

Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour

1718 Hillcrest Road
San Pablo CA 94806
(510) 236-9558

Kathy@KathyKramerConsulting.net
www.BringingBackTheNatives.net

Summary of the May 2 and 3, 2026 Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour

- 9,520 garden visits were made on the weekend of the 2026 Tour. This was almost exactly the same number of garden visits made in 2025, which was 9,647 visits. Both mornings of this year's Tour were cold and windy, which reduced the number of visits.
- 246,609 garden visits have been made since the Tour's inception in 2005.
- 99% of those who filled out the in-person Tour evaluations rated the in-person Tour "Excellent" or "Good."
- 72 gardens were open on the week-end of the Tour, making it the largest Tour to date. (This is a 40% increase over the 2025 Tour, when 51 gardens were open.)
- 86 hosts and 289 volunteers made this event possible.
- 49 garden talks, musical events, birdwatching opportunities, and native seed, plant, and soap sales were offered the week-end of the Tour. [Here](#) is the list of Bayside garden events, and [here](#) is the list of Inland garden events.
- 28 of the gardens were new to the Tour this year, which was a record.
- The [Gardens at a Glance](#) matrix helped registrants choose the gardens they would like to see, and the [online mapping program](#) helped them get there.
- The Tour's YouTube channel has 5,189 subscribers, contains 172 videos on gardening with native plants, and had more than 76,000 views in the last year.

2026 Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour

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2026 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.** (Click [here](#) to see a graph of the study results.)*

From the City of Santa Monica's garden/garden study

Why a Native Plant Garden Tour?

The spring 2026 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 70% 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 to enjoy.

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. California natives are hardy, and they don't require the use of pesticides and fertilizers, as many non-natives do. Native plants need less pruning than many non-natives, thus generating less green waste. As this article, "The Chickadees Guide to Gardening" demonstrates, native plants also provide the best habitat for birds, butterflies, beneficial insects, and other forms of wildlife.

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 compared to a traditional garden, the native garden:

- uses 83% less water
- generates 56% less green waste, and
- requires 68% less maintenance

Tour gardens contain minimal or no lawn. This is of particular value since the majority of the chemicals purchased by home owners 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, 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.

Introduction to the 2026 Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour

This year was the 22nd annual Tour. For the fifth year the Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour was a two-day event, with Bayside gardens (Pinole to Newark) open on Saturday, May 2, and Inland gardens (Martinez to Livermore, including Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda) were open on Sunday, May 3.

9,520 garden visits were made on the week-end of the 2026 in-person Tour. See page 11 for a list of the number of visitors counted at each garden.

- 246,609 garden visits have been made since the Tour's inception in 2005.
- 99% of those who filled out the in-person Tour evaluations rated the in-person Tour “Excellent” or “Good.”
- 72 gardens were open on the week-end of in-person Tour. This was the largest garden tour yet.
- 86 hosts and 289 volunteers made this event possible.
- 49 garden talks, musical events, birdwatching opportunities, and native seed, plant, and soap sales were offered the week-end of the Tour. [Here](#) is the list of Bayside garden events, and [here](#) is the list of Inland garden events.
- 28 of the gardens were new to the Tour this year, which was a record for new gardens.

The seventy-two gardens open on the Tour were located in twenty-five cities and unincorporated areas in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. The cities were: Alameda, Albany, Berkeley, Castro Valley, Clayton, Concord, Danville, El Cerrito, El Sobrante, Emeryville, Fremont, Hayward, Kensington, Lafayette, Livermore, Martinez, Newark, Oakland, Orinda, Piedmont, Pinole, Richmond, San Leandro, San Ramon, and Walnut Creek.

The gardens ranged from large lots in the hills to small gardens in the flats, and from mature landscapes to those that were newly-planted. They contained a suite of native plants ranging from local native plants to the horticulturally available offerings of natives from throughout California. Thirty of the gardens were designed and installed by owners, and the remaining forty-two were designed and

installed by professionals. All of the gardens were landscaped with at least 70% native plants.

289 volunteers and 86 hosts were stationed at gardens on the weekend of the tour to greet and answer questions from visitors, or helped with tour preparation and clean-up. The volunteer Greeters and Garden Assistants contributed more than 1,200 hours of time to the tour. The hosts put in countless hours preparing for the tour, and more than 700 hours on the day of the event.

