



BLOOM



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BLOOM

BOUNTIFUL
GARDENS
& LUSH
LANDSCAPES



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CREDITS

SECTION EDITOR

Jackie Burrell

DESIGN

David Jack Browning

Chris Gotsill

PHOTO EDITING

Mark DuFrene

Laura Oda

COPY EDITING

Sue Gilmore



COVER

ILLUSTRATION
BY STEPHANIE
CARTER

*Opposite: Spring
brings a froth
of blossoms to
almond orchards
near Davis.*

JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO/
STAFF

Let's get you . growing

*Five Bay Area nurseries nurture
your gardening dreams*

BY CHUCK BARNEY AND JOAN MORRIS

Sure, you can go to your favorite home improvement store and pick up the plants that everyone grows. But if there's something special —something unique — you just have to have for your garden, nothing compares to a homegrown nursery, and the Bay Area boasts plenty of them.

While it's true that big box stores, which often offer plants at discounted prices, have driven several family-owned businesses under, the nurseries that survived did so with clever pivots: They expanded their plant selection and focused on specialty plants, such as herbs, orchids, California natives, Asian plants and palms.

These are some of our favorites.

Bay Area Orchids

HALF MOON BAY

Family comes first at Bay Area Orchids, where Juan Manuel Aguilares, his wife, Maria, and their three sons work hard to “cultivate healthy plants and happy minds.”

“It might sound kind of corny,” says Jesus

A riot of color greets visitors at Half Moon Bay's family-owned nursery. Bay Area Orchids is a mecca for orchid lovers.

RANDY VAZQUEZ/STAFF





Juan Aguilares' entire family works at Bay Area Orchids, tending the exotic blooms with all the patience in the world.

RANDY VAZQUEZ/STAFF

Aguillares. “But we’re all about the love and the family bonds. We put a lot of care into what we do, and you can see it in the plants. They’re raised with love.”

After working for years in the sugarcane fields of his native Mexico, Juan Manuel relocated to the Bay Area in 1997 and was instantly drawn to some of the most elegant and mysterious flowers on the planet — first while employed at Half Moon Bay Orchids and then ePlant World.

When the latter went bankrupt last year, he boldly started a new business at the same location.

“I like the whole process of growing the plants and teaching my sons about orchids,” Juan Manuel says. “I feel happy when the plants start to flower.”

Jesus, 22 — along with siblings Juan Manuel Jr., 17, and Daniel, 14 — are picking up things as they go, while learning from their father that orchid-growing requires an abundance of patience.

“It’s a methodical process, but he’s so dedicated, determined and persistent,” Jesus says. “He’s part of a dying breed — a craftsman who does it all while providing for his family.”

The Aguilares’ nursery specializes in the phalaenopsis (also known as the Moth orchid) and cymbidium species, and they hope to expand their inventory to include more exotic and rare varieties in the near future. Meanwhile, they admit that starting a business in the middle of a pandemic has had its challenges.

“A lot of people questioned it. We had our doubters,” Jesus says. “But the way I see it, if you have to be quarantined and stay inside, it would be nice to have some orchids around you. They’re stress-relievers. They give off a sense of calm.”

Details: Bay Area Orchids is open from 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. daily at 12511 San Mateo Road in Half Moon Bay; www.bayareaorchids.com.

Golden Gate Palms

POINT RICHMOND

It would be accurate to say that Golden Gate Palms, which specializes in palms of all shapes and sizes as well as avocado and subtropical plants, had its origins



in the heart of an 8-year-old boy.

Gary Gragg, who grew up in Lafayette, developed a plant obsession at a young age, filling his room, the yard and then his mother’s entire house with a stunning assortment of plants. But it was a queen’s palm growing in a Denny’s parking lot in Pleasant Hill that might have sealed the deal.

Gragg was impressed by the queen, a stately, single-trunked palm that earned its name. The sky-scraping tree is topped by a graceful canopy of bright green leaves that have a classic droop. At certain times of the year, bright orange dates fill the tree top.

Gragg was fascinated by the tree. He knew that eventually, it would drop seeds, and with any luck, those seeds would sprout and produce new queen palms. When his dream came true, he rode his bicycle to the parking lot, shovel in hand, dug up a small seedling and rode off with his treasure.

His plant collection followed him to college and then to his first home. Eventually, it morphed into a full-fledged nursery. Armed with a wealth of horticultural

Golden Gate Palms owner Gary Gragg, right, sits among Yucca rostrata and agave medio-picta at his nursery in Richmond. The nursery specializes in palms, avocado trees, orange trees, succulents and subtropical plants as well as birds of paradise, above.

RAY CHAVEZ/STAFF



Morningsun Herb Farm owner Rose Loveall tends to the aromatic young plants at her nursery in Vacaville.

RAY CHAVEZ/STAFF

ture and landscape knowledge, Gragg opened Golden Gate Palms in 2002, and the nursery quickly became the go-to place for palms and subtropicals.

Gragg even defied garden logic by cultivating banana and mango trees, which he says can thrive in many Bay Area gardens and yards.

“We sell palms of every possible denomination,” Gragg says. “Huge ones that need cranes, which we have, small ones, extremely rare ones. On top of that, we sell all kinds of subtropical and exotic plants. I just run into really cool stuff, take it and utilize it.”

Although Gragg has several commercial customers — the nursery supplies palms to businesses and institutions throughout the Bay Area — most of his clientele are average gardeners looking for something different for their spaces.

Details: Golden Gate Palms is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily at 425 Cutting Blvd. in Point Richmond; <https://www.goldengatepalms.com>.

Morningsun Herb Farm

VACAVILLE

In the early 1990s, Rose Loveall was working for the U.S. Forest Service in Placerville, where she managed research greenhouses and was surrounded by “little baby trees.” What she really wanted to do,

though, was lose herself in fragrant herbs.

That’s when the concept of Morningsun Herb Farm began to take shape. Knowing there wasn’t anything like it nearby, Loveall started a specialty nursery on the three-acre plot of land where she was raised and where her parents had lived since 1956.

“It was their idea,” Loveall recalls. “They said, ‘Why not do it here?’ The land was flat and had water and electricity and was free! I thought: This is something I can do.”

Things got off to a humble start with one small greenhouse, just 60 varieties of herbs and week-end-only business hours. Looking back, Loveall remembers how would-be customers often drove past her unassuming place in the country “many times” before pinpointing its location.

Fast-forward to the present, when the demand for fresh herbs is skyrocketing. Morningsun now grows more than 700 varieties and business is thriving.

“We can make as much money in a single day as we used to make over a whole year,” she says, proudly.

Loveall insists that she and her customers love herbs because they’re “interactive plants.”

“You can cook with them. You can make medicine. They smell good. They repel insects,” she says. “They’re really functional. They’re not just there to look at.”

Her biggest seller? “Basil. Basil. Basil,” she says. “From mid-March to July, it’s an obsession.”

At Morningsun, the plants share the spotlight with



a trio of furry creatures — two donkeys and an overgrown goat named Goose.

“He has no value. He’s really old, and you can’t breed him,” Loveall says. “But he’s so sweet and super friendly. Our customers adore him.”

Details: Morningsun Herb Farm is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday through Sunday at 6137 Pleasants Valley Road in Vacaville; <https://morningsunherbfarm.com>.

Yamagami’s Garden Center

CUPERTINO

The cedar tree that stands on the grounds of Yamagami’s Garden Center began life in a small container seven decades ago. It’s more than 50 feet tall now.

“It’s firmly rooted in the place,” says Brittany Sheade, “much like our family.”

Indeed, that towering evergreen is an apt metaphor for a company that prides itself on a rich history and familial continuity. After launching the business in 1948 as a fruit stand amid sprawling orchards, original owner Taro Yamagami sold the nursery in 1963 to Mas Oka, who had worked under him for 10 years.

Mas and his wife, Betty, retired in 1983, handing the operation to their son, Preston, who eventually turned things over to his daughter, Brittany, and her husband, Michael. Through it all, the original name remained.

“Many of our customers remember coming here as kids. Now they’re bringing their kids,” says Sheade, whose first job in high school was at the nursery. After leaving for college, she decided to return because she didn’t like her major — city planning.

She attributes Yamagami’s long-running success to a steadfast desire to maintain a “family feel.”

“We’re an independent little business. We’re not corporate,” Sheade says. “And some of our core staff have been with us for over 20 years. I hope that means we’re doing something right.”

As for the nursery’s offerings, she is particularly proud of its edible selections — vegetables, herbs and citrus trees — and boasts that Yamagami’s delivers to more than 60 ZIP codes across the Bay Area.

She also points to the nursery’s more than 100 selections of bonsai — ranging from three-inch starters to one-gallon size — as well as finished bonsai options suitable for indoor and outdoor. In addition, Yamagami’s carries tools and instructional books for growing and caring for bonsai.

“Bonsai is a niche market most places, but for us, it’s pretty front-and-center,” Sheade says. “Being a Japanese nursery, it’s an important piece.”

Details: Yamagami’s Garden Center is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday at 1361 S. De Anza Blvd. in Cupertino; www.yamagamis.com.

East Bay Nursery

BERKELEY

One of the oldest in the East Bay, this nursery first opened in a single small building in 1926. It’s been



Yamagami’s Garden Center in Cupertino specializes in bonsai trees and supplies. DAI SUGANO/STAFF



Above: What began as a farm stand in 1948 is now a Cupertino icon, run by Yamagami’s Garden Center owner Brittany Sheade.

DAI SUGANO/STAFF

Opposite: At the 95-year-old East Bay Nursery, houseplants, such as this stunning Bromeliaceae, have become even more popular during the pandemic lockdown.

JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO/STAFF

family owned since 1942. Today, the East Bay Nursery covers most of an entire Berkeley city block and is one of the go-to places for California natives, as well as houseplants.

General manager Dominic Gamache says the nursery built its reputation on having something for

everyone, whether it’s a master gardener, a landscape designer, a garden newbie or, increasingly, people working on a plant oasis for their apartments.

East Bay has long considered itself a landscape nursery, Gamache says, offering larger plants in bigger gallon pots. But they’ve found that many of their more recent clients have smaller yards or none at all. So while they still offer larger plants, they also stock plants better suited to postage-stamp gardens and balconies.

“We try to have not just what’s blooming at the moment,” Gamache says, “but plants to help the homeowner and the balcony owner build their landscape for the future.”

California native plants take up a large portion of the nursery’s stock. Although the popularity of drought-resistant plants can wane a bit at times, it’s always strong.

“It’s always evolving and changing,” Gamache says. “We’ll hit a little waddle when we get some rain, but (interest) always comes back.”

To keep pace with trends and the renewed interest in gardening both indoors and out, Gamache says the nursery has increased its focus on houseplants, succulents and fruit trees, many of which can be grown in containers. They’ve also adapted their pot and container selections, keeping redwood planters in stock and adding a variety of decorative pots for houseplants — perfect for that apartment oasis.

Details: The nursery is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday at 2332 San Pablo Ave. in Berkeley; www.eastbaynursery.com.

David Brenner

Greenery growing up and down creates a living wall

BY MARTHA ROSS

One of the most popular exhibits at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art isn't a Matisse or Warhol. It's a living wall, a 4,400-square-foot vertical plant installation that brings a soothing forest of greenery into the museum's urban landscape.

Its creator is David Brenner, a pioneer in the living wall movement in the United States. The San Jose native doesn't necessarily consider himself an artist. But with a degree in horticulture sciences from Cal Poly, he's won praise for "painting" the walls of office buildings, museums and private homes with artful plants.

To create living walls, Brenner's Habitat Horticulture company uses a lightweight backdrop of recycled water bottles to hold plants in place, an irrigation system that keeps them nourished and designs that consider micro climate, foliage color, leaf texture, flowering times and plant interaction. Yearning for a living wall of your own? Brenner's mini-vertical gardens — Gromeos — come ready to hang.

Q How did you become interested in gardening?

A My grandparents would go to Italy every summer. I was left watering their garden in Willow

4 LIVING WALLS DESIGNED BY DAVID BRENNER

SF MOMA: The plant palette for the largest continuous living wall in the country includes ferns and other perennials native to California woodlands.

California Academy of Sciences: The native California plants in this wall include the Polypodium californicum, which adds bright textural highlights; the Heuchera maxima, which adds softness; and the flowering Rubus parviflorus.

601 City Center, Oakland: The installation "Urban Ecotones" in the east lobby features an interplay of varying tones, colors and textures to celebrate Oakland's cultural diversity.

Foundry Square III, San Francisco: The lobby features two adjoining living walls and floor-to-ceiling glass that allow passersby to view 12,500 plants inhabiting the space.

Glen, and the plants had this therapeutic effect on me. When I went to Cal Poly and had to choose a major, I thought, I like plants! When I got past the heavy science,

I realized I loved to create spaces with plants. I was interested in all the different colors and shapes and textures — the wackier the better.

Q How do you create a living wall?

A A living wall grows in a medium that can be free-standing or attached to a wall. We use Growtex, a medium we developed. We use a peatlike mixture, provide the nutrients and the water. The highest wall we've done is about 100 feet. The sky is the limit.

Q Vertical gardens don't need much land. In urban areas, that must be a plus...

A Absolutely. But another advantage is that, when the garden is elevated, we have this different connection with the plants. If you have a fern frond in a living wall, it's like a friend you get to know. It enters your space in a different way and demands the attention I think it deserves.

Q You also studied psychology at Cal Poly. Are gardens therapeutic?

A Some studies show that just seeing greenery helps lower blood pressure and heart rate. (Other studies) look at how they make you more creative, your cog-

nitve performance increases, and you can actually function better.

Q When you get a living wall commission, is it a long process?

A It can be, yeah. We work primarily with architects and a whole design team to understand how the system is going to be integrated into the building. How can the pipes get to it? Are we going to recirculate the water? What about the maintenance? Then you get to the fun part, which is designing the plant palette.

Q Are there certain kinds of plants that work best in living walls?

A There's definitely a handful of plants on the bullet-proof list: certain philodendrons, goldfish plants, Austral Gem ferns, parlour palms. For most projects, 90 percent of the palette (is) limited to species I've used before with much success. With 10 percent, I experiment with new species that give each wall a unique look and feel.

Q What's your top tip for people who want to create their own?

A It's the same thing for any garden: You have to look at the environmental conditions. Light is the biggest consideration.

Q How are your Gromeos selling?

