurseries located in nineteen cities and unincorporated areas in Alameda and Contra Costa counties (Antioch, Berkeley, Brentwood, Castro Valley, Clayton, Concord, El Cerrito, Lafayette, Livermore, Moraga, Oakland, Orinda, Piedmont, Pleasant Hill, Richmond, San Leandro, San Lorenzo, San Ramon, and Walnut Creek).

A variety of gardens were featured on the tour. The gardens ranged from Al Kyte's forty five year old wildlife habitat to a number of gardens that had been recently installed, and from large lots in the hills to small front gardens in the flats. Tour gardens contained everything from local native plants to the horticulturally available suite of natives from throughout California. Nine of the gardens were designed and installed by owners, and the rest were designed and

installed by professionals. Most the gardens were landscaped with between 70% and 100% native plants.

The tour received strong interest from the public; 3,836 people pre-registered for the Tour. Same-day registration sites were set up at nine gardens, and accommodated several hundred walk-in registrants, for a total of more than 4,000 registrants.

On the day of the tour 7,925 garden visits were made. See the end of this report for a list of the number of visitors counted at each garden.

More than 120 volunteers and 40 hosts were stationed at gardens for a half or full day shift on the day of the tour, or helped with tour preparation and clean-up, contributing more than 600 hours of time to the tour. The hosts put in countless hours preparing for the tour, and more than 200 hours on the day of the event.

Native Plant Sale Extravaganzas

More than \$32,000 worth of native plants were sold at the three Native Plant Sale Extravaganzas.

Workshops

In the fall and winter of 2016 and the spring of 2017 twenty workshops were coordinated. These included hands-on sheet-mulching workshops; how to install drip irrigation workshops; workshops on how to design a native plant garden that will provide color and interest throughout the year; tours of a large organic garden that stores 10,000 gallons of rainwater on-site, has chickens, and contains extensive native and edible garden areas; and native plant propagation workshops, among others.

Garden Talks

More than 50 garden talks and demonstrations on a plethora of topics were given throughout the weekend of the Tour. Talk topics included how to: retain storm water on-site; remove a lawn; design and install a drip irrigation system; select and care for native plants; design and install native plant garden; attract wildlife; choose appropriate natives; create a low-maintenance native plant garden; and receive rebates from water districts for removing lawns, among other topics.

The website

The website contains numerous photographs of all of the gardens that have ever been on the tour (information on prior tours remains accessible on the website for future reference), extensive garden descriptions, plant lists for each garden, and some garden-specific bird, butterfly, mammal, reptile, and amphibian lists, as well as resource information on how to garden with California natives. The resource

information includes contact information for landscaper designers with gardens on the tour, a list of Easy-to-Grow East Bay Natives, lists of nurseries that carry native plants, lists of reference books, “How I got started gardening with native plants” essays by a number of the host gardeners, and more.

In order to attract hosts and volunteers, and to thank them for their time, two Garden Soirees – free, private tours of native plant gardens – were held in 2017. Garden Soirees offer host gardeners and volunteers the opportunity to see tour gardens that they would otherwise miss. They also create a feeling of camaraderie between hosts and volunteers, and provide a venue for people who are both knowledgeable and passionate about gardening with natives to meet and exchange information. One Soiree was held at a garden in Contra Costa County’s unincorporated area; the other took place in Orinda.

Tour Partnerships

The Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour has created partnerships with a variety of organizations that share common values – that chemical-free and water conserving gardening preserves water quality and quantity, and creates wildlife habitat. The list of major sponsors and supporters of this year’s tour includes a flood control district, one county stormwater program, three water districts, five cities, an unincorporated area, a recycling agency, and the local Fish and Wildlife Commission. The list of tour sponsors is provided below.

