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Our Neighbors: See some of the area's best in popular natives garden tour

By Chris Treadway
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 03/19/2010 08:44:05 PM PDT

Updated: 03/23/2010 12:52:26 PM PDT

THE RIGHT combination of rain and sunshine should have the East Bay's natural vegetation looking its best in time for the sixth annual Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour on May 2.

While the actual event is still more than a month away, the online registration deadline is April 20 for the popular free tour, which tends to fill up early.

Tour founder Kathy Kramer, of San Pablo, has lined up 50 pesticide-free gardens in Alameda and Contra Costa counties that each feature at least 50 percent native plants.

Kramer started the tour to showcase the visual and practical possibilities of gardens more in tune with their surroundings. A native plant garden uses about one-tenth the water (and the energy needed to pump it) of a traditional garden, doesn't contaminate the water because no pesticides or fertilizer are needed and provides a habitat for birds, bees, butterflies and other wildlife, she says.

Gardens on the self-guided tour are grouped by climate, since native plants in warm-weather inland areas differ from those in milder climates nearer the

Bay.

There are participating Bayside gardens this year in Pinole, El Cerrito, El Sobrante, Richmond Berkeley, Oakland and Castro Valley, ranging from "large parcels in the hills to small lots in the flats." For those who want to make their own yard more harmonious, selected locations will have scheduled talks by experts and sales of native plants.

Registration, which is done online at www.bringingbackthenatives.net, closes early to allow time to mail this year's tour book to the more than 5,000 expected participants.

In conjunction with the tour is a "Native Plant Sale Extravaganza" on May 1 and 2 at participating nurseries, including Richmond locations The Watershed Nursery and Annie's Annuals and Perennials.

Volunteers are always needed to help staff locations, and those who provide assistance can meet the owner and get a private tour of the garden they will be staffing. Find volunteer details at the Bringing Back the Natives Garden Web site, <http://bringingbackthenatives.net>.

WEST COUNTY NOTES: El Cerritans are being asked to weigh in on traffic-related concerns and possible solutions at pair of meetings over the next week. The first session on the city's planned Neighborhood Traffic Management Program is Thursday at the Open House Senior Center, 6500 Stockton Ave. The second is March 31 at Arlington Clubhouse 1120 Arlington Blvd.

Both gatherings are from 6:30 to 8 p.m. and will have a drop-in format where the community can offer input and learn about traffic management program guidelines. To learn more call 510-215-

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city clerk from 1971 to 1986, is a founding member of the society.

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Richmond will hold its second annual Spring Egg Hunt & Breakfast on Saturday. Breakfast (eggs, pancakes, sausage, milk and juice) will be from 8:30 to 10 a.m. at the Recreation Complex, 3230 Macdonald Ave. The cost is \$5 adults and \$3 ages 12 and younger. The free egg hunt is from 10 a.m. to noon next door at Nicholl Park, when little ones can join the search for toy and candy eggs and other activities. Details: 510-620-6788.

Albany Little League will hold its opening parade at 9 a.m. Saturday, when uniformed players will set out from Key Route Boulevard and march down Solano to the University Village ball fields. The parade will be followed by official ceremonies, a barbecue and carnival.

NOTEWORTHY: El Cerrito police Chief Scott Kirkland was presented the Joe Molloy Award this month when the California Police Chiefs Association held its installation banquet in San Jose. Kirkland was cited for his service to law enforcement and the association in receiving the organization's highest honor.

Kirkland serves on the CPCA board and heads its medical marijuana dispensary task force.

Engineers Robert Giaramita and Marc Palecheck, both 12-year veterans of the Richmond Fire Department, were selected from a group of six candidates for promotion to fire captain this month and were formally acknowledged at a pinning ceremony before the City Council.

Lucille Irish was honored March 15 by the El Cerrito City Council for more than 35 years of service as an officer and board member of the El Cerrito Historical Society. Irish, who was El Cerrito's

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