A We can't build them fast enough! We had the idea to launch them before the pandemic, but once it hit, we thought, "People need them now." I have this feeling that after this pandemic, people are going to embrace life in all forms, and plants are a big part of that.

KARL MONDON / STAFF





The artful garden can express

whimsy, personality and taste

BY ANGELA HILL

At least a dozen metal suns in myriad colors burst from a side wall in my neighbor's garden, their warm, happy faces gazing down on a bed of succulents. On an adjacent fence, countless abalone shells cradle rainbows in the morning light. There's a giant metal bell from an old whaling ship. There are ceramic roosters, glass orbs, wind chimes and a "Frog Crossing" sign peeking out from behind the rhododendrons. And, yes, a smattering of classic flamingos.

Too much? Who's to say? Gardens are individual, personal. And garden art makes them all the more so, bestowed on the landscape at the beholding eye's behest.

But there are as many possibilities for adorning a garden as there are shades of salvias, everything from subtle to silly, artsy to animated, funny gnomes to high-end fine art from Bay Area sculptors and makers. So we checked in with some local landscapers, gardeners and garden-shop experts for tips and ideas. Still, the root concept remains embedded ... make your garden your own.

A "bottle fence" serves as colorful art as well as privacy screen on Sarah V. Lee's front yard in Pleasanton.

DAI SUGANO/STAFF



Top: Rain boots serve as succulent planters in Sarah V. Lee's Pleasanton garden.

DAI SUGANO/STAFF

Center, bottom: *Sedum rubrotinctum* "Pork and Beans" and *Echeveria agavoides* "Lipstick" are among the succulent array at Aptos' Dig Gardens.

ARIC CRABB/STAFF

"I don't think I've ever seen a garden with too much art. Too many pots, yes. But art? No," says Aerin Moore of Magic Gardens Landscaping in Oakland, who has designed gardens and landscapes for 45 years. In his own expansive yard, he has some really big heads scattered around — amazing sculptures from well-known East Bay artist Clayton Thiel.

"When you put art in the garden, and it's something you really like, it makes the garden more personal," Moore says. "I used to teach a lot of design classes, and one of the most popular was, 'Create your own garden paradise.'"



Left: "When garden art is done right, it brings so much joy," says Sarah V. Lee of Sarah's Magnifica Designs.

DAI SUGANO/STAFF

Far left: A living wall turns succulents into art at Dig Gardens, which has locations in Aptos and Santa Cruz.

ARIC CRABB/STAFF

I have clients who have picked things up at street fairs, art fairs, just beautiful sculptures on the fences, smaller freestanding sculptures. Some may think it's a lot, but it's what they love, and there's a whole quality to it that's really nice."

Indeed, with folks spending more time in their gardens, backyards, atriums and balconies this past restrictive year, enhancing outdoor areas has been a saving grace for our mental health and has served to grow the garden biz to new heights, says Kyli Richardson, manager of the Aptos branch of Dig Gardens.

"Last year, we saw a huge boost in our industry," she says. "We've seen the gear shift more for function — starting your own garden or growing your own food. But also looking at something beautiful, and that's not just plants. That does include art."

Sarah V. Lee of Sarah's Magnifica Designs in Pleasanton agrees. "When garden art is done right, it brings so much joy," she says. "It's a creative way to express ourselves, and it's been especially important during the pandemic, when we needed fun things to do at home."

GARDEN GUIDELINES

"You need to make sure things are not competing with each other," Lee says. "Like with any kind of design, you either need a common thread to carry throughout — maybe it's color or texture or style, like contemporary or rustic — or you need to have enough space in between pieces."

Lee has upcycled many items herself — turning a discarded bistro chair and an old half fountain into mini succulent gardens, or using old fence boards for a winding "beach boardwalk" path — but she feels using thrift-store items can be overdone. "It's better not to go overboard with upcycled items. You don't want it to look like a flea market."

Carol Maga, a longtime member of the Berkeley Garden Club, which will hold its first ever Art in the Garden Tour in May (more on that in a bit), also feels art should fit the theme of the garden.

"For me, I want to have some thematic consistency with type of garden and type of art," she says. "I don't want to walk into an English cottage garden and see a modern sculpture and feel like, uh oh, this is in the wrong yard. But if done right — one garden I know of has huge dinosaurs all through

their succulent and cactus garden, and it works perfectly.”

But some things really fit anywhere, like human figures.

Judi Townsend has populated her garden with mannequins, which is convenient, since she’s the owner of Mannequin Madness, an Oakland shop that sells used mannequins. Many are purchased by artists and transformed into garden art, she says. Townsend has an entire page devoted to the phenomenon on her Pinterest site.

“Mannequins are made out of fiberglass — the same material as surfboards — so they can withstand the elements, which is part of the reason so many people use them in the garden,” Townsend says. “Some people mosaic the mannequins and others paint them to give them an aged patina. They are cheaper and more lightweight than a sculpture made out of concrete. And often, they have a whimsical expression or pose. You can pretty much do anything with them.”

People embed succulents into wire dress forms for a free-standing “vertical” garden,” she says. Or you can use a mannequin hosiery leg to plant herbs.

PLANTS AS ART
INSTALLATIONS

Don’t forget — plants themselves can be considered art.

At the Dig store in Aptos, manager Richardson says “living walls” are popular as garden art. “They’re definitely like a major art installation themselves,” she says. “Like a living painting. Kind of outside the realm of, say, a sculpture. And perfect for an urban gardener who is running out of space. Going up on the wall is functional.”

Living walls have been around for a while now, she says, but incorporating plants into the art is a newer thing. “We have examples in both of our locations — wall displays with multiple types of succulents in various colors in designs. It’s really cool when they start to flower, the whole wall explodes with color.”



Aptos’ Dig Gardens specializes in succulents, sold in pots or displayed as a wall-mounted living art installation, with 15 varieties of succulents and drought-resistant plants.

ARIC CRABB/STAFF



Think beyond the standard pot when planting succulents. A whimsical bird cage, above, or terra cotta fountain can showcase your plants, says Sarah V. Lee.

DAI SUGANO/STAFF

FINE ART FITS IN

For some terrific ideas on displaying fine art in the garden, put the “Art in the Garden Tour” on your calendar for May 22. It’s co-sponsored by the Berkeley Garden Club and the ACCI Gallery, North Berkeley’s historic arts and crafts cooperative. Multiple pieces of fine art will be on display at seven lush gardens throughout the city. Details and ticket information will be available on both organizations’ websites soon, www.berkeleygardenclub.org and www.accigallery.com.

“There are a lot of plants that are really sculptures themselves,” Magic Gardens’ Moore says. “Tree aloes and some of the palms are really sculptural. Chamaedorea are a really common houseplant palm, but there are a lot of different ones that are really dramatic. We’ve been using them outdoors for a while now.”

PRACTICAL PURPOSE

Art in the garden can also serve a dual purpose. Lee created a “bottle fence” — partly as art and partly to shield her front yard from an adjacent driveway into a business park. It’s made of dozens of blue and green wine bottles — all found items.

“I didn’t drink an ounce of it myself,” Lee says, laughing. “The neighborhood had plenty.”

The design was inspired by a similar fence Lee spotted in Vacaville. “Making it was a labor of love,” she says. “You collect the bottles, take all the labels off. Drilling the bottles is tricky. Each has to be drilled on the bottom. Then you run rods through. We chose copper piping for the rods — I love the contrast of color — but you can use any kind of steel or even PVC pipe. You have to have some woodworking skills to build a frame that will hold up in a storm.

“I like the fact that it’s practical, purposeful,” she says. “We wanted to create a partition and at the same time divert attention from that driveway to my garden.”

Garden walls are indeed popular right now, helping to define “rooms” in a garden space. And they can be created out of anything.

“We’ve done three gardens where we built beautiful walls from rubble found on site, slabs of broken concrete, pavers with different colors, broken statuary heads,” Moore says. “One of our clients actually called them art walls. They’re very artistic, and there’s not anything like them. All built from the rubble and put together by very good masons, so they’re very strong walls. It gives people ideas on what can be done with a wall.”

Jonas Dupuich

Bonsai: Tiny trees from careful artistry grow

BY LINDA ZAVORAL

Alameda’s Jonas Dupuich is a giant in the world of bonsai — he teaches and lectures and runs the popular Bonsai Tonight blog, and his book, “The Little Book of Bonsai,” was published last year by Ten Speed Press. Podcasts are his newest project. With interest in bonsai increasing during the pandemic, he’s branched out to this medium. We talked with him about the art of growing small and how those who admire bonsai can move from enthusiast to grower.

Q How would you describe bonsai to someone unfamiliar with this garden art?

A “Bonsai,” which translates to “tray planting” in Japanese, refers to the practice of growing small trees in containers that evoke larger trees in nature.

Q How did you get into bonsai?

A After college, I was working at the family business, Encinal Nursery in Alameda, when I met a bonsai teacher from Hayward named Boon Manakivipart, who over the next few years became one of the most prominent teachers in the country. I studied with Boon for more than 20 years.

Q Why are we seeing a resurgence of interest in bonsai now?

A Bonsai is a great alternative to our increasingly digital culture that lets people embrace their horticultural and artistic sides.

Q What traits does one need to become a successful bonsai grower? Let’s say someone has a good eye for design but has never had a green thumb. Would that person be a candidate?

DUPUICH’S 5 FAVORITE GARDENS TO VISIT

Bonsai Garden at Lake Merritt, Oakland: Spectacular bonsai, including an oak that was presented to President Lincoln’s envoy to Japan in 1863.

UC Botanical Garden, Berkeley: One of the best places in the Bay Area to see mature specimens of exotic trees and shrubs from different regions of the world.

Muir Woods National Monument, Marin County: Offers a look at how the tallest trees on Earth grow. The Coast redwood is a great species for training as bonsai.

Point Lobos: Features some of the most attractive Monterey cypress along the California coast. Study the trees here to see how the elements inform the shape the trees take.

Inyo National Forest: Visit the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest to see the oldest trees on Earth. At more than 4,000 years old, these pines exhibit the characteristics most prized in bonsai — great age, character and beauty.

A The most successful bonsai growers care deeply about their trees and are always curious about how they can increase a bonsai’s beauty while maintaining its health. It’s not difficult to learn the basic horticulture, but one can spend years refining their technique or artistic sensibility.

Q How much does it cost to get started in bonsai?

A Getting started can be as easy as picking up an inexpensive tree for \$20 to \$50 at a garden center and pruning it to your liking. Your local regional park is one of the best places to study how trees grow in your area. Take note of which species are thriving, if you’re looking for species to train as bonsai. If you have an outdoor space, a juniper is great.

Q What sort of time commitment is involved?

A As little as a few minutes a day. Most trees require regular watering and seasonal pruning.

Q Can you keep a bonsai tree indoors?

A Yes! Species like ficus or portulacaria grow well indoors and can make compelling bonsai.

Q Tell us about your pride and joy.

A One tree that comes to mind is a Korean hornbeam. Shortly after acquiring the tree, I removed most of the branches and regrew them to create the image I had in mind for the tree. I showed it at the U.S. National Bonsai Exhibition in Rochester, New York, in 2016. I also have a strong connection to the many pines I’ve grown from seed over the years. Some are more than 25 years old!

ARIC CRABB / STAFF





SAVORY SALADS

Your backyard garden fills spring's bountiful bowls

BY JESSICA YADEGARAN

Salad junkies, get those tongs ready. With the arrival of spring, it's time to bust out your favorite big wooden bowl in anticipation of tender lettuces, purple-tipped asparagus and buttery fava beans sprouting from the garden.

Need inspiration? Look to the edible gardens of Northern California's wine country, which are brimming with these and hundreds of other fruits and vegetables. Much like the adrenaline rush vineyard managers feel at the start of the grape harvest, master gardeners from Livermore's Wente Vineyards to Sonoma's Stone Edge Farm Estate Vineyards & Winery are buzzing with optimism as they bring in pristine produce for the estate kitchens' veggie-centric dishes.

How do they know what to grow? They collaborate with the estate's restaurant chef or culinary director as early as January, poring over specialized seed catalogs that are the "ultimate dream books" for people who love to eat and garden, says Napa master gardener and food writer Janet Fletcher.

Her new cookbook, "Gather: Casual Cooking from Wine Country Gardens" (Jennifer Barry Design



Director of Gardens Colby Eierman carries a tray of lettuce to be transplanted in the gardens at Stone Edge Farm Estate Vineyards in Sonoma.

JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO/STAFF



Books, \$45), reveals the stunning culinary gardens of 13 Northern California wineries, from the mountain farmlike garden maintained by Clif Family Winery in St. Helena to the Mediterranean-inspired grounds at Skipstone in Geyserville, along with pro gardening tips and more than 65 tantalizing recipes, such as Mixed Chicory Caesar with “Cacio e Pepe” Croutons and Little Gem Lettuces with Radishes, Fennel and Verjus-Umeboshi Vinaigrette. “When it comes to salads, winery chefs are big fans of bitter greens, watermelon radishes and herbs,” Fletcher says. By her count, the deep raised beds inside The Prisoner Wine Company’s St. Helena courtyard garden contain a dozen varieties of basil alone, including rare Persian Basil and

Green Goddess Basil. “They add that intrigue of herbal perfume to everything,” she says. Herbs are also plentiful at Stone Edge Farm, where an acre of organic fruit trees and vegetable and flower beds yields thousands of pounds a year for EDGE, the estate’s sustainably focused and globally inspired restaurant. Housed inside a Victorian home and run by culinary director Fiorella Butron with chefs John McReynolds and Mike Emanuel, EDGE produces plates that resemble little works of art, showcasing garden director Colby Eierman’s cornucopia of colorful and aromatic supplies. In addition to mature fruit and olive trees, the cool-climate farm near Sonoma Plaza yields kale, Swiss chard, onions, leeks,

Above: The gardens at Sonoma’s Stone Edge Farm include vegetable beds and fruit trees, including this mandarin tree, brimming with fresh citrus.

Opposite page: EDGE culinary director Fiorella Butron checks the progress of the broccoli sprouting in beds at Stone Edge Farm.

JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO/
STAFF

beets and carrots year-round, with heirloom tomatoes and a host of peppers, including Butron’s favorite chiles from her native Peru. Eierman’s flowering plants provide nectar for the garden’s good bugs. If you’re just starting out — or don’t have the space for asparagus, a perennial that needs up to five feet per plant — Eierman suggests planting lettuces, carrots and beets, plus radishes to give your salads a peppery crunch. “Radishes are so easy and satisfying,” he says. “You can mix the seeds with carrot seeds as a fun way to get more out of a small space.” He likes harvesting beet leaves first and the early baby beets soon after, which are fabulous sliced into a layered salad with late

winter citrus. Loose leaf lettuces are one of the easiest salad ingredients to grow, he says. Just plant, water, harvest and eat. “We harvest those leaf by leaf, leaving the center of the head to keep growing,” Eierman says. To add texture and flavor, he favors wild arugula, mustard greens and cilantro microgreens. In her book, Fletcher talks about the creativity encouraged by building a salad from the garden versus the grocery store. “You don’t walk into the garden thinking, ‘I’m going to make an arugula salad,’” she says. “You pull what’s ready, a few leaves of chervil, a few of arugula and this and that.” In Fletcher’s kitchen, those arugula leaves will be tossed with



MEG SMITH

Mixed Chicory Caesar with “Cacio e Pepe” Croutons

Serves 6

Creamy Anchovy Dressing:
½ cup mayonnaise
1½ teaspoons fresh lemon juice
1½ teaspoons Thai or Vietnamese fish sauce
½ teaspoon Dijon mustard
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
“Cacio e Pepe” Croutons:
½ sourdough baguette, torn into rough ½-inch pieces
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
¼ teaspoon freshly cracked black pepper
¼ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Salad:
3 quarts torn mixed chicories and other bitter greens, such as radicchio, escarole, frisée, dandelion, puntarella and arugula
1 cup thinly sliced mixed radishes, including small daikon and watermelon radishes, if available
Chunk of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, for shaving

Directions:
In a small bowl, whisk together all the dressing ingredients. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Make the croutons: Heat the oven to 375 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. In a bowl, toss the baguette pieces with the oil and pepper, then arrange them in a single layer on the prepared pan. Bake until lightly browned in spots, about 8 minutes. Immediately transfer them to a bowl and, while they are still hot, toss them with the cheese. Toss the chicories and radishes with enough of the dressing to coat lightly. Arrange attractively on a serving platter, then scatter the warm croutons on top. Using a vegetable peeler, shave a little Parmigiano-Reggiano over the top. Serve immediately.

— FROM JANET FLETCHER’S “GATHER: CASUAL COOKING FROM WINE COUNTRY GARDENS” (JENNIFER BARRY BOOK DESIGN LLC, \$45)



4 SPRING GARDENING TIPS

Marcy Snow, gardener, Cakebread Cellars: Plant a blanket of Blue Spice basil around the base of tomatoes to deter nighttime predators, such as raccoons.

Tessa Henry, farm manager, Clif Family Winery: Consider planting Cabernet red onions, an uncommon edible that flourishes on Clif Family Winery’s farm. Not only is the name a plus for wine lovers, but the variety is useful at multiple stages: as a mild spring onion, a mature summer onion and a dry storage crop.

Laura Regusci, Regusci Winer: The top habitat plants for healthy gardens are cosmos, dill, echinacea, fennel, milkweed, red valerian, salvia and yarrow. These put out the welcome mat for bees, butterflies and other beneficial insects.

Daphne Araujo, proprietor and avid gardener, Wheeler Farms: An attractive vegetable garden is a healthy garden. Always remove thin and wilted leaves, which keeps disease at bay. Plant a cover crop to conceal the bare ground and improve the soil.

— “From Gather: Casual Cooking From Wine Country Gardens”

with shaved fennel, ricotta salata, watermelon radishes and a few walnuts, then dressed with olive oil, lemon and a scraping of garlic.

At EDGE, the salads vary not only according to Eierman’s daily deliveries but by each chef’s sensibility. McReynolds, the winery’s founding chef, whose background is in Mediterranean cooking, favors simple salads, like a Soft Leaf Herb Salad using whatever soft leaves and lettuces you have, tossed by hand with a Sunflower Oil and Lemon Dressing.

Butron, on the other hand, leans on her Peruvian-Palestinian heritage and experience in

Hawaii’s Pan Asian restaurants to create edgy composed salads, like Asparagus, Olive, Fava Bean, Pickled Radish and Tuna Salad.

Both salads are featured in the 2019 cookbook, “Stone Edge Farm Kitchen Larder Cookbook: Seasonal Recipes for Pantry and Table” (Rizzoli, \$35), written by McReynolds, Butron and Emanuel. Divided into chapters inspired by 10 classic ingredients, including lemons and citrus, herbs, garlic, tomatoes and peppers, the book offers up 75 farm-fresh recipes alongside Butron’s ferments, preserves, infused oils and powders that she makes from the



The estate’s organic fruit trees and produce sustain EDGE, the restaurant founded by chef John McReynolds, top. A Buff Orpington hen, above, steps carefully among rows of onions.

JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO/STAFF

garden’s leftover bounty. Nothing is wasted.

“The larder is on steroids now,” McReynolds says. “We built a climate-controlled room for all the ferments. Fiorella really has a focus on this, and it’s such an important part of her cuisine.”

Whether it’s her infused oils, fruit vinegars or pickled radishes and dehydrated olive crumbles, both featured in the confit-style tuna salad, the larder provides building blocks of flavor and texture for salads throughout the year.

“It’s a mindful practice,” says Butron, of building her balanced

veggie dishes. Her advice: Build your salad by starting with what’s newly in season, such as snap peas, with a lingering reminder of winter’s citrus, for example. Then incorporate the different taste profiles, from salty and sweet to bitter and acidic. For this salad, cue bitter greens, goat cheese and seeds finished with a simple roasted shallot-thyme vinaigrette.

“People sometimes think salads are not important, but I completely disagree,” she says. “I think they are super fun bursts of flavor in your mouth. They are so lively, and you can play around with so many things.”

Asparagus, Olive, Fava Bean, Pickled Radish and Tuna Salad

Serves 4

Ingredients:
20 asparagus spears
Kosher salt
1½ pounds fava beans, shucked
3 pickled radishes (see recipe below)
5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons fresh lemon or lime juice
Artisanal sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
¾ pound Tuna Confit in Aromatic Olive Oil (see recipe below), cut into 12 equal pieces
½ cup pitted Kalamata olives, halved
2 tablespoons Olive Crumbles (see note below)
1 tablespoon torn fresh tarragon leaves
1 tablespoon fresh chives, cut in 1-inch lengths

Directions:
Cut off and discard the tough end from each asparagus spear, then halve each spear on the diagonal. Fill a large bowl with water and ice. Bring a saucepan filled with water to a rapid boil and salt generously with kosher salt. Add the asparagus and boil until crisp-tender, 2 to 3 minutes. Scoop out the asparagus and plunge them into the ice water bath until chilled. Drain the asparagus well and set aside.

Return the pan of water to a rapid boil and refresh the ice water bath with additional ice. Add the fava beans to the boiling water and boil just until tender, 2 to 3 minutes. Scoop out the beans and plunge them into the ice water bath until chilled. Drain well, then peel away the tough outer skin from each bean.

Using a mandoline, thinly slice the radishes lengthwise.

In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil and lemon juice; season with salt and pepper to make a dressing.

In a bowl, combine the asparagus and favas and coat lightly with some of the dressing.

To serve, arrange three pieces of tuna in the middle of each plate and place some favas, asparagus, and olives around the tuna pieces. Tuck the radishes in among the other vegetables. Drizzle each serving with a little dressing, then sprinkle with olive crumbles, tarragon, and chives.

Pickled Radishes

1 pound radishes
3 cardamom pods
1 teaspoon black peppercorns
1 cup Champagne vinegar
1 cup water
2 teaspoons sea salt
2 teaspoons firmly packed organic light or dark brown sugar
2 cloves garlic

Directions:
Wash a 500-ml glass jar and its lid in hot, soapy water. Immerse the jar in gently boiling water for 2 minutes. Leave it in the hot water until ready to fill.

Cut the radishes into ¾-inch pieces. If they are small, leave them whole.

In a small cast-iron frying pan over low heat, dry-toast the cardamom and peppercorns, shaking the pan occasionally, until fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes. Set aside.

In a nonreactive saucepan over medium heat, bring the vinegar, water, salt and sugar to a boil and cook until the sugar and salt dissolve. Add the garlic and toasted spices, reduce the heat and simmer for 3 minutes. Remove from the heat.

Remove the jar from the hot water and shake off any excess. Pack the radishes into the jar and pour the hot pickling liquid over them, leaving ½-inch headspace. Let cool at room temperature on a rack or a kitchen towel, then cap with the lid and refrigerate for at least 2 days before using, to allow the radishes to cure. They will keep for one month in the refrigerator.

Olive Crumbles

Use a dehydrator to dry 3 cups of Kalamata olives (or dry them in a 150-degree oven for 2–3 hours). Chop into crumbles. Transfer crumbles to a glass jar, cap tightly and store at room temperature for up to one month.

Tuna Confit in Aromatic Olive Oil



LESLIE SOPHIA LINDELL

Ingredients:
500 grams best-quality albacore (tombo) or yellow fin (ahi) tuna steak, trimmed of any dark blood line
Artisanal sea salt
1½ cups extra-virgin olive oil
3 fresh thyme sprigs
3 very thin lemon slices
2 cloves garlic, smashed
A few tender fennel fronds
½ teaspoon pink peppercorns
½ teaspoon black peppercorns
½ teaspoon fennel seeds

Directions:
Season the tuna steak generously with salt and set aside.

In a small pot with a diameter that will accommodate the tuna snugly, combine the olive oil and remaining ingredients over medium heat until the herbs just start to crackle and spatter in the oil. Turn off the heat and let the flavors infuse the oil for about 10 minutes.

Return the pot to the stove and warm over the lowest possible heat setting. I use a heat diffuser or cast-iron pan beneath the pot to keep the heat very low. Carefully slide the tuna into the oil. Let the tuna poach in the oil bath until the center of the steak starts to lose its raw color but is still pink and juicy, about 7 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat and let the tuna cool to room temperature in the oil.

Transfer the tuna to a container with an airtight lid, then strain the oil through a medium-mesh sieve held over the tuna. Cover with the lid and store in the refrigerator for up to 10 days.

— FROM JOHN MCREYNOLDS, MIKE EMANUEL AND FIORELLA BUTRON’S “STONE EDGE FARM KITCHEN LARDER COOKBOOK” (RIZZOLI, \$35)

Lisa Troutner

Tomato growing taken to an art form at Carmel Bella Farm

BY JESSICA YADEGARAN

Black Beauties darker than ink. Ananas Noire beefsteaks streaked red and green. And long trusses of rare Date Fruit Yellow grape tomatoes strung like vines of gold.

Carmel Bella Farm bursts with so much stunning color, walking the grounds or scrolling through owner Lisa Canepa Troutner's mouth-watering Instagram feed feels like visiting an art museum. A very delicious art museum.

Troutner, 33, actually is an artist, one who has woven together her passions for farming and art since planting her first garden in Aptos at age 19. She began gaining a following at local farmers markets after she started Carmel Bella Farm in the coastal mountains of Carmel Valley in 2013.

Her specialty is rare heirloom tomatoes — 150 varieties of them — and she's in expansion mode. Troutner recently purchased 10 acres in Sandpoint, a mountain town in northern Idaho, to expand Carmel Bella Farm and its seed shop.

Q How did this all begin?

A I grew up very indulged in nature. My mother had a garden strung with blackberries and lemon trees. My brother, sister and I were always playing in dirt piles. My grandmother, Rita, was an heirloom tomato farmer in Croatia. She came here in the 1950s, and I remember wandering through her gardens and marveling over her gorgeous stained-glass art.

Q Which came first — Instagram or tomatoes?

A I really got into the tomato world in 2013. I saw the garden as a way to feed my family, as well as art. I thought, "How can I share this?" So I started the Instagram in 2016. At the time, I started taking these mosaiclike images of fruits and vegetables, inspired by my grandmother's art.

Q What's the secret to growing beautiful tomatoes?

A Companion planting is so beneficial and beautiful. In my tomato garden, I often have borage, basil, French marigolds and sweet alyssum to bring in pollinators. You want to promote bees and lady bugs in your environment. Also, organic fertilizers, worm castings and organic compost.

If you live in a humid area, you want to prune to avoid moisture between the plants. If you live in a hot environment, it's actually important to not prune too much in order to leave a little shade.

Q Favorite varieties?

A I grow indeterminate varieties, meaning they grow all summer. I love classics, such as Brandywine and Kellogg's Breakfast, rich and robust-tasting tomatoes that have both sweet and acidic flavor. Blue Beauty is one I really enjoy growing for color, production and texture. While they are delicious, too, they are much more mild and sweet.

Date Fruit Yellow is a favorite cherry type, packed with sweet, acidic flavor. They're resistant to cracking and last forever on both the vine and countertop. Costoluto Genovese is a multipurpose variety that I find shines in sauces. Rosso Sicilian is one I enjoy for stuffing and roasting.

Q Tell us about your seed business. What's in the works?

A For years, I have been working on growing a diverse and unique seed bank by collecting rare varieties from all over the world. We offer a lot of these treasures in our online seed store. Most recently, I have been working towards breeding and developing my own seeds.

I am fond of the classic heirloom varieties that carry beautiful history and flavor along with their name, but am equally enthralled by the newer open pollinated varieties that showcase heavy anthocyanin expressions, the pigment responsible for the dazzling blue, purple and black shades often seen on my Instagram page. I hope to combine the best of both these worlds.



FIVE WAYS TO ENJOY GARDEN-FRESH HEIRLOOM TOMATOES

- Right off the vine
- A beefsteak tomato slice on sourdough with Veganaise, sea salt and pepper
- Sun-dried, then eaten with olive oil and basil
- Use multiple varieties to make pasta sauces, which can then be made into soups
- Salad of diced avocado, tomato and blood orange wedges with vinaigrette and basil

Q Photo tips? How do you get those perfect dew drops and stunning colors?

A Honestly, I'm just out there so often and shoot so much. I like to go out at 4 or 5 in the morning when the sun is just rising and hasn't taken those water drops off the tomatoes yet. It's a filtered light. I just use my iPhone. I like the ease of use and the ability to share instantly.

Q What is the ultimate vision for Carmel Bella Farms?

A My ultimate dream — I'm shooting for the stars — is to create a destination farm, a place where people can visit to learn about sustainable organic farming and enjoy delicious organic food. That's the dream.