Sponsors of the 2017 tour

\$15,000

Contra Costa Clean Water Program

\$12,500

Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District

\$5,000

Contra Costa Watershed Program

\$4,000

Contra Costa Water District

\$3,000

Alameda Fish and Wildlife Commission
East Bay Municipal Utility District

\$2,000

Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency

\$1,500

California Native Plant Society (East Bay Chapter)
City of El Cerrito
City of Pittsburg

\$1,000

California Native Plant Society
City of Antioch
City of Brentwood
City of Walnut Creek
RecycleSmart

\$750

Zone 7 Water Agency

The 2017 Tour was well-publicized through regular media outlets:

[Bollinger Hills Neighborhood Newsletter](#)

[California Native Plant Society's Newsletter](#) (East Bay Chapter)

[Clayton Pioneer](#) (April 7 issue, page 5)

[Concord Pioneer](#) (April 21 issue, page 21)

[East Bay Times](#) (Berkeley and El Cerrito gardens featured)

[East Bay Times](#) (Antioch and Brentwood gardens featured)

[East Bay Times](#) (Oakland gardens featured)

[Lamorinda Weekly](#)

[Mercury News](#)

[Valley Sentinel](#) (San Ramon gardens, page 10)

The Golden Gate Audubon Blog featured an article on "[Best Bird Gardens on the Tour](#)."

There was a live "Periscope" video tour of three of the gardens on the 2017 Tour
Garden #1 - <https://www.pscp.tv/CNPS/1yNGaqjPrPjGj> (Orinda garden)
Garden #2 - <https://www.pscp.tv/CNPS/1BRjWNWdppxw?> (Moraga garden)
Garden #3 - <https://www.pscp.tv/CNPS/1YqKDwvwoezxV?> (Lafayette garden)

The 2017 Tour was also included in numerous calendar listings and on websites:

[Alden Lane Nursery](#)

[Bay Nature](#)

[City of Pittsburg website](#)

[City of Richmond's website](#)
[City of Richmond's calendar](#)
[Contra Costa Water District](#)
[East Bay Municipal Utility District](#)
[Ecology Center](#)
[FunCheap SF](#)
[Garden Design On-Line](#)
[Green Remodel Forum](#)
[Hillside Club website](#)
[Independent News](#)
[Northern California Peace Corps Association](#)
[Organization of Women Architects and Design Professionals](#)
[Pacific Horticulture](#)
[Pleasanton Weekly](#)
[Red Tricycle](#)
[San Joaquin Master Gardeners](#)
[See California](#)

A variety of list-serves sent out articles or announcements about the Tour:

Contra Costa Water District's WaterSaver e-newsletter included the Tour in numerous announcements

[Mayor Tom Butt's e-mail Forum](#)

[Susan Friedman Landscape Architecture](#) (article 1)

[Susan Friedman Landscape Architecture](#) (article 2)

Changes to the 2017 and 2018 Tour

There were some changes between the 2017 and the 2016 Tours. The May 2017 Tour followed an extremely wet winter, whereas the previous four years had been times of drought. Perhaps as a result of the rainy winter, 2017 Tour registrants were less concerned about saving water in the landscape. The South Bay's Going Native Garden Tour reported a 50% reduction in the number of registrants in 2017 compared to 2016. The Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour had a 20% reduction in registrants in 2017 when compared to the number of registrants from 2016. Both EBMUD and the Contra Costa Water District reported a decrease in the number of lawn conversion rebates thus far in 2017 when compared to the previous year.

Besides the weather, another change in the 2017 Tour when compared to 2016 was made in the garden guide. In order to cut costs, for the first time the printed garden guide was not automatically mailed out to all registrants. Instead, a

registrant could purchase the printed guide for \$10, or receive the guide as a free PDF. Twenty percent of registrants purchased the guide; the other 80% chose the PDF.

The 2017 Tour had more gardens than in 2016, and far more new gardens (25 new gardens in 2017, compared to 6 new gardens in 2016), but despite the excellent publicity, there were fewer registrants in 2017 than there were for the 2016 Tour. As expected, due to the lower number of registrants, there fewer garden visits were made in 2017 than in 2016.

Of particular note, ticket counts shows that nearly half (45%) of the garden visits were made by the 20% of the people who had the printed garden guide. The remainder of the garden visits were made by the 80% of people who had the PDF.

