

HOME & REAL ESTATE

Friday, April 13, 2007

OPEN
HOUSE GUIDE
Also online at www.PaloAltoOnline.com

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Home Front

TREE WALK . . . Dave Muffly will lead a free tree walk through Gamble Garden on **Saturday, April 14**, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Meet at the Carriage House, behind 1431 Waverley St., Palo Alto. For information, call Canopy: Trees for Palo Alto at 650-964-6110 or visit www.canopy.org. (In addition, Muffly will be manning a table at the Santa Clara Master Gardeners major plant sale/gardening event on **Sunday, April 15**, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the Mercury News Facility, 750 Ridder Park Drive, San Jose (West Parking Lot). For information, visit www.mastergardeners.org/events/2007/SGM_2007.html.

SPICE UP YOUR HOME . . . Interior designer and Palo Alto Weekly columnist Kit Davey will teach a class on "Room Re-design: Take Your Home from Blah to Beautiful in 8 Hours or Less!" on **Wednesday, April 18**, from 7 to 9 p.m. at Foothill College, Room 3301, 12345 El Monte Road, Los Altos Hills. Focus will be on redecorating without buying new furnishings, including creating a floor plan, balancing color and accessorizing. Fee is \$39, plus a \$7 materials fee payable to the instructor in class (plus bring \$2 in quarters for parking). For information, call 408-864-8817 or visit www.shortcourses.fhda.edu.

TIME TO PLANT . . . UCCE Master Gardener Bekah Stratton will talk "All About Planning" (continued on page 6)

Send notices of news and events related to real estate, interior design, home improvement and gardening to Home Front, Palo Alto Weekly, P.O. Box 1610, Palo Alto, CA 94302, or e-mail cbplitzer@pawebly.com. Deadline is Thursday at 5 p.m.

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A Japanese bridge and redwood bench lead the eye to low-growing, not overly manicured plants in this Mountain View native garden.

Sam Tenney

Shade garden attracts critters, visitors

Plenty of inspiration at Going Native Garden Tour

by Thea Lamkin-Carughi

Native flowers aren't the only things sprouting up in the Foxborough garden this spring. All sorts of creatures have been finding sanctuary in Renate Ka's back yard in Mountain View.

"The hummingbirds are just crazy. When I brush my teeth in the morning I can watch them through the window," Ka said.

Ka's lively garden will be one of the 45 featured sights on this year's Going Native Garden Tour on Sunday, April 29. The tour focuses on the use of California native plants and green-gardening methods in locations throughout Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. Registration is free, but spots fill up quickly, and about 1,500 people have already signed up for this year's tour.

Three years ago, the Foxborough site would have had nothing more than a small pool and a patchy lawn, but today it is a sculpted yard filled with lush, low-growing plants and stone ornaments.

Renate Ka, the homeowner, initiated the transformation soon after moving in, and saw it as an extension of her already environmentally conscious lifestyle.

"For me, going native is part of being green as far as I'm concerned. You're supporting the animals and the birds and the lizards and the bees and insects," she said one afternoon as she sat on her patio, looking out over the garden.

The soft slopes of the Japanese bridge and "Mediterranean mounds" carry the eyes easily from one space to the next. At the far end, a kidney-shaped expanse of decomposed granite lies where the pool used to, giving the garden a tranquil atmosphere.



In a primarily shady garden, California poppies thrive in the space where the sun manages to shine.

Sam Tenney

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Shade

(continued from page 1)

But Ka is quick to remind that she had help with the project. She worked with Chris Todd, a landscape designer whose company Garden Escapes specializes in native plants.

Even then, Ka wasn't "too religious" about having only native plants.

"I kind of didn't want to be too radical and kill everything I had," she said. The garden is as much for her as it is for the local habitat. "I tend to be a more casual gardener — I do everything myself, and I hate leaf-blowers."

The area reflects this more passive approach. Ka has allowed the plants to take on their own shape, and nothing seems over-manicured.

Creepers and low bushes abound, exquisite to the last detail. White blossoms hang from the manzanita plants like tiny bells, and the mint-scented salvia leaves are coated in a soft down.

Ka's lot isn't a typical example of California native gardens because a row of tall redwood trees in her neighbor's yard blocks much of the light. "We have the shade natives, and they're a little less flashy."

She has still managed to find plants that thrive on the soil, which she has layered with redwood bark. "I've really tried to have something in the garden I can show all year round," Ka said.

Poppies give the yard bursts of color in spots where the sun manages to get through, and in the shade lavender coral bells have just sprung up. Much of the garden is filled with lush leaves that will be eclipsed by bright flowers once the tour starts.

Here and there the growth is broken by Ka's own decorations: a bird bath near the bridge and a large stone Buddha's face nestled in the corner.

Ka devoted extensive attention to her garden, making sure that it provides more than just aesthetics to the environment. "I don't use pesticides, and I fertilize almost exclusively with compost. I have my own compost, and sometimes I get some from Redwood City."

She cut down significantly on her water usage by installing agricultural drips that provide "moisture cones," and by setting up four separate irrigation zones.

None of the non-native plants included are invasive. "I once had this Cotoneaster that had just beautiful red berries, but then a friend told me it was invasive, and I got rid of it," Ka said.

Soon after going native, Ka noticed that more and more animals were visiting her garden. She enjoyed them so much that she hired Josiah Clark, consulting ecologist and naturalist, to help her "attract critters."

"I had a lizard early last spring, but then it just disappeared. It was fun, you know? They sit there and do their pushups." She later put in redwood branches to encourage its return.

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What: *Going Native Garden Tour*

When: *Sunday, April 29, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

Where: *45 Peninsula gardens, including 3 in Palo Alto (includes Master Gardener Demonstration Garden and El Palo Alto Park), 3 in Mountain View, 1 in Los Altos, 1 in Los Altos Hills, 1 in Menlo Park, 3 in Portola Valley*

Cost: *Free*

Info: *Pre-registration is required before April 28, noon (or when tour reaches capacity), at www.GoingNativeGarden-Tour.org. For information, e-mail info@GoingNativeGardenTour.org.*



Sam Tenney



Sam Tenney

Renate Ka, above, prefers to take a more casual attitude in creating her native garden. Below, a large stone Buddha's face nestles in the corner.



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