LISA CANEPA TROUTNER





Find earthly delights aplenty at seven Bay Area public gardens

BY MARTHA ROSS
AND JESSICA YADEGARAN

If you're looking for inspiration for your garden this spring, you can do better than scroll through pretty Pinterest photos.

You can emerge from pandemic lockdown and visit some of the Bay Area's very pretty and very famous gardens. The region's rich horticulture tradition is represented in botanical gardens and arboretums tended by world-class experts in plant care and landscape design. And because many of the gardens feature plants from all over the globe, there is always something in bud or bloom.

Over the past year, these public spaces have remained open so people can enjoy nature in a safe, socially distanced way. They also are a rich source of information on everything from how to grow drought-tolerant native plants to how gardeners do things in other parts of the world.

Here are seven Bay Area gardens to visit, along with a guide to each venue's hidden treasures, blooming plants and garden shops — and tips on how to enhance your visit with a picnic or lunch at a nearby cafe.

Filoli Historic House and Garden

Strolling along the terraces or by the lush flower beds of Filoli, it's easy to forget that the crush of 21st century Silicon Valley modernity is just across Interstate 280. Filoli can transport the imaginative visitor to the grounds of a country estate in an Edith Wharton novel or even a garden party in “Bridgerton.”

With the backdrop of its 36,000-square-foot Georgian brick mansion, Filoli is famous for its English-style garden, which features formal clipped hedges, yew-lined avenues, a walled garden, a rose garden and a reflecting pool in a classic sunken garden.

Bloom: Starting in March, look for “Red Impression” tulips and pink “Ollioules” tulips, weeping cherry tree blossoms, lilacs and camellias. April and May bring wisteria, dogwood tree blossoms, yellow and pink climbing roses, irises, bluebells and the “Mrs. Sam McCredy” rose, along with water lilies,

Children play in the woods alongside Andy Goldsworthy's Wood Line trail in San Francisco.

KARL MONDON/STAFF

rhododendrons, azaleas, foxgloves and ornamental vegetables in the kitchen garden.

Shop: The estate’s Clock Tower Shop sells plants grown at Filoli as well as other decorative items for the garden or home.

Dine: Outdoor dining was expected to resume in early February at Filoli’s Quail’s Nest Cafe, where visitors can order sandwiches, wraps, salads and soups made with fresh seasonal ingredients.

Details: Filoli is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily at 86 Cañada Road, Woodside. Admission is \$10-\$20; <https://filoli.org>.

UC Botanical Garden at Berkeley

Tucked against Strawberry Hill with views overlooking the San Francisco Bay, this 34-acre living museum holds one of the largest and most diverse landscapes in the world, with more than 10,000 types of plants, including many rare and endangered species, from nearly every continent.

Organized geographically, the garden emphasizes plants from Mediterranean climates and a major collection of California native plants. But you’ll also discover much flora — and serenity — along the stepping stones of the garden’s Japanese Pool, home to Japanese plants and a thriving population of native newts.

Top: Visitors head into the “Daffodil Daydreams” walk at Filoli Historic House and Garden in Woodside.

LIPO CHING/STAFF

Right: Children pause to peer into the Japanese Pool on a pre-pandemic field trip to the UC Botanical Garden.

ARIC CRABB/STAFF ARCHIVES



Bloom: In early spring, look for red, pink, and white magnolias and rhododendrons; a riot of pinks and purples in different species of Babiana (or Baboon flower) at the base of the Southern Africa hill; and, by late spring, flowering dogwood, azaleas and primulas.

Shop: Closed for indoor shopping, the UC Botanical Garden Shop still sells plants and other items on its deck, as well as through its online shop at <https://gardenshop.berkeley.edu>.

Dine: Picnicking with members of your household is allowed at the tables scattered around the grounds. Consider stopping first at The Italian Homemade Company in Berkeley’s Elmwood District to pick up Caprese salads, mortadella

on piadina flatbread or cold cuts and cheese plates; <https://italian-homemade.com>.

Details: The UC Botanical Garden is open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily at 200 Centennial Drive in Berkeley. Reservations required. Admission is \$7-\$15; <https://botanicalgarden.berkeley.edu>.

San Francisco Botanical Garden

Open since 1940 inside Golden Gate Park, the San Francisco Botanical Garden features 55 acres of landscaped gardens and open



spaces perfect for wandering and meditative discovery. There are more than 8,000 different kinds of plants from every corner of the world, so you can easily spend a full day here, strolling from the Great Meadow and Garden of Fragrances, where gentle touching of the plants is encouraged to release the many pleasing aromas, to the Zellerbach Garden of Perennials and Mesoamerican Cloud Forest, a misty tangle of mosses and ferns in every shade of green imaginable.

Bloom: In March, visitors can enjoy the last blooms of the magnolias, plus rhododendron, crab apple trees and puya, a stunning pineapple relative from Chile. Later in spring, look for wildflowers galore in the California Native

Plant Garden, as well as South African proteas.

Shop: The Garden Bookstore & Plant Arbor sells plants, books and other items Fridays and weekends.

Dine: Picnicking is allowed in the lawn areas. Grab hoagies, meatball subs and other sandwiches at The Yellow Submarine, which opens at 11 a.m. Tuesday through Sunday at 503 Irving Street.

Details: The San Francisco Botanical Garden is open from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. (last entry at 5 p.m.) daily at Golden Gate Park, 1199 Ninth Ave. in San Francisco. Admission is \$3-\$12; www.sfbg.org.

A blooming magnolia in the San Francisco Botanical Garden captivates hikers.

KARL MONDON/STAFF

Hakone Estate and Gardens

Koi ponds. Stroll-perfect bridges. Multi-tiered waterfalls. With a history that dates back to 1915, Saratoga’s Hakone is the oldest traditional Japanese-style residential garden in the Western Hemisphere. The 18 lush acres comprise four principal gardens, including the Hill and Pond Garden, Tea Garden and Zen Garden, home to a shrine lantern and black pine tree. The Bamboo Gardens hold prized bamboo plants from Yasui, Japan, and around the world. Cultural programs throughout the year include origami and storytelling in addition to traditional tea ceremonies.

Bloom: Opening night for cherry blossom viewing is March 22 and typically lasts two weeks, with timed reservation tickets required. Also this spring, look for blooming camellias, azaleas and wisteria.

Shop: Hakone’s online gift shop sells collectibles, accessories and other decorative items at <https://hakonegiftshop.org>.

Dine: Eating is not allowed in the gardens, and picnic areas are closed due to COVID-19. Enjoy lunch or dinner nearby, instead, at the family-friendly Big Basin Burger Bar, which opens daily at 11 a.m. at 14413 Big Basin Way.

Details: Hakone is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays, 11 a.m. weekends, at 21000 Big Basin Way in Saratoga. Admission is \$8-\$10; <http://hakone.com>

The Presidio’s Wood Line and the Tennessee Hollow Watershed

When it comes to landscape design, sometimes less really is more. That’s one lesson home gardeners may take away from a stroll along the The Wood Line in San Francisco’s Presidio. Artist Andy Goldsworthy was working with an amazing natural tableau — a historic grove of eucalyptus trees — so he came up with a design element that would intrude as little as possible. He arranged 1,200 feet of eucalyptus branches into a graceful, sinuous line along the path through the grove. After walking the Wood Line, visit another area of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area that offers insight into local ecology: El Polín Spring, which for centuries provided fresh water for Native families, and the Tennessee Hollow Watershed, where 23,000



native salt marsh species are being planted to restore habitat for birds, sea creatures and native oysters.

Bloom: A number of plants will be flowering in the Tennessee Hollow Watershed in March and April. Look for “Footsteps of Spring,” with its tiny, yellow, buttonlike flowers, the purple miniature lupine, Western blue-eyed grass, wild beach strawberries and, of course, California poppies.

Dine: You can picnic pretty much anywhere in the Presidio, but there are tables at El Polín Spring. Pick up an artisanal cheese or charcuterie plate, fried chicken breast sandwiches or burgers at Sessions at the Presidio. Open from 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily at 1 Letterman Drive, San Francisco; www.sessionssf.com.

Details: The Presidio is open 24

hours a day, 365 days a year in the northwest corner of San Francisco, near the south end of the Golden Gate Bridge. Downloadable maps and other information are available at www.presidio.gov.

The Ruth Bancroft Garden

Tucked among the subdivisions, shopping centers and office parks of Walnut Creek, the Ruth Bancroft Garden is one of the country’s best known examples of a water-conserving landscape. Visitors to the 3.5-acre suburban oasis can see collections of rare and extraordinary succulents, as well as other drought-tolerant plants from around the world.

Founder Ruth Bancroft began her garden as a hobby on the family’s walnut and pear farm. But

Hakone Gardens’ Moon Bridge and its views of the Key Pond are always popular with visitors, but especially so during “Hanami at Hakone,” the night cherry blossom viewing is held each year in early spring.

NHAT V. MEYER/STAFF ARCHIVES

she became a gardening pioneer as she experimented with raising plants that thrive in arid landscapes. Today, the garden displays gorgeous, other-worldly arrays of aloes, agaves, yuccas and echeverias, with different plants blooming all year.

Bloom: In March and April, look for striking red, yellow and orange flowers on aloe plants, white blossoms on the “Medusa’s Head” succulents, red blooms on the Giant Spear Lily and tufts of pink on the “Big Bird” Grevillea petrophiloides.

Shop: The garden’s nursery sells a wide range of drought-tolerant plants. Many of the cacti and other succulents sold at the nursery are propagated by staff and volunteers.

Dine: Picnicking is not allowed in the garden. For a bite before



or after, head to The Orchards shopping center at Ygnacio Valley and Oak Grove roads for beer and brewpub fare at Mike Hess Brewing (www.mikehessbrewing.com), or salads and sandwiches at Jack’s Urban Eats (www.jacksurbaneats.com).

Details: The Ruth Bancroft Garden is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday through Sunday at 1552 Bancroft Road in Walnut Creek. Admission is \$8 to \$10; www.ruthbancroftgarden.org

UC Santa Cruz Botanic Garden

In a town rich with tourist destinations, the university’s arboretum is a lesser-known gem that’s well worth a visit. It stretch-



Top: The Ruth Bancroft Garden’s Simon Szary tends the succulents that draw more than 15,000 people to the Walnut Creek botanical garden each year. Above: Low-growing “Coastal Cushions,” a variety of Banksia, dot the Australian Garden at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum & Botanic Garden.

JANE TYSKA/STAFF; ANDA CHU/STAFF

es across 135 acres of meadow overlooking the Pacific Ocean and displays hundreds of plants that thrive in Mediterranean climates. That means California natives, of course, but also species from South Africa, New Zealand, Chile, and especially, Australia. In fact, the garden houses one of the largest collections of banksias — popular Australian wildflowers — outside that country.

Home gardeners looking for inspiration should check out the gorgeous flowering shrubs, including South African heaths. They aren’t common to the Bay Area, but these plants can flourish here, and they add a dash of the exotic to any landscape.

Bloom: In March, look for red-blooming lantern banksia, as well as the purple Protea Niobe and the Scarlet Santa Cruz, a heath, from South Africa. April brings brilliant, cone-shaped blooms on other banksia shrubs and bursts of white and pink blossoms on the Australian Bunjong plants.

Shop: The inventory at Norrie’s Gift and Garden shop includes plants from California, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, along with locally made pottery, jewelry and other gifts. The shop has been closed for in-store shopping in recent months, but you can order online for curbside pickup, 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Thursday through Saturday, <https://shopucscarboretum.com/>

Dine: Picnickers are welcome to enjoy their repast at benches arranged around the garden. Pick up house-made soup, fresh-rolled sushi or made-to-order sandwiches at nearby New Leaf Community Market, 1101 Fair Ave. in Santa Cruz, www.newleaf.com.

Details: The Arboretum and Botanic Garden is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily at Arboretum Road, off High Street in Santa Cruz. Admission is \$2 to \$5, payable online or with cash or check at one of the garden’s pay stations; <https://arboretum.ucsc.edu>.

Q & A

Walter Hood

‘Black Landscapes Matter’ co-author integrates racial history into his urban designs

BY MARTHA ROSS

“You could feel something in the landscape,” Walter Hood said, describing the underdeveloped waterfront lot in Charleston, South Carolina, that he is helping transform into the new International African American Museum.

Hood, an Oakland landscape and public artist, is talking about the “spirits” of the 100,000 African slaves who arrived at Charleston’s infamous Gadsden’s Wharf in the late 1700s and early 1800s. How, he wondered, “do you emote those spirits in the landscape?”

The design created by Hood, a MacArthur “genius fellow” known for integrating local history, ecology and culture into his designs for parks, museum gardens and other urban spaces, features a tidal pool with waters that will recede at regular intervals to reveal a pattern of human figures, aligned as though imprisoned within the hold of a slave ship.

Other recent projects, including Oakland’s Lafayette Square Park, similarly spark conversations about social justice and marginalized communities. Now the UC Berkeley professor has a new collaborative book, “Black Landscapes Matter,” and an art piece he unveiled in February at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

In “Black Landscapes Matter,” you talk about Black landscapes having been “erased” throughout history, including Seneca Village in New York City, a Black village eliminated to make room for Central Park in the 1850s. Any local examples?

You can look at the Fillmore in San Francisco: gone. When we talk about urban development in the 1950s and ’60s, we talk about how it was done for the public good. In actuality, it lowered the density

of Black people in urban areas and pushed them to high-density separate areas. In the Fillmore, pre-redevelopment, people lived in houses, and there were a lot of us.

You’re known for giving new life to underused spaces in cities. Was that the intention with your Oakland projects, such as transforming a turn lane under 580 into Splash Pad Park?

I hate that interpretation, because it puts out the idea that I work in these “bad places.” These places aren’t “bad.” It’s just that people only see them in one way. I think for artists and designers, we have to reimagine places through the people who are there, as well as the cultural moment they are in.

Can you talk about your piece for the new SFMOMA exhibit, “Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America”?

It’s called “Black Tower, Black Power.” I’m proposing a fictitious landscape in Oakland on San Pablo Avenue that’s littered with nonprofits that basically are supposed to take care of people in this kind of marginal existence. I’ve lived along this corridor, and my office has been there for almost 30 years, and it’s gotten worse. I also deal with the history of redlining that prevented any major development higher than six stories west of Telegraph Avenue. I create this fiction asking: What if nonprofits were armed with the Black Panthers’ Ten-Point program? I’m proposing high-rise towers for 10 nonprofits that illuminate how they might help people think of the future in a completely different way.