2017 Tour - 40 gardens

2016 Tour - 29 gardens

2017 Tour - 4,000 registrants

2016 Tour - 5,500 registrants

2017 Tour - 7,925 garden visits

2016 Tour - 10,644 garden visits

of garden visits made by the 20% people who had the printed guide: 3,302

of garden visits made by the 80% people who had the PDF of the guide: 4,045

Another change between the 2016 Tour and the 2017 was in the reduced number of people who attended the talks that were given on Tour day. A number of speakers at the 2017 Tour reported that a talk that drew 20 people in 2016 (such as a talk on drip irrigation, or on the lawn removal rebate programs) might bring in 4 people, or even no one, in 2017.

In summary, the 2017 Tour had fewer attendees than in 2016. Those who chose the free PDF (80% of registrants) appear to be much less engaged than the printed garden guide registrants. PDF registrants visited less than half of the number of gardens per person than the printed garden guide registrants did; attended fewer talks than the printed garden guide registrants, and had a much higher no-show rate than the printed garden guide registrants. Registrants who had received the printed garden guide completed the evaluation at double the rate of those who had received the PDF. It is doubtful if many of the PDF users read the 80 page electronic guide as thoroughly as if they had a physical copy to browse in advance of the Tour, or if the PDF was as easy to flip through on Smart Phones as the printed guide is.

While offering the PDF made sense financially, and was more environmentally sensitive than printing the garden guide for each registrant, the cost in reduced engagement was high. The lack of engagement of PDF users is constant across every aspect of the Tour, from attendance at the Tour, attendance at the talks, number of garden visits made, and completion of the evaluation.

For the 2018 Tour, finding the funds from government agencies that will allow all registrants to be mailed a garden guide will be a priority. If agency funds cannot be found, charging a \$10 fee per each registration, to cover the cost of again printing and mailing a garden guide to every registrant, will be considered.

In an effort to reach out to new audiences to the 2018 Tour, thus increasing the number of registrants, there will be a theme, “Art and Music in the Gardens”. In addition, in 2018 public agencies will be asked more directly to promote the Tour to their constituents.

Host Gardeners

The gardens selected to take part in the tour are chemical-free and water-conserving landscapes that provide habitat for wildlife. Hosts were chosen because of their willingness to be on site on the day of the tour to talk with visitors about their gardens, and their enthusiasm for, and commitment to, educating others about how to garden in environmentally sensitive ways.

Host gardener recruitment began in the spring of 2016 for the 2017 tour. Potential candidates completed an application, and applicants who met the criteria received a site visit. Host criteria were as follows:

- Gardener must reside in Alameda or Contra Costa County.
- Gardener must use organic and/or natural techniques for pest control rather than synthetic pesticides.
- Garden must demonstrate water conservation techniques. Examples include mulches, groundcover plants, drip or soaker hose irrigation, and the use of plants that do not require excessive watering during the dry part of the growing season.
- Gardener must be a good ambassador for chemical-free, water-conserving gardening: enjoy educating the public; and have the knowledge base to employ natural gardening techniques and share this information with the public.
- Garden must provide food, shelter and nesting areas for wildlife.
- Garden must contain 60% or more California native plants.

- No invasive plants are found in the garden.

Host's gardening experience ranged from native plant novices to professional landscape designers. All of the host gardeners were good ambassadors for natural gardening techniques.

Host Comments from the 2017 evaluations:

Thank you Kathy for all you do. Folks are so pleased to go on this tour and really enjoy it. You have made such a positive impression with this Tour and are such a force behind this amazing event/program. Attendees have many complements, are very engaged, and many are very knowledgeable themselves. So it is a pleasure sharing my garden, meeting all of these "neighbors" from near and far, and talking with them. And I know some went away inspired to begin work in their own gardens, or to add to them.

Everything was well thought out and communicated to the hosts by Kathy. Loved being part of the tour. Thank you for the opportunity.

