

**Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour**  
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## *Executive Summary*

### *2023 online and in-person Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour*

#### **Overall**

- 3,036 people registered for this year's Tour.
- 1,190 new e-mail addresses were added to the Tour's database, bringing the total to nearly 20,000.
- 964 visits were made to green homes on the week-end of the in-person Tour.
- 220,090 garden visits have been made since the Tour's inception
- The YouTube channel has 2,600 subscribers, and had 75,000 views in the last year.

#### **Online Tour**

- The [online Tour](#) offered 10 hours of content on gardening with California native plants in the East Bay over the course of two days.
- The online Tour took place on April 15 and 16.
- 543 unique viewers watched into the Saturday program, and 398 unique viewers watched the Sunday program.

#### **In-person Tour**

- The [in-person Tour](#) took place on May 6 and 7.
- 10,345 garden visits were made on the week-end of the in-person Tour.
- 99% of those filling out the in-person Tour evaluations rated the in-person Tour "Excellent" or "Good."
- 55 gardens were open on the in-person Tour.
- 72 hosts and 163 volunteers made this event possible.
- 32 garden talks and demonstrations were given on the weekend of the in-person Tour.
- 58% of registrants who filled out the evaluation said they had changed their gardening practices because of the Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour.

## Green Home Features

- [Twenty in-person hosts](#) shared their green home features with Tour registrants.
- Four of these hosts opened their homes to Tour participants, to allow viewing of induction ranges, heat pumps, bidets, solar panels and batteries, induction ranges, Smart Panels, and more. This brought additional registrants to the Tour, and increased the number of in-person visitors at homes with these features.
- 82% of respondents who submitted evaluations “loved” the addition of the green home features.

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## 2023 Final Report

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

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

### Why a Native Plant Garden Tour?

The spring 2023, [Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour](#) was held in order to showcase pesticide-free, water-conserving gardens that provide habitat for wildlife, reduce solid waste, and contain 70% or more native plants.

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

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

A nine-year study of water use, green waste generation, maintenance hours, and maintenance labor costs between a traditional garden and a California native plant garden was conducted by the City of Santa Monica between 2004 and 2013.

The [results of this study](#) showed that compared to a traditional garden, the native garden:

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

Tour gardens contain minimal or no lawn. This is of particular value since the majority of the chemicals purchased by home owners support lawn care, and the majority of water used in home gardens is applied to lawns. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, homeowners use up to ten times more chemical pesticides per acre on their lawns than farmers use on crops. In addition, half of the water used by the average household is applied to the landscape—with most of that water being used to keep turf green.

### **2023 Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour # of Registrants**

3,036 people registered for this year's Tour. This year 1,190 new e-mail addresses were added to the Tour's database. This is a large number of new registrants. Some combination of the new events—online tour, two-day in-person tour, and/or the addition of the green home features attracted them.

### **Online Garden Tour**

This year, for the second time, the Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour was held both online and in-person.

The [ten hour-long online Tour](#) took place on Saturday and Sunday April 15 and 16. Nearly 1,000 people watched the online Tour, with 543 unique viewers watching the Saturday program, and 398 unique viewers watching the Sunday program.

Inspirational speaker Doug Tallamy was the keynote speaker for this year's online Tour.

The recording of the online Tour has been uploaded to the Tour's [YouTube channel](#). The videos on this year's Tour will receive more exposure over time; the Tour's YouTube channel had 75,000 views in the last year, and the channel currently has 2,600 subscribers.

Below are comments taken from online Tour evaluations:

- Amazing quality of content! Thank you SO much for doing this!!
- You all did a fantastic job. The videos only get better and better, and the teamwork is evident and effective. Kudos, folks!
- These two days have really changed my thinking on native plants. I thought of it as a new hobby and now I see it is so necessary for life on our plant. The presenters were all excellent and inspirational.
- Loved it so much! Great information; well-presented, and the event was so well-run! Thanks for all your hard work!

- The best!!!! Thank you!!!! All of your presentations were great. You selected a wonderful variety of gardens and presentations.
- This webinar and its later availability on YouTube is so necessary to all of us. By putting on this tour you enable so many people to encounter these topics and resources. It is invaluable. Thank you.
- Wonderful presentations by all and excellent teamwork. The chat responses were timely and helpful. The tech situations were well-handled.
- This was great. I am trying to convert my friends to natives. The information and the pictures help.
- The presentations exceeded my expectations, and motivated me to take action in my own garden.
- Thank you for continuing to offer this wonderful annual event. It is very inspiring!!
- I want to thank you for your initiative and efforts to encourage us to plant natives. Thanks to you, I am slowly converting my garden to natives.