JOHN D. & CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION



WHERE TO SEE WALTER HOOD’S BAY AREA DESIGNS

Oakland Museum of California:

Hood Design Studio helped design the new landscaping for the museum’s gardens, which will showcase California’s five eco-regions when the museum reopens in the spring.

Lafayette Square Park, Oakland:

This downtown Oakland park is designed to serve multiple users, including children, nearby office workers and the homeless people who have frequented the park since the Great Depression

Splash Pad Park, Oakland:

An area under I-580 and near a busy traffic intersection was transformed into an oasis of trees and walkways that link the Grand Lake Theatre to Lake Merritt and provide a location for the city’s largest farmers market.

M.H. DeYoung Museum, San Francisco:

The landscaping incorporates a sculpture garden, children’s garden and historic elements.

Bayview Opera House, San Francisco:

Hood introduced a floating walkway of glass, steel and wood and other upgrades to make the building, the oldest wood structure in the city, more accessible and to allow some of its diverse programming to move outdoors.

SEASON'S SEEDINGS

A year-round guide to what to grow and when in your Bay Area garden

STORY BY JOAN MORRIS

ILLUSTRATION BY HELENA PEREZ GARCIA

Even though we're blessed in California with being able to grow vegetable and flower gardens the year round, there are some seasonal rules. Mother Nature can be as forgiving as she is harsh, but here are some guidelines for growing in each season.



June, July, August

This is the season when things get exciting, whether you have a large garden bed or small pots in the kitchen window. Things are growing now.

Your vegetable plants are starting to produce, and your flowers are blooming like mad, but we're not the only ones who find that so appealing. Inspect your plants often for insects and diseases.

Our summer vegetable gardens reach their peak in August, which means you should be harvesting daily to prevent the plants from getting overburdened with fruit. Pull out plants that have done their jobs and are now spent and plant something anew. You still have time for a second crop of fast-growing vegetables.



September, October, November

With the summer garden starting to fade, you can start cleaning up beds and pots and start planting your winter garden. You also can pull out spent flowering plants and add some colorful fall annuals.

In November, there's not a lot to do in the garden but clean up leaves, dead fruit and scraggly plants. With most of the youngsters gone from the bird nests, it's now safe to prune trees.

Prepare for colder weather by building structures to fit over your plants and cover them with frost cloth when needed. Move potted plants closer to the house and to each other for extra protection.



March, April, May

Spring is the season of renewal and hope. Our gardens and planter boxes, even those pots crowded onto postage-stamp balconies, seem to come to life all on their own. But they can use a little help.

Any plants you've been nurturing through the winter could use a shot of fertilizer and the start of regular watering. You might be tempted to start planting your vegetable garden, but the soil temperature, even in containers, still is too cold for many plants. Gardening is 99 percent patience.

In late April and early May, start planting beets, broccoli, corn, cucumbers, lettuces, onions, peas, potatoes, radishes and squashes. Prune your spring-blooming shrubs, if they've stopped blooming.

In late May, you can plant tomato seedlings and the rest of your summer garden. Remember to add fertilizer and compost into beds and pots and set up a regular schedule of watering. It's always better to water in the early morning. Don't forget to stake your tomatoes and peppers as you plant them, so they'll have good support as they grow.



December, January, February

The winter garden likes to take things slowly. Harvest as you need to. Most veggies are happy to stay on the plant until you're ready for them. Rake fallen leaves onto your flower and garden beds. They'll compost there and will help enrich your beds for the coming spring.

If the rains don't come, you'll need to make sure your plants are getting enough water, especially those in pots and containers. If you have roses, plan to finish pruning in February. Although it might still be cold and dreary, you can hurry spring along by starting seeds for your spring garden inside. Just keep them warm and watered, and when they sprout, give them lots of light.



Gardening trends the pandemic brought us will take root in 2021

BY ANGELA HILL

For most of the last year, the outdoors has been totally in.

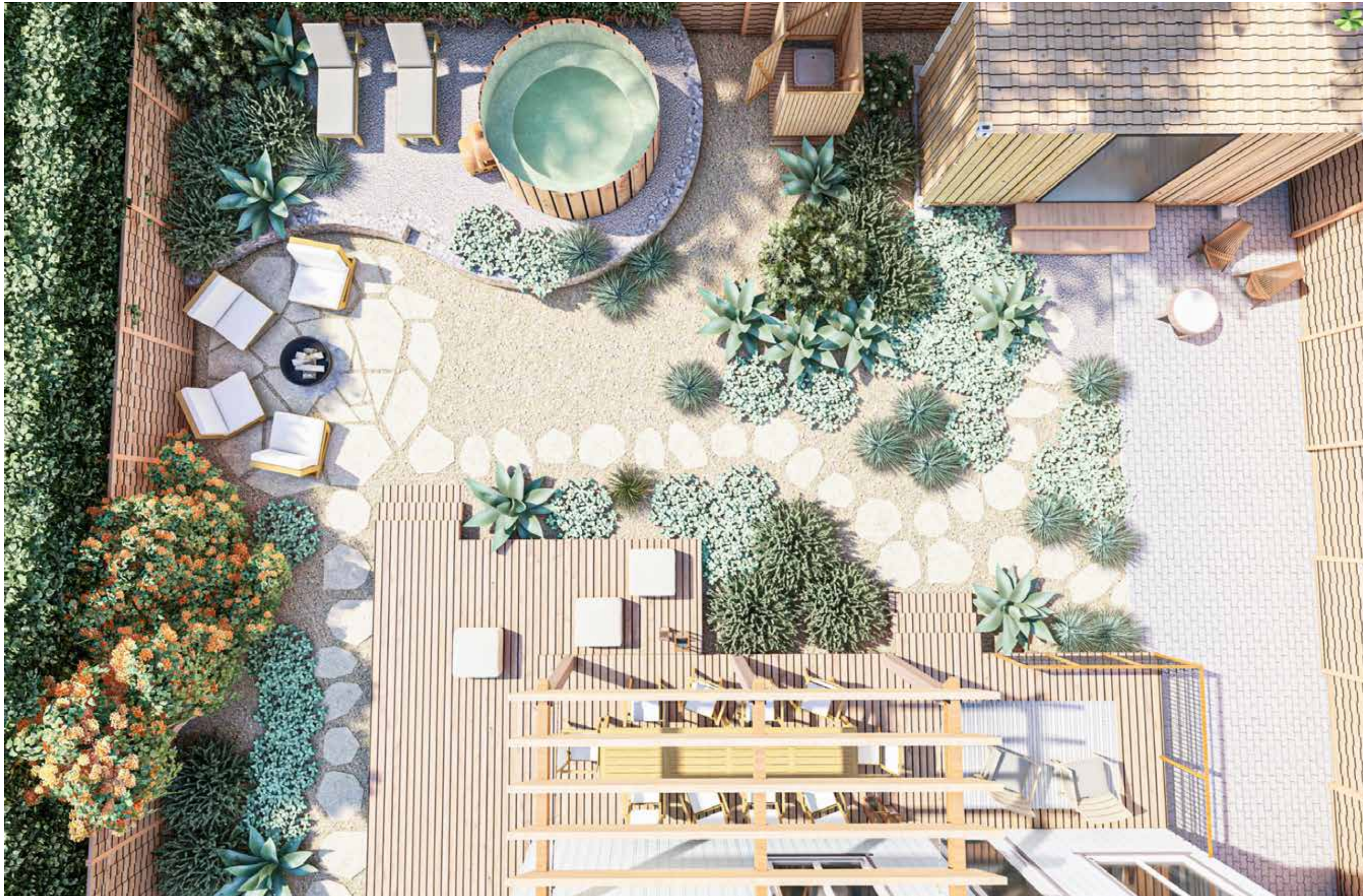
Our backyards and garden spaces became havens, ways to connect with nature and a sense of life beyond limitation. Landscape designers say gardens also took on new identities as clients yearned for “outdoor rooms” — dining spaces, play areas, offices or oases for spread-out outdoor gatherings. (One San Leandro client wanted to create a space for a dozen ukulele-playing friends to practice outside.)

“We’ve asked a lot of our yards the last few months,” says Allison Messner, CEO of Yardzen, an online landscape-design platform based in Sausalito. “For a lot of us, our yards have been the only green space we could access during that time, and we needed them to serve these whole new functions.”

Even as things gradually move toward normalcy, these new functions aren’t going anywhere. So for 2021, we gathered some of the top ways to create beautiful and useful outdoor settings.

1 Garden as office

Working in the garden has a whole new meaning now. Aerin Moore of Oakland’s Magic Gardens Landscaping has created designs for a number of executives who say a garden office has changed their lives. “They loved moving outside of the house to the



Cedar hot tubs are not the only garden trend to have made a comeback this year. Shade structures, like pergolas, have become wildly popular. YARDZEN



Houzz declared 2021 the “year of the pergola.” The popular garden feature is tailor made for outdoor dining and even office space.

COURTESY RIKKI SNYDER/HOUZZ

middle of their garden, setting up a nice wooden desk, a hot spot for their computer,” he says. “They said it was so peaceful, and they actually felt like they got so much more done.”

Heather Reid Johnson of Orinda’s Hey Nice Garden says, “I’ve never designed and built more pergolas in my life” — and many were specifically designed for outdoor office space. “They approximate the actual indoor office in many ways,” she says. “Scale is usually around 12- by 16-feet, enough room for a table, chairs and plenty of outlets” to plug in a printer or a coffee pot.

And some people are going all in, according to the folks at Houzz, a Palo-Alto-based website and online community about all things home and landscape. Their recent survey noted “the rise of the backyard cottage or ADU” (accessory dwelling unit) to use as dedicated work spaces, gyms, meditation areas or study rooms for students.

2 The Year of the Pergola

“If you want to create an inviting outdoor living space, you’ll likely need shade to do it. And a pergola is a relatively quick and affordable solution,” a Houzz spokesman says. “There are simple shade structures which can be built and installed in a day or two.”

Going hand-in-hand with the popularity of pergolas are fire pits, says Patricia St. John of Berkeley’s St. John Landscapes. “Almost every job for a family or young couple has included a fire pit,” she says.

And get ready for a retro dip — tubbing is back! “Cedar tubs are making a comeback,” Messner says.

“They were very popular in the ’60s, and we’re seeing a lot of requests for cedar tubs and also for what are called plunge pools or cocktail pools that fit in a smaller space without the commitment of a full built-in pool.”

3 Eat your heart out

St. John regularly designs spaces to grow edibles in raised beds or containers for greens and lettuces or in pots for herbs by the kitchen door, “where it’s easy to go harvest right before making a salad,” she says. “I know that’s a trend that’s been around for a while, but it’s only growing.”

One new element she’s noticed of late is more requests than ever before for fruit trees. “They don’t have to take up a lot of space,” she says. “Citrus can be grown in containers their whole lives, as long as you move up the size as the citrus grows.”

4 Borrowed views

Not everyone has an expansive yard to work with, but designers have tricks to make small spaces seem larger. “One way to do that is to use borrowed views,” Moore says. “Maybe your neighbor has beautiful trees that rise up over your back fence. We’ve sometimes created almost-doorways and fences to make it look like the garden goes on. I have some small gardens that have mature planting and the neighbor’s garden all around them — you can’t really tell where their gardens end and their neighbor’s starts.”

5 Gardens as inspiration/mood

While many people are looking outdoors to create more space for dining, lounging and playing, others are seeking quiet spaces: peaceful gardens that provide a tranquil break from work, school and stressful news cycles, according to Houzz.

Moore had a former client, a well-known author, who requested designs for very specific parts of the garden in terms of mood.

“She wanted to create these specific mood areas for different kinds of inspiration, so she could write,” he says. “There was a really sunny bright area, then a somber area with a beautiful waterfall, which was more

Think beyond the deck or patio when you plan a dining space in your garden.

YARDZEN



ST. JOHN LANDSCAPES



JULIE PARKINSON-MORGAN

Zenlike and tranquil. She said it really worked. I think that’s what gets left out of garden design so much — the emotive element instead of just the utilitarian.”

6 All work, plus play

With at-home schooling, backyards have become play areas for “recess,” says Reid Johnson, who has been putting in more artificial turf and multipurpose concrete pads for half-size basketball courts and hanging swings from well-established branches of trees.

Often, you can’t just put a full-sized, store-bought playset in a space, Messner says. “And a lot of people don’t want something big and plastic and primary-colored in their yard anyway. Tree houses, trampolines and rope swings are among our most

Bay Area gardens have become places to dine, lounge and play — and you need shade for that, says Patricia St. John of Berkeley’s St. John Landscapes. St. John’s designs regularly include spaces to grow herbs, lettuces and other edibles in raised beds or eclectic containers.

requested elements in family-friendly yards,” she says. “A lot of homes in the Bay Area have mixed elevations, areas with a little bit of slope — perfect for a slide rather than installing a structure.”

Another Yardzen client who had to take down an unhealthy tree had the arborist cut the tree into rounds. The family then used them as stepping stairs for the kids to climb on. “People are wanting play structures that blend into the environment.”

7 Functional Front Yard

This trend has been a clear result of pandemic restrictions. “We’ve heard from clients that they want to connect with their neighbors, but not too close,” Messner says. “So some have put a patio out front or even a fire pit, some Adirondack chairs. It’s been a way to find a sense of community and connect with neighbors while remaining socially distant.”

8 Environment-friendly surroundings

More and more, clients are moving toward sustainable landscapes, St. John says. “As we talk about climate change, people want more low-water and low-maintenance plants. I’ve either reduced or eliminated lawns in most,” she says. “People want more pollinator plants attracting more birds and bees — lavenders, plants that have berries. Milk-weed attracts the monarchs. Some people are raising monarch butterflies from caterpillars. There’s such an interest right now in being more aware of our natural habitat.”



Replacing lawns with native California plants is a hot trend this year, as is reframing front yards as socially-distanced outdoor gathering spots.

YARDOZEN



Orinda landscape designer Heather Reid Johnson says, “I’ve never designed and built more pergolas in my life.” The popular structures are used to shade dining decks, lounge chairs and outdoor office space.

YARDOZEN

Along those lines is a movement called “re-wilding,” Messner says, restoring urban and suburban yards to life-supporting habitats. “It’s about restoring wild-ness,” she says. “Bringing native and climate-adaptive plants into residential spaces, using materials for hardscaping that aren’t going to foster water accumulation, so water can flow the way nature intends. We’re also focused on creating wildlife corridors — if you and your neighbors along a street do this, it restores an amazing habitat for creatures.”