Host Gardeners

The gardens selected to take part in the tour are chemical-free and water-conserving landscapes that provide habitat for wildlife and contain 70% or more California native plants. 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 sustainable ways.

Host gardener recruitment began in the spring of 2025 for the 2026 tour. Potential candidates completed an application, and applicants who met the criteria received a site visit.

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.

Website

The Tour's website featured the gardens on this year's Tour under "[View the 2026 In-Person Gardens](#)." Each garden is described in detail, and plant lists and numerous photographs are provided for each garden.

The website also contains information and photographs of all of the gardens that have ever been on the tour, under "[Find a Garden](#)"; this section contains extensive garden descriptions, plant lists for each garden, and some garden-specific bird, butterfly, mammal, reptile, and amphibian lists. By typing in the name of a city, all of the gardens that have ever been on the Tour from that city will appear in the results box. The gardens can also be searched by 25 other factors, such as rain garden, professionally designed, small garden (600 sq. ft. or less), natives in a parking strip, slope, shady garden, great bird garden, and more.

Resource information on the website includes contact information for landscaper designers who specialize in creating native plant gardens ("[Find a Designer](#)"), lists of nurseries that carry native plants ("[Find a Nursery](#)"), a list of [Easy-to-Grow East Bay Natives](#), and a list of [keystone species](#)—local, hardy native plants that provide the best habitat for wildlife, according to Dr. Tallamy.

Native Plant Extravaganzas

The Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour also coordinates spring and fall Native Plant Extravaganzas, during which free talks are given at each participating nursery on the day of the event.

Three Extravaganzas were held in the fall of 2025, and three more were held in the spring of 2026. Participating nurseries are East Bay Wilds, the Watershed Nursery, Oaktown, Curious Flora (formerly Annie's Annuals), Green Thumb Works, Down by the Bay Native Plant Nursery, Evergreen Nursery and Garden Center, and California Native Seeds.

Comments taken from 2026 Tour Evaluations

- Since going on this tour every year starting in 2014, I have converted our back lawn and front yard to (mostly) natives and received a rebate from my water company. I started out not knowing any CA native plants in 2014 to truly seeing their incredible beauty over the years. The Tour and website provided many resources to convert my own yard. I am saving water and bringing in incredible animal, insect, bird life, which entertains me every day. My neighbors stop and talk with me about the garden frequently. I've always been a gardener from a young age and this tour truly awakened my appreciation for our CA ecosystem. Keep up your wonderful work!
- We are such fans of this Tour, which is amazingly well-done on all levels. The ease of attending, helpful hints beforehand, knowledgeable expert presentations, organization and signage are all at a high level of professionalism. Kudos to Kathy and all the hosts and volunteers. This was truly a joyous experience. THANK YOU!
- The Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour has always been terrific. I was convinced to replace my suburban lawn with natives back in 2009 after going on a tour, and I'm sure thousands of others have been as well.
- I've been attending the tour for many years and it's only because of it that I have planted a native garden, and I have also completely eliminated gas from my house.
- I learned something from every spot we visited. Seeing the same plants in different spaces and at varying levels of maturity and size was super helpful. And the love and pride the homeowners showed of the visiting

birds, bees, and wildlife was evident throughout the day. Can't wait for next year!

- The keystone species signs were incredible! I learned so much from them.
- Thank you to all the gardeners for welcoming us and sharing their knowledge! It was a wonderful day, and we came away with more ideas of what to put in our yard. (We are slowly converting it into a fully native space).
- I appreciated seeing the sample of markers for bird / glass collision avoidance.
- I thought all of the gardens were great for different reasons.
- Seeing the keystone species signs and the keystone plants in person makes it “real” for me in terms of their purposes, what the plants look like, and how they grow.
- All of the garden hosts and volunteers were great! They answered questions about the plants, and explained the gardening practices so well; this was very helpful.
- All of the gardens we visited were wonderful. We appreciated the extra on-site information tables, such as Zone 7 Water District, designers, gardeners, and green companies.
- The smaller gardens were so helpful, as they had interesting plant combinations and gave me ideas that I could use in my own garden.
- The Tour is inspiring, and seeing these gardens will help us do this ourselves.
- All of the volunteers were super lovely and helpful, and it was just a fantastic experience overall!
- All of the gardens were great. All of the hosts very welcoming; I appreciate them opening their gardens to the public.
- I loved the keystone species signs. I take pictures of the ones I want to remember and perhaps include in my garden.
- The Tour was delightful!