Labeling all the plants was a great idea. I put a table on my porch with a plant list and garden plan taped to the table. The information sheets, and a picture album with information on project dates and the people who helped me design and maintain the garden, and pictures of the project from the beginning were also out for visitors to peruse. People spent a good bit of time at the table, looking through the album. I spent my time welcoming people and telling them about the workshops at my home and the timeline for my garden, then I let them go explore. That worked well for them and for me. Attendees started coming at 10:00 am and the final guest left at 5:20. There was a lovely steady flow throughout the day. Everyone was having a great time and raving about the gardens they had seen. Excellent guidance. Well publicized. We really appreciated Kathy's support and advice.

I like the way the tour brings people with different interests together to learn about native plants, water conservation, and gardening in general.

Hundreds of people came through without a hitch -- seems amazing.

The "Dear Neighbor" letter worked well to invite neighbors and initiate networking.

I think the garden tour is an excellent vehicle for people to be inspired to think about native gardening. People asked lots of great questions, wanted to know all about our experience and were amazed at our water savings and at the beauty of the garden. I think people came away feeling they can achieve this themselves. I

have been a visitor on the BBTN tour several times. This is my first time as a host. It really opened my eyes as to how enthusiastic people are about native gardening and how much they want to educate themselves about it. I think the BBTN tour is so important to promote the conversation about gardening in a way that respects our environment and works with the environment rather than fighting with it. From the visitors we had, I would say many people in this area feel passionate about native gardening. BBTN encourages people to achieve sustainable gardening!

Well organized, well run and a great experience.

Volunteer Comments from the 2017 evaluations:

I loved meeting all the people; all wanted or had a native garden, and wanted to tell me about theirs.

Three of the San Ramon gardens were within walking distance of each other. Pete was selling plants and giving talks, there were bakery items for sale, and a Porta-potty available - so that one stop was perfect as it had many things to do and see!

This is my second time volunteering at Bob Sorenson's garden. It is such an inspiring garden; I greatly enjoy introducing visitors to the unique front yard.

The smallish garden I volunteered at made native gardening seem achievable and not too overwhelming.

I toured Thurston's garden in Antioch, Mayo's in Brentwood and volunteered at Alcorn's. I enjoyed all three and especially appreciate that each garden offered a different approach to the use of native plants. My favorite was the Mayo garden as I like the design approach used and the less common plant choices, such as the Palo Verde tree. I was surprised to learn that no fertilizer is used in this yard, or other native plant gardens, as natives are adapted to our clay soil.

Both gardens I worked at were wonderful: the plants were labeled, and they were beautifully maintained.

I loved the garden where I volunteered. The natives were well marked and the bird talk was excellent.

I enjoyed being a volunteer in Tre Frane's garden. She was very conscientious & hospitable to one and all. Her garden was perfectly groomed & presented. Also visited Penny Spear's garden, which was equally welcoming, informative with native plant books on hand, and free plants given away. Both gardens were

developed and tended 100% by their owners for years, with some new features.

I've been volunteering for quite a few years and am always amazed at the efficiency of the tour.

My host, Nancy Niemeyer, was super-organized. The garden was spectacular.

I enjoyed welcoming visitors, asking if this was their first time in the garden, and then sharing with them some of the features of the front yard that particularly impress me. I had a lot of great conversations.

My volunteer duties were clearly delineated. Nancy and I are old friends, so we got along well and I was able to explain to guests her process of planning and executing the garden transformation. Kathy, everything is so well organized. I'm an event organizer, and I was amazed at how well thought out everything is.

I've attended this tour many times since it began years ago. I love it. So inspirational! I've chosen many many plantings for my yard based on what I've seen on the tour.

Congratulations! This tour has changed people's ideas about gardens.

The Tour, again this year, started folks thinking about going native. That is a good thing! So, thank you for all your hard work making the Tour an easy way for people to learn and see our amazing natives!

The Tour is very organized and well run.

Thank you for putting this all together, we really enjoy the inspiration that comes with seeing these gardens.

This is always a well-planned and well-attended event, thanks for all your hard work, Kathy!

Nancy's garden was a huge hit. I heard people saying "Oh my God!" and "Wow!" and "This is amazing!" before they got out of their cars.

This was my fifth year for being a Greeter. I have always enjoyed it very much.