9 Firescaping

Unsurprisingly, many Californians are increasingly looking for fire-resistant landscapes, St. John says. “You want plants closest to the house that have moist leaves, that are easy to bend – things like coral bells, low-growing sages,” she says. “Within the first five feet, you don’t want wood chips. Maybe pea gravel or decorative rock. A little further away, use organic mulches that have a lot of compost, which tend to be moister. Deciduous trees rather than evergreens.”

10 And side gates

A peripheral pandemic-related trend is a design that includes side-entrance access. It makes sense. If you plan to have friends visit in the backyard for outdoor distancing, it defeats the purpose to have people traipsing through the house, St. John says.

“I hadn’t even realized it until now,” she says, “but pretty much every job we’ve had lately has requested that: side access and gates.”

The friends, of course, are up to you.



Designed by Patricia St. John, this garden offers separate outdoor “rooms” for dining and lounging.

JUDE PARKINSON-MORGAN

Kristen Natoli

Connecting people and plants at San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers

BY JIM HARRINGTON

Kristen Natoli grew up in a flora-friendly family — both her grandfathers had greenhouses in their gardens. But it was fauna that originally captivated the Conservatory of Flowers’ chief nursery specialist. “I went to college pretty intent on being a veterinarian,” Natoli says, but a plant anatomy class at Cornell University changed everything. “It absolutely blew me away to see how fascinating plants are — how fundamentally differently they work from the way we, as animals, work.”

Natoli graduated from Cornell in 1991 with a degree in plant ecology, then headed west for a career in horticulture that eventually brought her to Golden Gate Park.

Q How did you end up at San Francisco’s iconic Victorian greenhouse?

A I particularly liked taking care of plants under glass in containers. That’s kind of a particular path in horticulture. I love how greenhouses work — how they function. They are a building that is also a piece of engineering. So, I pursued work in various greenhouse situations. The Conservatory sponsored a reconstruction and reopened in 2003, and some positions opened up here. I was here for about four years, then I went over to the Academy of Sciences to help them open and manage the rainforest exhibit over there. When a supervisor position opened up here — the chief nursery specialist position — I came back, because this place is all about plants. I realized that is where my heart is.

Q What does a typical day look like at the Conservatory?

A There are four of us on the horticulture team. Each of us walks through, checks our spaces. We have climate control equipment we want to monitor

5 PLANTS KRISTEN NATOLI HAS AT HOME

Begonias (*Begonia sp.*): “Begonias are my absolute favorite house plants. Their growing needs are very compatible with temperature, light and humidity in most homes.”

Ferns: “Ferns are a must to create a soft, friendly atmosphere in my home. Many tropical ferns in the Asplenium, Microsorium or Adiantum genera make excellent houseplants, given plenty of water.”

String of Hearts (*Ceropegia woodii*): “I always have one of these hanging at my kitchen window. Mine thrives on neglect! They require little water, do well in low light and have lovely, stylish leaves.”

Sinningia (*Sinningia sp.*): “There are endless varieties of pretty Sinningia, and many are dainty, compact and bloom without a lot of fuss.”

Sundew (*Drosera capensis*): “How about a house plant that works for you for a change? Sundews are carnivorous plants that trap small flying insects on their sticky leaves. Great in a kitchen window to catch nuisance gnats.”

all day. We water all our plants by hand. We have an enormous diversity (of plants), and each plant has different needs. You can’t automate that. Watering is a very slow, meditative thing. It’s a great time to be looking and evaluating and building your projects for the day. Does something need repotting? Does an area need cleaning? We do a lot of cleaning — this is a white building full of heat and humidity.

Q Why do you think it’s important that places like the Conservatory of Flowers exist?

A We are connecting people and plants in a place of exceptional beauty. Plants are fundamental to everything — everything we are, everything on this planet. We bring (guests) two things they can’t have in their living room: an enormous diversity and certain plants that you can’t grow in your house. Like, we have a philodendron that is 40 feet tall. You just can’t have that in your living room.

KARL MONDON / STAFF





Let's plot together

Community farms connect people and nourish the needy

BY LINDA ZAVORAL

For Cedric Williams, nurturing his garden plot at City Slicker Farms means much more than providing collard greens in winter and tomatoes in summer for his family. The experience is also a neighborhood bonding experience, a chance to enjoy the natural environment he so loves and a fresh-air break for him, wife Apollonia and their children, son Askari and daughter Azariyah. "I'm so blessed to have my plot there," said Williams, a UCSF technician who grew up tending backyard gardens in Fairfield-Suisun and San Francisco, but lost the space for that when his family moved to a West Oakland apartment. "We're eating organic foods and getting into the joy of real work." Beyond that, he said, the garden imparts life lessons that he can pass along. "If you want change in life, it requires work. This teaches me not to give up."

Cedric Williams tends his vegetable plot at Oakland's City Slicker Farms, where community and backyard gardens let locals grow their own produce.

ARIC CRABB/STAFF



Williams is among the thousands of Bay Area residents singing the praises of community gardens. Long a presence in the Bay Area, these nonprofit ventures have expanded their farm-to-table mission during COVID-19 to bring locally grown, organic food to more and more people — whether or not the recipients themselves have time to garden.

Here's a look at four major farms — three established ventures that are adding creative new outreach programs all the time and a new one that launched in 2020 with an unusual mission.

City Slicker Farms

OAKLAND

Now in its 20th year, City Slicker has evolved from a half-acre farm that empowered West Oakland residents to grow organic food to a program with much wider reach. To date, more than 500 City Slicker backyard gardens have been built in this neighborhood, where fresh produce historically had been too expensive or out of reach; three community farms have opened to the public, and more than 300,000 pounds of produce has been raised.

Of course, the pandemic has created new challenges for the farm's food justice and food access work.

"A lot of work is based on relationships and community — digging in the dirt together, one-on-one mentor visits with new gardeners, having volunteers help

Above: Cedric Williams harvests purple tree collards from his garden box at Oakland's City Slicker Farms. Williams is just one of the many local residents who grow vegetables and fruit at the community garden.

ARIC CRABB/STAFF

Right: Maricella Fuentes from the Climate Action Corps carries a basket of apples out to the Veggielution community farm stand. The San Jose community garden takes up a corner of the 48-acre Emma Prusch Farm Park, which preserves the city's rich agricultural heritage for visitors and locals alike.

ANDA CHU/STAFF



us keep the farm running, for example," executive director Kelly ErnstFriedman said. "So we've had to get creative in how we can continue to do this work."

City Slicker's goals for 2021 include growing more food at its home base, Farm Park, to give away, building at least 10 more gardens and expanding educational opportunities.

How you can help: An operation like this always needs the skills not just of farm volunteers (building gardens, weeding, irrigation) but also of web- and marketing-savvy individuals. Check the website for needs. There's also a wish list of appliances and supplies.

Details, donations: 2847 Peralta St., Oakland; www.cityslickerfarms.org



Above: Volunteers prepare the youth garden for renovation at San Jose's Veggielution community farm.

Left: Signs point the way at the Veggielution community farm in San Jose.

ANDA CHU/STAFF

Veggielution Community Farm

SAN JOSE

When Emma Prusch deeded her family's dairy farm to the city of San Jose back in 1962, she requested that part of the land be used to educate future citizens about the valley's agricultural past and inspire them.

The nonprofit now located on the property does that — and more. Since 2008, Veggielution has operated with a much broader mission of "connecting people from diverse backgrounds through food and farming to build community in East San Jose."

Those programs include a 6-acre community garden overseen by farm manager Luis Hernandez, a



youth garden, a cocina with recipe demonstrations, a farm stand and fresh-air sessions on organic farming for thousands of students, from elementary age to college interns.

In the last year, a new priority has involved partnering with other local farms to put together produce boxes for 200 local families who have been affected by COVID-19.

“Starting in April, we will be partnering with the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition to begin delivering these boxes by bikes,” said Emily Schwing, the farm’s marketing and impact manager. “We are hoping that expanding the visibility of this program will allow us to make deeper connections with other communities who are not aware of our work at Veggielution.”

And when pandemic protocols permit, the farm’s children’s activities and food truck will be back on the schedule.

How you can help: Volunteers — individual and corporate — are needed to pack farm boxes for the San Jose COVID Food Relief Program, help the Eastside Grown commercial kitchen and lend a hand with



Above: Apprentice Jerome Brown works at Family Harvest Farm in Pittsburg.

Left: Growing food and cultivating community are dual goals at the farm, which provides jobs and training to young adults transitioning out of the foster care system.

COURTESY OF
ADAM WEIDENBACH

farm chores. You can also shop at the farm stand from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays.

Details, donations: Emma Prusch Farm Regional Park, 647 S. King Road, San Jose; www.veggielution.org

Muir Trust: Family Harvest Farm

PITTSBURG

Last summer, a 3.5-acre urban parcel in downtown Pittsburg — in a neighborhood categorized by the USDA as a “food desert” — was transformed into an organic garden with a dual mission of growing community and growing food.

While doing so, the Family Harvest Farm, part of the John Muir Land Trust, is fulfilling another unique mission: providing jobs and training to young adults who are transitioning out of the foster care system.

“We just want to help them find a place in the world, give them a sense that they can make a positive contribution,” said Muir board member and master gardener Jack Cortis, who came up with the idea. “We are just trying to give them a foundation.”

Future plans include donating food to community members in need, selling produce at farmers markets and to local restaurants and school cafeterias and launching subscriptions for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) boxes.

How you can help: Volunteers are sought to help grow organic produce and assist with daily farm tasks, all done alongside apprentices. Check the farm’s information page on the John Muir Land Trust website for information.

Details, donations: 1300 Power



Ave., Pittsburg; <https://jmlt.org/our-places/farms-gardens/family-harvest-farm/>

Collective Roots

EAST PALO ALTO

The Collective Roots nonprofit is deeply rooted in this Peninsula community. Founded 20 years ago to improve access to healthy food, the group started with gardens at Belle Haven Elementary School, a school garden that has since expanded to community gardens, and in 2007 founded the East Palo Alto Community Farmers Market.

A merger with Cal Fresh, which is part of the Pacific Coast Farmers Market Association, allows those core programs to

Ellen Olack, left, a Collective Roots staffer, shows off the garden to Youth Urban Ag Ambassadors who visited the East Palo Alto program before the pandemic.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
COLLECTIVE ROOTS/
FRESH APPROACH

continue while adding free Veggie Rx cooking classes (now virtual), a community compost hub, a mobile farmers market and — new for this COVID-19 era — a produce box program for those who need it most.

“We’ve partnered with farms within a 100-mile radius to create Farm Fresh food relief boxes, because a lot of people were having problems going out and going to the store,” garden manager Najiha Al Asmar said.

The network of community-based gardens is thriving and growing. Eight community gardens offer plots to dozens of families, and more than 120 home garden boxes and other garden spaces have been created. Residents of East Palo Alto and the Belle Haven neighborhood

of Menlo Park who want to join the growing organic movement may sign up for a free plot or box. Those come with access to seeds, seedlings, tools and compost — and lots of advice.

How you can help: Volunteers are always in demand for planting, pruning, composting and other garden needs. You can also shop at the farmers market, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesdays at 2555 Pulgas Ave., East Palo Alto.

Details, donations: 1785 Woodland Ave., East Palo Alto; www.freshapproach.org/collectiveroots

Bay Area News Group reporter Judith Prieve contributed to this story.



Add some music to the mulch to make your garden grow

STORY BY JIM HARRINGTON
ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH COLEMAN

Is your philodendron getting enough sunlight? Do your ferns need more fertilizer? Are you overwatering the roses?

These are the questions that can haunt gardeners, but maybe we should be worrying about something else:

Are our plants listening to enough cool music?

People have long suspected that there is a positive correlation between music and plant growth, with numerous studies indicating that greens watered with tunes grow at a faster, healthier rate than those devoid of a soundtrack. Many believe it has something to do with those nurturing good vibrations, a hypothesis any Beach Boys fan can certainly get behind.

So, if you think you have already gone as far as mulch can take you, maybe it's time to add music to the mix in order to take your garden to the next level. We've flipped through countless records, found the right mix of rock, pop, jazz and other styles, and put together our best "Plant Playlist." Push play and (hopefully) watch your garden grow.

Please note that this list was compiled by a music critic, not a master gardener, so your plants' preferences may vary — but we trust the humans will enjoy the tunes.

“Good Vibrations”

We can think of no better way to kick off a plant playlist than with this Beach Boys' masterpiece, which might just be the greatest 3½ minutes in pop music history. If plants do indeed dig vibrations, as studies suggest, they'll absolutely adore this famed "pocket symphony" that took Brian Wilson and his sensational SoCal band to the top of the charts in 1966. Highly recommended for aloe plants, which are said to really enjoy the theremin.

“Mr. Farmer”

You can't go wrong with including anything by the Seeds on your gardening soundtrack. "Mr. Farmer" (1966) seems like an especially appropriate choice from the often-overlooked catalog of these Los Angeles psychedelic-rock pioneers. The tune relates the story of a guy who grew tired of life in the city and moved out to the country "to be a farmer all year round." It was banned by some radio stations at the time of its release for what were considered thinly veiled drug references, but that doesn't concern us much. Most double entendres go right over the heads of the begonias we know.

“San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)”

We thought twice about including this old chestnut, knowing many people would find it an obvious selection. Then we realized that this list isn't for people — it's for plants. And we know there are plenty of geraniums out there who have yet to experience the sublime joy of hearing Scott McKenzie's voice on this counterculture anthem of 1967.

“Incense and Peppermints”

We'll make it four Flower Power anthems in a row with the addition of this 1967 gem from Los Angeles-based psychedelic-rock act Strawberry Alarm Clock. Warning: This song may make your favorite ficus long to don a tie-dyed T-shirt and follow Dead and Company around the country.

“Rose Garden”

Talk about a tune that will stick in your head. We love this Joe South-penned number, which country great Lynn Anderson sent to the top of the charts with her definitive version in 1970 — and your roses will, too. Note: Tulips may become jealous when this song is played.

“Dead Flowers”

Let's address the troublemakers in the garden that might not be cooperating with the plan, the ones who just refuse to grow no matter what we do. (Orchids, we're looking at you.) We thought a scare tactic might be in order — or perhaps some reverse psychology — with this cautionary flora tale from the Rolling Stones' "Sticky Fingers" album from 1971.