- Fantastic gardens, the plants were well-labeled, and the owners shared their knowledge. The Tour was very well done, and it gets better every year.
- Thank you so much for pulling all of this together. The volunteers were super-knowledgeable and helpful.
- Everyone was so friendly and happy. It was so interesting to see what others do with their gardens. I was very impressed.
- Beautiful gardens, informative signage, friendly hosts and volunteers— thanks!
- Such an amazing community, mission, and event. Very well organized, fun, cheerful, and neighborly. We are starting out and it's fun and inspiring to see people's beautiful gardens.
- Love the tour and brought new friends this time.
- The Tour is soo well organized, and the owners of the gardens were so generous with their time - they were all wonderful and kind.
- LOVED IT - people were so friendly and so helpful and so generous with their advice and information sharing.
- The Tour was awesome and really helpful!
- I appreciate the green home and bird-safe additions.
- We really loved the tour and want to come every year. We left very inspired and full of ideas for our own yard.
- The tour was an excellent experience. It was very well-organized and super inspirational.
- This was absolutely delightful, thank you to all the volunteers who made this such a great day!
- The volunteers/hosts were kind and knowledgeable.
- It was just a stellar experience, and I learned sooo much. Will be writing an article to share with my audience. So inspired by and grateful for your work. It seems to keep improving every year, so keep keeping on!

- Great mix of gardens. The addition of fire-wise gardening was helpful.
- All of the volunteers were helpful, kind, and willing to discuss what the garden is about and how they can help me increase the use of native plants in my own garden. Hosts and volunteers provided suggestions of online resources, libraries, and samples of native plant seeds.
- Thank you so much! I look forward to it every year!
- Thank you for all the work you've put into increasing awareness of native plant gardens.
- The Tour was very well done in every way. There was a lot of good information on the website. We visited both large and small gardens and enjoyed both; the large gardens were magnificent, but we also appreciated seeing what gardeners had done with smaller spaces as we could see what we might be able to do as novices. The hosts were welcoming and helpful and there was a lot of good signage and other information at the gardens.
- It was obvious that all garden hosts put a lot of effort into getting their gardens ready for the tour. They all had plants well-labeled.
- All of the volunteers were very enthusiastic.
- Great event; I'm looking forward to the next one.
- The signage was excellent! The people volunteering at each garden were so positive, pleasant, and informative. Every garden that I visited was welcoming and was managed so well by the owners & volunteers. Everyone was very friendly and professional.
- All the greeters at the entrance of the gardens were very friendly and helpful. Thank you to all for your efforts in organizing this event.
- I love seeing the new gardens. A huge thank you to everyone who participates in this event!
- Thank you so much for putting together such a wonderful event. I've enjoyed the tour a number of times over the years and have recommended it to others. The gardens are always inspiring, the volunteers welcoming, and the hosts generous in sharing their spaces and knowledge. It's a real gift to the community.

- What a wonderful experience to see the gardens in-person and get plant ideas.
- We really enjoyed our garden visits! Inspiring! I've been telling everyone about it. Keep up the good work.
- Thank you for organizing this, I learn something new every year. I use the ideas not only in my garden, but also in the two school gardens I oversee.
- The tour is fantastic. I picked up ideas and tips at every garden I visited. This year I was able to get my husband to come to a few of the gardens with me - he came for the music but enjoyed the gardens we visited.
- This tour is so wonderful. I have learned so much and I just love coming every year.
- Great experience. learned lots. Inspired to do more with my garden.
- The tour is such a great resource and an inspiration for so many.
- I'm looking forward to next year!

Tour Partnerships and Sponsors

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 the 2026 Tour and the programs it runs include a flood control and water conservation district, one county clean water program, five water districts and water conservation agencies, four cities, three non-profits, and several businesses. The list of tour sponsors is provided below.