Tour Survey and Evaluation

Two surveys were offered to Tour participants. The first was available as part of the registration process; it asked what people wanted to learn from the Tour.

Responses by Tour year

What do you want to learn from the tour?	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
How to select native plants	72%	83%	69%	71%	69%	59%
How to reduce water use	51%	58%	57%	62%	49%	36%
How to garden for wildlife	51%	56%	45%	46%	49%	46%
How to reduce or eliminate pesticide use	30%	33%	25%	25%	24%	22%
How to replace a lawn with a garden	30%	33%	30%	33%	26%	22%
How to compost	19%	23%	18%	17%	16%	15%

Post-Tour Evaluation

The second survey was e-mailed out the morning of the Tour. There were 188 responses (9%), which was about half the number of evaluations received in the previous year. It is worth noting that in 2016 people who filled out evaluations were entered into a drawing to receive a free front yard garden design. This incentive was not offered in 2017. (It will be in 2018.) Below are statistics taken from the post-tour survey.

97% of those filling out the evaluations rated the tour "Excellent" or "Good."

95% percent of the people who completed the evaluation said they felt the Tour did inspire them to garden without pesticides, and while using less water.

This year 60% of the registrants were repeat visitors, and 40% were attending the tour for the first time.

Registrants who had received the printed garden guide completed the evaluation at double the rate of those who had received the PDF.

Motivation and Behavior Change

The registrant evaluations were split up into two groups – those who had attended the tour before, and those who had not. The data for repeat registrants and first-time registrants was tabulated separately. Both categories are discussed below.

Repeat Registrants

75% of registrants who had attended a previous Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour, and who filled out the evaluation form, said they had changed their gardening practices because of their participation in the Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour.

The first column below shows the percentages of the repeat registrants who changed their gardening behaviors after attending the Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour. The second column shows the percentage of repeat registrants who plan to change their gardening behaviors.

How do you manage your garden? (This information was taken from evaluations filled out by repeat registrants.)

ITEM	Began after participation in a previous BBTN Tour	Plan to do this
Incorporate native plants into our garden	17%	13%
Tolerate some insect damage to plants	13%	8%
Group plants of similar water needs	11%	27%
Increase the density of plantings to out-compete weeds	10%	30%
Encourage birds, butterflies, etc. with plant choices, food, shelter, and water	9%	19%
Group plants of similar water needs	9%	22%
Reduce the size of our lawn	9%	11%

Install efficient irrigation (such as drip, timers, soaker hoses)	8%	21%
Mulch with leaves, grass, wood chips, etc	6%	13%
Reduce/eliminate insecticide/herbicide use	4%	5%
Minimize hardscapes (patios, decks)	4%	8%
Compost yard waste and kitchen scraps at home	4%	10%
Grasscycle (leave grass clippings on the lawn)	4%	6%
Amend soil with compost	4%	14%

First-time registrants

The tour was highly motivating to the first time registrants who completed the evaluation.

The question was, “How do you manage your garden?” The following are the percent of people who responded that they planned to begin managing their garden in a more environmentally sound way.

ITEM	Plan to
Group plants of similar water needs	52%
Increase the density of plantings to out-compete weeds	50%
Incorporate native plants into our garden	46%
Encourage birds, butterflies, etc. with plant choices, food, shelter, and water	40%
Group plants of similar water needs	40%
Reduce the size of our lawn	38%
Install efficient irrigation (such as drip, timers, soaker hoses)	30%
Tolerate some insect damage to plants	24%
Amend soil with compost	24%
Mulch with leaves, grass, wood chips, etc	18%
Reduce/eliminate insecticide/herbicide use	16%
Minimize hardscapes (patios, decks)	14%
Grasscycle (leave grass clippings on the lawn)	12%
Compost yard waste and kitchen scraps at home	12%

Number of garden visits made to each garden on the day of the Tour, showing visits made by people who had the printed garden guide (20% of registrants), and visits made by those with the PDF (80% of registrants).