“Orange Blossom Special”

This bluegrass/country music staple — which borrows its title from the old New York-to-Miami passenger train of the same name — makes sense for this list in two ways. It would surely thrill its namesake orange blossom flower. And it's also widely referred to as "the fiddle player's national anthem" and thus, understandably a big hit at large gatherings of fiddlehead ferns. The song has been recorded by artists ranging from ELO to Johnny Cash, but many ferns favor the Charlie Daniels Band version from 1974.

“Roses from My Friends”

Ben Harper delivers one of the best songs of his career with this gorgeous folk-pop ballad, originally recorded on the 1997 studio album, "The Will to Live." It reached even greater heights on the 2001 concert album, "Live From Mars." And yes, we realize those notoriously jealous tulips might be reaching a boiling point right about now. Fortunately, there's something for them right around the corner ...

“Tulip”

Finally! It's "Tulip" time, as those spring-blooming flowers are highlighted on this intriguing indie-folk-pop offering from Santa Rosa-born singer-songwriter Jesca Hoop. The song hails from Hoop's 2009 album, "Hunting My Dress." Note: Roses have been known to get a little thorny when this song is played.

“Gardening Is Gangsta”

Confession: We had never heard of this 2016 number until we Googled "hip-hop songs plants" and this hilarious spoof — which Weird Al could only wish he'd written — came up in the search results. Now, we just can't get enough of Master Mark and Sifu Paul Davis' ode to growing your own food. Judging by the comments on YouTube, we're not alone in our admiration. "Gangster rap changed my life, and it's going to change my peppers' lives too," one person commented.

“Forest Flowers”

We're kind of cheating here, in recommending an entire album as opposed to an individual song, as well as breaking with the established chronological order, but we don't think you'll mind in this particular case. So we're bringing the playlist to a close with this triumphant live set recorded by the Charles Lloyd Quartet at the 1966 Monterey Jazz Festival. It opens with a suitelike two-song offering — "Forest Flower: Sunrise" and "Forest Flower: Sunset" — then features three others that showcase the talents of saxophonist Lloyd and his amazing band, which includes pianist Keith Jarrett, bassist Cecil McBee and drummer Jack DeJohnette. There's not a plant in the garden that will disapprove. Well, except those darn orchids.

Tune in

& dig 'em

5

entertaining
shows for
garden lovers

BY CHUCK BARNEY



GETTY IMAGES AND PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

Looking for a great garden/landscape show on TV? Good luck.

They're about as rare as a lawn without gophers. Even the "G" in HGTV has become largely a misnomer in recent years. And that bums out many horticulture enthusiasts, including Bay Area resident Gary Gragg, who used to host a series called "Superscapes" on the cable channel.

"Those shows have become an endangered species," he says. "Now it's mostly all about home-renovation programs."

Indeed, somewhere along the way, a network suit clearly decided that a wall being smashed to smithereens makes for flashier, more dramatic television than watching tulip bulbs being planted in nice, neat rows. Go figure.

Gragg suggests that viewers head to YouTube instead, where many green-thumbed experts offer how-to videos. Gragg, in fact, oversees a series called "True Plant Stories."

"You get a better depth of content," he says. "And you can search out specifically what you want — instead of watching a 30-minute show and hoping that they might talk about a topic you're interested in."

He makes an excellent point, but we still wanted to explore television and streaming options to discover what exactly constitutes a gardening and/or landscaping show these days. Here are five that caught our eye:

Florists, sculptors and garden designers vie for the prize in extravagant fashion in Netflix's The Big Floral Fight," co-hosted by Natasia Demetriou.

NETFLIX



“The Big Flower Fight”

If you're someone who believes any activity connected with flowers and plants should be blissfully Zen-like, avoid this offbeat British reality series. But if you're keen on watching a group of eccentric floral sculptors enter a massive thunder dome and throw down in a stressful, cutthroat, totally bonkers competition, then by all means, have at it.

In each episode, teams of two are challenged to create eye-popping artworks — including colossal bugs and sea creatures — from flowers, shrubs, grasses and other material.

It makes for plenty of whimsy and visual dazzle, but it's not all flowery fun. While challenge winners are declared the “best in bloom,” eliminated losers, alas, are relegated to the “compost pile.”

Where to watch: The eight-episode first season is currently streaming on Netflix; www.netflix.com/title/81046153.



“Lawn & Order

This series, which wins our trophy for best title ever, features landscape contractors Sara Bendrick and Chris Lambton giving some love to neglected front yards in hopes of raising property values.

“Sometimes when a house won't sell, the reason is right in front of you,” goes the series mantra.

And so cue the tractors, chain saws and other noisy contraptions as driveways are enhanced, trees are shorn and overgrown lawns are ripped out. Then bring on the enhancements — like garage doors, flagstone walkways and “calming” water features. And, oh yeah, some lovely flowers and trees.

The result? Homeowners are stoked. Curb appeal is boosted. And Lambton tries his best to resist the urge to remind us that he was the runner-up on Season 6 of “The Bachelorette.”

Where to watch: HGTV, DIY and Hulu; www.hgtv.com/shows/lawn-and-order



Landscape contractors Chris Lambton and Sara Bendrick bring on the curb appeal, from refurbished garage doors to water features and plants in the DIY series “Lawn & Order.” DIY



Aussie host Jamie Durie goes out back in “Backyard Takeover,” taming the jungles — and occasional alligators — that lurk in overgrown gardens. HGTV



“Backyard Takeover”

Affable Aussie Jamie Durie hosts this series, which basically takes the “Lawn & Order” concept and shifts it to the hideous areas behind homes. Sure, things get a little hokey when Durie makes like Crocodile Dundee and, with a completely straight face, slashes his way through overgrown weeds and bushes with a huge machete, as if he were penetrating the Outback. (C’mon, mate!). On the other hand, we admire how he does his own stunt work. To wit: In one episode, Durie plunges from a tree while

using a chain saw. In another, he deals with an intrusive alligator — yikes! — in a Florida yard. We also admire how he gets the homeowners and their children deeply involved with the four-day facelift projects. For example, they are required to camp overnight in their yards to “reconnect” with the environment. But not the alligators.

Where to watch: HGTV, Discovery+ and Hulu; www.hgtv.com/shows/backyard-takeover



James DeSantis, Melissa Brasier and Garrett Magee star in “Backyard Envy” on Bravo. KAROLINA WOJTASIK/BRVO



“Love Your Garden”

By now, you have surely figured out that most TV gardening shows don’t delve all that deeply into actual *gardening*. When this iconic British series launched in 2011, it did just that. Scotsman Alan Titchmarsh visited lovely spaces all over Britain and passed on tips about planting, watering, fertilizing and pruning while teaching viewers how to “put some real flower power into your garden.” The show eventually succumbed to the makeover craze and began reimagining not only gardens, but structural landscape features. “Love Your Garden,” however, does bring a tearfully endear-

ing twist to the genre — directing its transformational efforts toward needy and deserving people. (One episode, for example, had Titchmarsh and his team helping a family coping with the sudden loss of their son). So the program has a feel-good vibe that others might lack. Even Titchmarsh’s dulcet tones have a way of putting us in a mellow mood and ready to smell the roses.

Where to watch: Selected episodes available on Amazon Prime. Also BritBox and ITV.com.



COURTESY OF THE OAKLAND A'S

Q&A

Clay Wood

Oakland A's groundskeeper is the guy who polishes their diamond

BY JIM HARRINGTON

Clay Wood always dreamed of a career on the baseball diamond — and it came true, not with a baseball in hand, but as head groundskeeper for the Oakland A's. It's been 25 years since he arrived at the Oakland Coliseum, and he's still there, maintaining the immaculate field and playing areas not just for the A's, but for most of that time, the Raiders as well, changing a single playing field from baseball to football and back, sometimes overnight.

"Concerts, football, soccer, you name it," the Danville resident says. "If it came in here, we were responsible for overseeing the set-up and then, obviously, returning the field back to the best possible shape for baseball."

Were you always interested in landscaping?

The first way I earned any money as a kid was mowing yards. And in high school, I was a catcher and was assigned to take care of home plate — the batter's box and catcher's area. I took it pretty seriously, because I didn't want to sit in a dustbowl all the time.

Your original dream was to make it to the "big" as a player, right?

I had some early injuries to my knees from skiing. As a catcher, they weren't great for my baseball career. Really, after that first year (playing) at Scottsdale Community College, I kind of knew I was done. I was studying business — and wanted to transfer to Arizona State — and I wanted to get into the front office

CLAY WOOD'S TIPS FOR HOME GARDENERS

Mow the lawn more frequently: "I only mow my lawn once a week — and I have somebody else do it, so I'm guilty of this, too. But I think a yard should be mowed at least twice a week."

Use fertilizer: "I think a lot of people don't fertilize enough. The best defense — whether for fungus or weeds or pests — is really healthy turf. You don't want to overfertilize, to the point where you create problems. But I think people at their homes run a little lean."

Take care of the details: "You can do things that aren't that difficult, and they really make a big difference. Just little details — edging your yard along your driveway or your curb or sidewalk."

on the baseball operations side.

One of our duties at Scottsdale was to catch minor league spring training bullpens, which was really cool. I got to know (former Oakland A's pitching coach) Wes Stock — at the time, he was the minor league pitching coordinator — and some people in the A's organization.

Your first full season as head groundskeeper with the A's in Oakland was 1995, the same year the Raiders moved back to the Coliseum. What was your reaction when you heard your job had just gotten a whole lot more complicated?

Probably "(expletive)." But seriously, it was a wow moment. Here I am, a 24-year-old kid, all my time groundskeeping has been spent in baseball. It's my first year in the major leagues, which is

challenging and difficult enough. I will say this: I have always had great help and great crews. They deserve as much credit as anyone for what we do here.

How difficult was it to transform a field from baseball to football? A lot of fans probably just took it for granted.

It's easy to do if you're a fan. You just show up one day, and there is a baseball game. And then you come the next day, and there's a football field.

But the process to do that was miraculous. It's an old stadium — antiquated. It's not set up well for baseball or football. There are thousands and thousands of moving parts — the backstop, the on-field seating, the foul poles, the netting, the outfield wall. Basically, everything in this stadium, except the out-of-town scoreboards in the outfield, is removable.

And then there's the pitching mound.

It was a major concern. Not only did we have to move the mound, we had to move the bullpens, because they're in the end zone. We — myself, an architect and an engineer — sat down in a construction trailer, had a 10-hour meeting and came up with a design for a movable mound: three mounds on steel plates with a gigantic trailer to lift them up and move them.

You put so much care into the field. It's so beautiful for spring and much of the summer. Then football season would arrive, and the field would get chewed up. Was that hard for you to watch?

It always was. You think maybe after 25 years, it would get easier, but it never did. We'd usually re-sod the field in late February or March. Then we'd play, let's say, 65 A's home games. The field was just immaculate from April until mid-August. All it took was one football conversion, and that beautiful pristine field was never the same. It never was easy to accept or to handle. It wasn't the Raiders' fault. It wasn't the A's fault. It's not a good stadium for multipurpose.

What was your reaction when you heard the Raiders were leaving again?

(Laughs) Well, we heard it a few times. I never got my hopes up. Again, it wasn't the Raiders. It was August, September and October, when they were playing both sports together. It was just super demanding and stressful, physically and mentally, for myself and my crew and really for everyone who works in the stadium. There is just this sigh of relief to see them kick off in Las Vegas.

How much are you looking forward to the A's proposed state-of-the-art stadium at Howard Terminal?

I love baseball. I love groundskeeping and that satisfaction when the players take the field. You never take it for granted to come to a major league stadium every day. My ultimate goal is to stay with the A's, build a new field and a new stadium and ride that into retirement.

I keep hearing about your famous groundskeeper companion. Is she named after Reba McEntire?

She is. Reba is an incredible dog. She loves to be here. This year, I didn't bring her (to work) much. I didn't feel like it would be great to have a dog running around and everybody petting her (during COVID-19). And man, not only did I miss having her, but players, coaches (would ask) "Where's Reba?" And then, "Oh, yeah, how are you doing?"

Pretty but poisonous

WHAT NOT TO PLANT TO KEEP YOUR PET SAFE

BY JOAN MORRIS

We love our gardens, and we love our pets, but sometimes the two just don't go together. ¶ Whether you're growing plants outdoors or in, you can make your environment safer by using creative thinking to keep pets away from fragile plants and, most especially, plants that, if eaten, can sicken or even kill. ¶ Keep risks at the minimum by restricting these plants — the ones most commonly involved in pet poisonings — to areas of your garden where pets can't reach them or by eliminating them from your garden palette altogether.

1

Amaryllis

All the amaryllis varieties are popular, common garden plants, but if your pet eats the leaves or bulb, it can become very ill.

2

Azalea and rhododendron

Azaleas and rhodies are popular with gardeners because of the showy blooms they produce. Most of our Bay Area soils are unsuitable for growing them, so gardeners go to extremes to amend their soil or plant in pots, which makes it even more tragic that these plants are highly toxic to our pets.

3

Castor bean

These are beautiful plants, but the beans — the seeds — of the castor plant contain large amounts of ricin, a deadly poison.

4

Chrysanthemum

Chrysanthemums, or mums, are a popular garden plant, but dangerous to pets because they contain pyrethrins.

5

Cyclamen

The deadliest part of the cyclamen is below ground, in the roots. If you have a dog that likes to dig up plants, this is one to avoid.

6

English ivy

Ivy presents its own set of challenges. It provides places for unwanted animals, such as rats, to live. It spreads everywhere. And it contains toxins that can make pets very ill.

7

Lily

Every part of almost every type of lily, from the leaves to the flower and stamens, can be fatal to cats, although they are safer for dogs. Be especially careful if you bring lilies indoors in bouquets.

8

Oleander

Oleander is a hardy, easy-to-grow plant that can make a good "privacy fence" around your yard, but parts of the oleander are toxic to pets and humans alike.

9

Sago palm

This is a very popular plant for the yard, patio or a sunny window indoors, but it's dangerous to have around your pets. The fronds are toxic, but the seeds — or nuts — of the palm have a higher concentration of toxins.

10

Tulip

Nothing says spring quite like vividly colored tulips popping their heads from the soil, but tulip bulbs have a toxin that is bad for our pets.