2026 Tour Sponsors

\$17,000

Contra Costa Clean Water Program

\$10,000

Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District

\$5,500

Contra Costa Water District

\$5,000

California Native Plant Society, East Bay Chapter
Lyngso

\$3,000

Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency

\$2,000

City of Walnut Creek
EcoPerformance Builders
Dwight Johnson

\$1,500

Alameda County Water District

\$1,000

Anne Chambers and Ed McAlpine
City of Antioch
City of El Cerrito
City of Pittsburg
Glen and Connie Schneider
Ann Sorenson
Zone 7 Water Agency

Number of Garden Visits Made in 2026

	AM visits	PM visits	Total garden visits
Bayside Gardens			
Alameda			
Jenny Michael and Craig Valentine	30	54	84
Albany			
Scott Richerson	61	109	147

Berkeley			
Arlene Baxter and David Mostardi	76	109	170
Sallie Bryan	114	116	230
Leslie Buck	82	157	239
Lucinda Daly	91	135	226
Keith Johnson and Erin Diehm	85	118	203
Jennifer and Adam Love	74	137	211
The Pollinator Pathway	26	50	86
Ruth Rogow			165
Dave Savidge and Jennifer Braun	75	84	159
Timothy J. Sullivan	74	83	157
Wayne Whitney	62	91	153
Castro Valley			
Danny Galindo & Eugene Shabelyanau	53	73	126
Steve Morjig	30	39	69
Cindy and Richard Simons	36	44	80
Susan and Bill Teefy	74	52	126
El Cerrito			
Pamela Fox	46	39	85
Michael Graf	46	48	94
John MacLennan	82	110	192
Jean Mckenzie	99	91	190
Prospect Sierra Elementary School	19	21	40
El Sobrante			
Wildcat Canyon Community School	27	19	46

Emeryville			
Whitney Grover and Elliott Callahan	30	42	72
Fremont			
Jennifer Dockter	25	25	50
Museum of Local History	38	46	84
Hayward			
Natalie Forrest	22	33	55
Josh and David	22	22	44
Kensington			
Janet Parks	65	57	122
Newark			
Yen Bui	35	35	70
Mike Egusa	33	15	48
Oakland			
Genie Barry	64	126	190
Julie Benson	72	146	218
Beth Calvet	48	88	136
Michael Charnofsky	49	78	127
Hannah and Mike	44	48	92
Alan Harper and Carol Baird	77	123	200
Alton Jelks	72	146	218
Jamie Marantz	29	71	100
Nicole and Andrew	68	130	198
Sarah Selvidge	70	146	216
Tobi and Marie Szuts	41	85	126
Tim Vendlinski	75	136	211

Piedmont			
Valerie Matzger	47	100	147
Pinole			
Kim and Jeff Jerge			36
Richmond			
Anita Pereira	33	22	55
Debbie Rheuark			33
San Leandro			
Jong and Olivia	70	58	128
Kathy and Peter Greenstein	43	37	80
Stefanie Pruegel	70	58	128
Katie Steigman and Nick Wright	37	45	82
Nora Trentacoste and Jay Slean	42	28	70
Inland Gardens			
Clayton			
Nancy Niemeyer	44	62	106
Kelly Marshall and Mike Weidner	51	73	124
Concord			
Gehringer Native Plant Demonstration Garden	45	42	87
Danville			
Maria Sargent	31	36	67
<i>Continued on next page</i>			
Lafayette			
Michael and Juliana Horn	43	91	134

Glenn Phillips and David Nish			90
Livermore			
Roger and Amy Aines	37	64	101
Maria and David Dawson	54	49	103
Jennifer Hurley and Dan Gaff	74	30	104
Martinez			
Nancy Salsig	21	13	34
Orinda			
Pat and John Pomidor	81	77	158
Bob and Stephanie Sorenson	117	118	235
Jim and Laurie Ulrick	81	96	177
Walnut Creek			
Michael Cochrane	94	162	256
Trina and Jeff Horner	83	146	229
Lainie Johnson	73	120	193
Jennifer Russell	130	153	283
Sugarloaf Native Plant Garden	98	121	219
Nancy Wenninger	68	138	206
Totals	3,908	5,316	9,520

Appendix A—“The Chickadee’s Guide to Gardening”

OPINION: NY Times, March 11, 2015

by Douglas W. Tallamy

March 11, 2015

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.

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.”

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