2017 Tour Gardens and Number of Visits Made	AM visits garden guide tickets	AM visits PDF	PM visits garden guide	PM visits PDF	Guests w/out tickets	Total visits
Berkeley						
Hillisde Club	39	37	70	55		201
Jane Maxwell	44	33	40	56	8	181
Glen Schneider	51	41	34	63	19	208
Castro Valley						
Sam Brewer	20	41	18	19	11	109
Mary Cooper	13	30	21	16	6	86
Dale Wolford	20	29	21	29	5	104

2017 Tour Gardens and Number of Visits Made	AM visits garden guide tickets	AM visits PDF	PM visits garden guide	PM visits PDF	Guests w/out tickets	Total visits
El Cerrito						
Michael Graf	40	37	38	34	2	151
Oakland						
Clytia and Joe Curley	58	75	131	77	36	377
Joanne Holland & Scott MacPherson	53	50	47	68	10	228
Sally Mathews	44	41	52	70	20	227
Nick and Liza Mealy	83	110	83	102	22	400
Peggy Olofson	27	44	39	75	26	211
Piedmont						
Jean Hansen's garden	26	20	56	97	19	218

Nancy and Robert McKee-Jolda	33	58	33	58	13	195
Richmond						
Merle Norman and Curtis Beech	27	36	20	29	9	121
San Lorenzo						
San Lorenzo High School	57	57	25	25	28	192
Antioch						
Valerie and Harry Thurston	10	10	6	14	5	45
Brentwood						
John and Fran Alcorn	6	2	8	17	33	66
Lorianne Mayo	6	6	12	26	18	68
Clayton						
Nancy Niemeyer	31	40	21	27	38	157
Concord						
Dan and Lisa Wanket	47	77	28	50		202
	AM visits garden guide tickets	AM visits PDF	PM visits garden guide	PM visits PDF	Guests w/out tickets	Total visits
2017 Tour Gardens and Number of Visits Made						
Lafayette						
Kay Countryman and Ron Briggs	65	77	34	51	25	252
Livermore						
Ann Brown and Steve Ketzler						
Laura Cornett and Brad Buehler	32	56	16	19	5	128
Dixie Finley	26	38	2	16	28	110
Stepanie Jones and John Kundert	30	31	21	24	6	112
Moraga						

Al and Barbara Kyte	40	67	32	78	41	258
Kathleen and Jeff Johnson	41	75	59	77	27	279
Orinda						
Bill and Nancy English	61	63	66	69	17	276
Tre Frane	47	43	46	70	22	228
Barbara and Phil Leitner	68	33	28	58	8	195
Pat Rudebusch	55	50	54	52		211
Bob and Stephanie Sorenson	35	36	42	78	1	192
Pleasant Hill						
Penny Spear and Kathleen Lowe	31	62	39	64	19	215
San Ramon						
Mekhala Chandreshakar	45	45	45	45		180
Melinda Bandler	83	83	83	83		332
Lorraine Kalich	83	83	83	83		332
Nancy and Clark Vandell	83	83	83	83		332
Walnut Creek						
Mike and Mardi Veiluva	43	97	57	80	25	302
Nancy Wenninger	46	49	60	63	26	244
	-	-	-	-	-	
Totals	1649	1945	1653	2100	578	<u>7925</u>

When planning for a year, plant corn. When planning for a decade, plant trees.

*When planning for life, train and educate people.
(Chinese proverb)*

Below are comments from garden tour attendees, either taken from registrant evaluation forms, or received via e-mail.

I was astounded at the magnificent organization of this event! Wow; kudos to everyone. Beautiful gardens, friendly and enthusiastic owners - I had a great day.

This event is WONDERFUL! We love being able to see what others are doing, planting, having success with, experimenting with and exploring. Thank you SO

much for all the work you all do putting this together. All the volunteers are so friendly and the residents so cheerful and excited to talk about their projects. This event always kicks off our spring in the best possible way! Wonderful, wonderful!

I was very impressed with the beautiful booklet, the descriptions of what to expect in each garden, and the directions. In addition, the people who hosted us at their homes were very gracious.