Rich Santoro

San Jose's 'Bulb Guy' invites you to tiptoe through his tulps

BY LINDA ZAVORAL

Rich Santoro isn't just a bulb guy. He's The Bulb Guy — and he's got the numbers to prove it. For years, he's planted thousands of flowering bulbs in his spacious backyard in San Jose's Berryessa neighborhood, then invited the public to enjoy the colorful spring-time blooms.

After the pandemic forced his tours to become virtual visits last year, he (admittedly) went a little nuts, planting more than 28,000 daffodils, tulips, irises, scallia and others for the 2021 season. If you're keeping track, and Santoro is, that's twice as many as last year.

We chatted with him about his over-the-top hobby and how you, too, can join the bulb mania.

Q How did your bulb garden get started?

A It was back in the fall of 1985, and we stopped by to see my sister-in-law, Carmen Felisilda. She was puttering around the front. I yelled out, "What are you doing?" She came up to the car with an apron full of daffodil bulbs and said, "I'm bulb gardening." I said to her, "Isn't that difficult? You have to do it a certain time with special fertilizers and talk with an English accent?" She said, "Let me show you." I watched her and was hooked. My wife, Riza, and I went and bought 50 daffodils, came home and buried them in our 2,000-square-foot lawn.

Q What did she show you? We're curious: Just how easy is it to plant bulbs?

A This easy: Dig hole for bulb. Drop bulb in hole. Water bulb in hole. Cover bulb with dirt. Step awaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaayyyyyyyyyyyyyy from the bulb. The last step is critical (he says with a laugh).

Q What's the optimal time of year to plant for spring blooms?

A I tell people to plant after Thanksgiving. The key is the dirt must not be warm.

Q How did you feel about not being able to allow the public to enjoy the garden last year?

SANTORO'S 5 FAVORITE GARDENS TO VISIT

Nola's Iris Garden at Prevost Ranch, San Jose: Nola starts taking orders in August and ships in November. Her claim to fame is that her irises are in The Bulb Guy Garden AND the Queen of England's garden. (That's the way I tell the story.) During blooming season, the gardens are open to the public.

Hakone Gardens, Saratoga: One of the finest Japanese gardens in the Bay Area — if not the finest. Meticulous.

Filoli, Woodside: A must-go, with 225 acres of gardens from tulips to trees.

San Francisco Botanical Garden: 8,000 plants at Golden Gate Park. So much to see.

Copenhagen, Denmark: The sheer volume of bulbs (in the city's greenspaces) is overwhelming.

A This was a Bulb Guy bummer of all bummers. Can you imagine Michelangelo not being able to show his art? I tell a pretty good story during my tours, and that is soooooooooo much fun. The garden is not just a garden of tulips and ranunculi.

Because of COVID, we had to shut down the 2020 Bulb Guy Show. So my sister Joyce, who sings with me with Swing Solution and the Millennium Sounds Orchestra, took a video of the garden and put it to music — "Tiptoe Through the Tulips" by the McGuire Sisters. Usually I get 2,300 people walking through. But Joyce's YouTube video was seen by 25,000 people. Now that's just crazy.

Q What's the outlook for visitors this year?

A The decision to open the garden is up in the air. Usually, the last week of March is when it opens. (With the pandemic), we think maybe eight people at a time might be the limit, with 15 minutes of viewing time. I planted a lot of late bloomers, so it will be interesting to see what happens. (For updates, check www.the-bulbguy.com.)

Q You're also a big-band vocalist, so we have to ask: Do plants really grow faster when you sing to them?

A They like Michael Bublé. Well, I can see why ... Bublé ... bulb ... 'nuff said!



ALL HAIL THE HARDY SUCCULENT, BOTANY'S BIG SUCCESS STORY

BY JOAN MORRIS

Trying to understand succulents' surge in popularity is a little like trying to explain why the sky is blue.

You know the science of it. Succulents are fairly easy to grow, have the ability to survive on benign neglect and are perfect for our drought-plagued environment. But if you focused only on those things, you would overlook the ethereal qualities that appeal to succulent savorers — the beauty, the opulence, the singularity, the form and the structure.

"One of the things I find especially appealing in succulents is their array of colors," says Brian Kemble, curator at Walnut Creek's Ruth Bancroft Garden, a mecca for succulent lovers. "You don't have to depend so much on flowers for color if you have leaves tinged with red or orange or pink or purple. Another point of appeal is the endless variety of their forms: rosettes and columns and stacks of paddles. I like plants that are oddities, and there are plenty of these among the succulents."

There are more than 60 succulent plant families and within each, hundreds and even thousands of different plants, giving the gardener a wealth of options.

Kemble believes the current craze has roots in the realization that water-guzzling landscapes are just not sustainable in drought-plagued California.

*Succulence Life and Garden owner Ken Shelf started his San Francisco nursery in the back of his ailing video store, mainly to fill the time. Soon he was obsessed with succulents — and so was his clientele. Today, he does a brisk business in plants like this *Haworthia Fasciata White* — and sells a few video tapes on the side.*

RAY CHAVEZ/BAY AREA NEWS GROUP



It was a drought of a different type that led musician Ken Shelf to open his San Francisco nursery, Succulence Life and Garden Center. In the early 2000s, Shelf and his wife bought a quaint video store in their Bernal Heights neighborhood. And over the next few years, it all unfolded exactly the way you know it did — until Shelf made what he calls the “ultimate pivot.” “I sort of stumbled into this idea to redo the break area as a plant store,” he says. It was, he admits, an “interesting challenge to get people to understand there was a store out there. Most of the time it was just me and the plants.”

Shelf spent the quiet time reading and learning about succulents, improving his stock and making vertical art gardens. He used everything he could get his hands on, including old picture frames that he backed with curtains and stuffed with growing medium and succulents.

One day while Shelf was on tour with a band, his staff called to say they had sold one of his succulent art creations for \$500, and Shelf knew he’d found the future. As he phased out the video store and built up the nursery, eventually more people were coming in for the plants than the videos, and the store became official.

“If you remain open to life,” Shelf says, “life will open to you.”

Since then, Succulence has expanded. Shelf briefly opened a second store at Ghirardelli Square, which was doing well until the pandemic lockdown forced its closure. But the Bernal Heights store has branched out to offer personalized video shopping and, with the doors back open, is doing good business. All those people working from home have apparently become disenchanted with their décor and views and are looking for ways to brighten up their spaces with greenery.

Shelf, who has written a best-seller, “Essential Succulents: A Beginner’s Guide” (Rockridge Press), says succulents offer something for everyone. Whether you want a tall, thin plant, one that will take over a corner of your yard or tiny specimens perfect for a fairy garden, succulents provide.

Kemble and Shelf offer these tips for nurturing your own succulent obsession.

AN INDOOR GARDEN

Many succulents can be grown indoors if placed in brightly lit rooms. Haworthia, some aloes and cactus

Top: Haworthia Fasciata White is a best seller at San Francisco’s Succulence Life and Garden.

Right: The succulent array at the San Francisco nursery includes a variety of cactus large and small.

RAY CHAVEZ/STAFF



make excellent houseplants. The main problem, Shelf says, is if you try to bring a plant that requires full sun indoors.

Shelf says succulents are survivors. The plants will try their best to capture all the light they can, which usually means your nice, compact plant grows leggy and oddly shaped. It might live, but it won’t thrive.

Growing conditions

Soil is the most important consideration for succulents, Kemble says. Whether you grow in pots or in the ground, the soil needs excellent drainage.

If you don’t have that, you need to amend the soil or plant in mounds of a soil mix formulated for succulents.

Whether indoors or out, watering also is key. Kemble recommends giving the plants a thorough soaking, then allowing the soil to dry out before watering again.

KNOW YOUR PLANTS’ NEEDS

Although we associate succulents with the hot, dry desert, not all plants can withstand full sun. A barrel cactus thrives in full sun all day long, Kemble says, but an aeonium will burn up if given the same treatment.

Some plants grow well in the winter and want a resting period in summer, while others want the opposite. Still others will grow all year around.

It’s also important, Shelf says, to know how big your plants will get. Aloes and agaves can get really ginormous, he says. Don’t put them in a spot you’ll regret later.

A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR BEGINNERS

Some examples of easy-to-grow plants for indoors include haworthias, gasterias and sansevierias, Kemble says.

For outdoors, prickly pears, agaves and yuccas are all easy-to-please groups in general. Aeoniums are very easy to grow near the coast, but vulnerable to summer heat and winter chill in inland areas.

Within each group, some varieties are much easier to grow than others, Kemble says. Taking the echeverias as an example, Echeveria imbricata is very tough and adaptable, while Echeveria laui should be left to the experts.

“Once again,” Kemble says, “learning something about the plants when you get them can make all the difference in keeping them happy.”

And you along with them.

Terrariums filled with succulents inspire visitors at San Francisco’s Succulence Life and Garden shop.

RAY CHAVEZ/STAFF

PHOTOGRAPHY

#BloomScrolling through the pandemic, one blossom at a time

STORY AND PHOTO BY KARL MONDON

Are you a flower nerd? Do you sometimes post blossom pictures to Twitter? Maybe you used the hashtag #BloomScrolling?

Well, that's mine. Yep, I invented it (or so I'm told). And no, you can't have my autograph.

Back in August — during the dark COVID days when the presidential primaries were still sucking the life out of me and the CZU Lightning Fire was about to blacken 85,000 acres of the Santa Cruz Mountains — the trending hashtag of the time was #DoomScrolling.

And Lord knows, I was plenty guilty of that. Scrolling my Twitter timeline, I was like one of the Four iPhone Horsemen of the Apocalypse, riding with endless woe.

But then I saw it: A herd of blooming agapanthus marching down to the San Mateo coastline, looking for all the world like lemmings about to hurl themselves into the sea. I mean, it was 2020. Who could blame them?

They were gorgeous and full of selfie-snapping people Instagram-gorging themselves

I've driven that coastline for years and never once noticed

these button-downed, boring, suburban, blue/white garden staples, now apparently gone feral, throwing a rave down by the Pacific.

It took a couple weeks, but I finally Tweeted pictures out with the caption, "Time for #Bloomscrolling. My contribution: Agapanthus sunset, Montara State Beach."

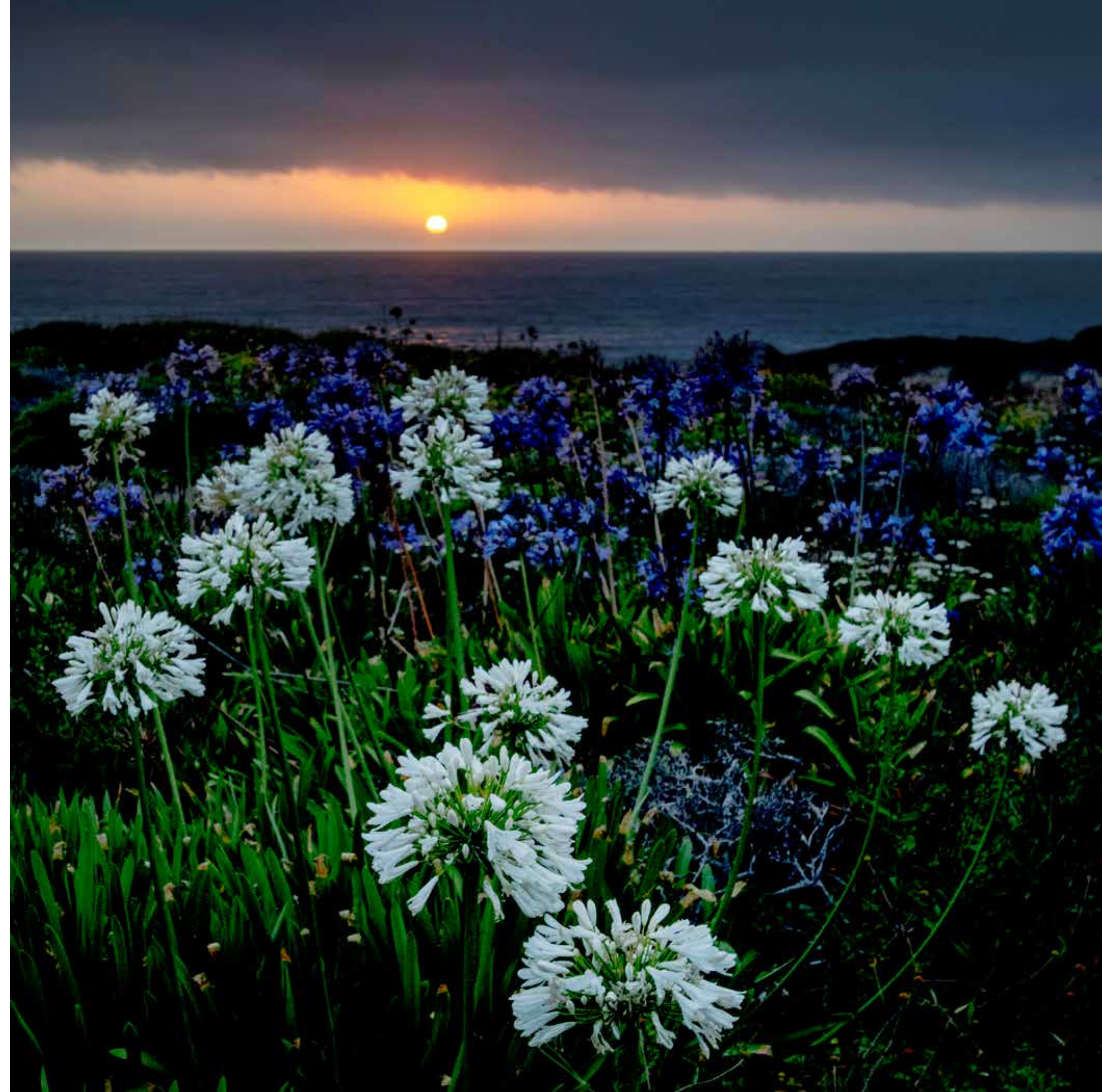
It didn't exactly trend, as most of my Tweets are wont not to do. In fact, nobody used it for three months.

Then in January, a Dr. Minx Marple used it, and bless 'em, some hashtag research was offered up:

@MinxMarple

"Jan 12bc citation politics: Earliest example of #BloomScrolling I can find is from @karlmondon on 8th August 2020, and then by @nath1as on 3rd Nov, and the term seemed to take off at US election time when used by @yungcontent with 17k followers... so thanks to them, really."

Thank you, Dr. Marple for crowning me the #BSoriginator. My work here is done.



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