Everyone was very, very welcoming, considerate, and knowledgeable. (One owner went out of her way to answer questions and label another plant for us.) We really enjoyed everything from the seed balls to homemade pop tarts. We plan to utilize all the great resources in the garden guide. The organization and attention to detail was evident. You all should be very proud of your efforts.

A big thanks to the organizers and all of the fantastic people who graciously allowed us to tromp through their yards! I got the hard copy of the guide; it is impeccably produced. This was my first year, but I'm already looking forward to next year. I got lots of great plant ideas for my garden!

I am definitely inspired to learn more and to consider replanting beds on my property.

I visited four great gardens and appreciated that all had labels identifying the plants, and people on hand to talk about the plants and garden practices.

I went to four gardens, and learned things that directly applied to my garden at each place!

All of the gardens I visited had great plant labels, which are so important to help us learn what it is we are looking at.

Every garden had great labeling. One also included pictures of the garden during different seasons. For example, they had fall and winter pictures on the path showing that exact view which included multiple plants that change colors and drop leaves. I thought that was a delightful and very informative touch! That same garden also included the year some of the larger specimen plants were planted, which is helpful for anticipating long term growth.

The tables with the volunteers were well-placed, easy to spot, signage was good, and the volunteers were very helpful and cheery. Good job, everyone!

I really like it that we are encouraged to invite insects into the garden. It adds a whole new dimension to gardening. I am not just collecting plants but am really seeing how they benefit the environment.

We look forward to this tour every year and love to visit new gardens. So many thanks!

There were great hosts at each garden. I got something from each place.

Well organized, super friendly hosts. The Tour is very, very informative.

Loved this. I had a great time. I visited 11 gardens and drove by a 12th to see another front yard, after hours.

I love the tour. I learn a lot and always come away inspired to continue working on these garden practices. The tour reinforces my understanding that the garden is always a work in progress.

At every garden that we visited, the team was very helpful, excited to answer questions, and if they did not know the answer, they would find someone that had an answer. Love love this wonderful day.

Fun, informative tour.

This is always an inspiring and beautiful event. Thank you for all you do.

Kathy, thank you SO much! This is such an awesome event -- where to begin? The gardens, the workshops, the talks, the music, the food offerings, restroom options, meeting the designers, the plant lists, plant sales, the community, the maps, the directions, the guidebooks, the online features, etc., etc., etc. Wow. You must have been doing this for a while!

LOVE IT.

Another well-organized tour! Thank you to all the volunteers for their work and to the host gardens for their hospitality.

Thank you for another wonderful round of gardens! We look forward to the tour every year and appreciate how much intense work must go into making the day a success.

This event is one of the highlights of the year for me; it's a wonderful inspiration!

We really enjoyed the Tour. Learned a lot in a very short time. Plan to head in the native plants direction with our overgrown weedy garden that abuts the regional open space. This event gave us "courage" and a nascent sense of direction.

The Tour was awesome, as usual.

For me, the tour was fantastic - from the layout and resources in the Guide (which I am keeping for future use); all the gardens provided opportunities to learn; the talk on sheet mulching was great - sheet mulching is something I was already planning to do, but the tip on obtaining cardboard from Costco was worth the price of admission! An unintended outcome is that I've been able to educate Costco employees about sheet mulching. The tour is a phenomenal resource.

The tour is amazing. It is a great opportunity to see how other homeowners have approached native planting.

Love this tour; wish I had discovered it sooner.

Thanks very much for keeping this going; you have made a real difference. Every gardener that goes from grass or ivy to natives encourages others to do the same. Think about how many acres this tour has influenced over the years!

We look forward to this tour every year and love to visit new gardens. So many thanks!

This was my first year, but I'm already looking forward to next year. I got lots of great plant ideas for my garden!

Huzzah ! Huge compliments to participants, Kathy Kramer, and everyone who helps her.

Attachment:

The Chickadee's Guide to Gardening:
In Your Garden, Choose Plants That Help the

Environment

By DOUGLAS W. TALLAMY MARCH 11, 2015



Credit
Courtney Wotherspoon

OXFORD, Pa. – I GREW up thinking little of plants. I was interested

in snakes and turtles, then insects and, eventually, birds. Now I like plants. But I still like the life they create even more.

Plants are as close to biological miracles as a scientist could dare admit. After all, they allow us, and nearly every other species, to eat sunlight, by creating the nourishment that drives food webs on this planet. As if that weren't enough, plants also produce oxygen, build topsoil and hold it in place, prevent floods, sequester carbon dioxide, buffer extreme weather and clean our water. Considering all this, you might think we gardeners would value plants for what they do. Instead, we value them for what they look like.

When we design our home landscapes, too many of us choose beautiful plants from all over the world, without considering their ability to support life within our local ecosystems.

Last summer I did a simple experiment at home to measure just how different the plants we use for landscaping can be in supporting local animals. I compared a young white oak in my yard with one of the Bradford pears in my neighbor's yard. Both trees are the same size, but Bradford pears are ornamentals from Asia, while white oaks are native to eastern North America. I walked around each tree and counted the caterpillars on their leaves at head height. I found 410 caterpillars on the white oak (comprising 19 different species), and only one caterpillar (an inchworm) on the Bradford pear.

Was this a fluke? Hardly. The next day I repeated my survey on a different white oak and Bradford pear. This time I found 233 caterpillars on the white oak (comprising 15 species) and, again, only one on the Bradford pear.

Playing God in the Garden

By planting productive native species, we can create life.



Why such huge differences? It's simple: Plants don't want to be eaten, so they have loaded their tissues with nasty chemicals that would kill most insects if eaten. Insects do eat plants, though, and they achieve this by adapting to the chemical defenses of just one or two plant lineages. So some have evolved to eat oak trees without dying, while others have specialized in native cherries or ashes and so on.

But local insects have only just met Bradford pears, in an evolutionary sense, and have not had the time — millennia — required to adapt to their chemical defenses. And so Bradford pears stand virtually untouched in my neighbor's yard.

In the past, we thought this was a good thing. After all, Asian ornamentals were planted to look pretty, and we certainly didn't want insects eating them. We were happy with our perfect pears, burning bushes, Japanese barberries, porcelain berries, golden rain trees, crape myrtles, privets, bush honeysuckles and all the other foreign

ornamentals.

But there are serious ecological consequences to such choices, and another exercise you can do at home makes them clear. This spring, if you live in North America, put up a chickadee nest box in your yard. If you are lucky, a pair of chickadees will move in and raise a family. While they are feeding their young, watch what the chickadees bring to the nest: mostly caterpillars. Both parents take turns feeding the chicks, enabling them to bring a caterpillar to the nest once every three minutes. And they do this from 6 a.m. until 8 p.m. for each of the 16 to 18 days it takes the chicks to fledge. That's a total of 350 to 570 caterpillars every day, depending on how many chicks they have. So, an incredible 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars are required to make one clutch of chickadees.

And chickadees are tiny birds: just a third of an ounce. What if you wanted to support red-bellied woodpeckers in your yard, a bird that is about eight times heavier than a chickadee? How many caterpillars would that take?

What we plant in our landscapes determines what can live in our landscapes. Controlling what grows in our yards is like playing God. By favoring productive species, we can create life, and by using nonnative plants, we can prevent it.

An American yard dominated by Asian ornamentals does not produce nearly the quantity and diversity of insects needed for birds to reproduce. Some might argue that we should just let those birds breed "in nature." That worked in the past, but now there simply is not enough "nature" left. And it shows. Many bird species in North America have declined drastically in the past 40 years.

Fortunately, more and more gardeners are realizing that their yards offer one of the most empowering conservation options we have, and are sharing their properties with the nature around them.

By the way, you might assume that my oak was riddled with

unsightly caterpillar holes, but not so. Since birds eat most of the caterpillars before they get very large, from 10 feet away the oak looked as perfect as a Bradford pear.

[Douglas W. Tallamy](#), a professor of entomology and wildlife ecology at the University of Delaware, is the author of “Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife With Native Plants.”