### **In-person Garden Tour**

This year, was the 19<sup>th</sup> annual Tour. For the second time, the in-person Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour was a two-day event, with Bayside gardens (Pinole to Fremont) open on Saturday, May 6, and Inland gardens (Martinez to Livermore, including Orinda and Moraga) open on Sunday, May 7.

10,345 garden visits were made on the week-end of the in-person Tour. See the end of this report for a list of the number of visitors counted at each garden. Rain on Saturday morning depressed garden visits during that time.

220,090 garden visits have been made since the Tour's inception in 2005.

The fifty-five gardens open on the in-person Tour were located in twenty-five cities and unincorporated areas in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. This is the highest number of cities that have had gardens on the Tour in one year. The cities were: Alameda, Alamo, Albany, Berkeley, Castro Valley, Clayton, Concord, Danville, El Cerrito, El Sobrante, Fremont, Hayward, Livermore, Kensington, Martinez, Moraga, Oakland, Orinda, Piedmont, Pinole, Richmond, San Leandro, San Ramon, San Pablo, and Walnut Creek.

A variety of gardens were featured on the tour. The gardens ranged from large lots in the hills to small front gardens in the flats, mature landscapes to those that were newly-planted, and they contained everything from local native plants to the horticulturally available suite of natives from throughout California. About half of the gardens (33) were designed and installed by owners, and the remainder (32) were designed and installed by professionals. The gardens were landscaped with at least 70% native plants.

163 volunteers and more than 72 hosts were stationed at gardens on the day of the tour, or helped with tour preparation and clean-up. The volunteers contributed more than 650 hours of time to the tour. The hosts put in countless hours preparing for the tour, and more than 500 hours on the day of the event.

Below are comments taken from in-person Tour evaluations:

- It's been fascinating to see the Bringing Back the Natives garden tour and its body of knowledge percolate through the media and into different communities over the years while becoming a trusted source of information, personal inspiration, and community unification.
- Thank you so much to everyone who works to put this on!!!! It's an amazing resource!
- The addition of green houses was like a dream!
- I feel so grateful for the inspiration, thoughtful organization and all the hard work that goes in to these tours. THANK YOU!
- Compliments on the keystone species signs. They are marvelous, informative, and inspiring. I will be planting some of, or more of, these plants.
- The information provided ahead of time (maps & garden descriptions) was fantastic.
- I always appreciate all your hard work and the generosity of the homeowners who open their homes and gardens. The green home aspect has provided valuable information, and we've taken steps in that direction as well as in our garden. There's nothing like seeing what works or doesn't in situ and it's encouraging to see what others struggle with to know to keep working at it.
- The Tour gets better and better each year! And I look forward to it every year. Thank you for all you do to make this tour such an outstanding experience!
- Thank you so much for your dedication to this effort. Native plant gardening is becoming more "mainstream," and that is fantastic. Your efforts are part of that shift in thinking.
- Amazing amount of organization; very enthusiastic home owners.
- We love it! Thank you for all the work that goes into the event and for putting up the video tours and getting such wonderful garden owners to participate. The signage gets better all the time.
- Thank you for all of your hard work that makes this tour so fabulous! Being able to see the plants at their mature size in a home garden setting is so helpful in planning my garden. I have learned a lot from observing the gardens and talking with the owners. You are really doing a great service to spread knowledge about the importance of native plant gardening.

## **Native Plant Extravanzas**

The Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour has now expanded its offerings to include not only online and the in-person Tour, but also a series of Native Plant sales, which are held throughout the year. Three Extravanza's were held in the spring of 2023, and the nurseries reported good sales of native plants.

Participating nurseries are East Bay Wilds, the Watershed Nursery, Oaktown, Annie's Annuals, and Green Thumb Works.

## **Green Home Features**

This year, [twenty garden tour hosts](#) who had electrified their homes shared their green home features with Tour registrants. (Look for the "Green Home Features!" tag on the host list.) In addition to the twenty in-person homes, one green home was featured during the online tour. Solar panels and batteries, induction ranges, heat pumps for heating and cooling the house, heat pumps for heating water, Smart

Panels, and more brought additional registrants to the Tour, and increased the number of visitors at homes with these features.

Four Tour hosts with green home features opened their homes to registrants. These homes were located in Albany, Kensington, Moraga, and San Leandro. A total of 964 visitors visited these four homes.

82% of those who submitted evaluations “loved” the addition of the green home features.

## **Garden Talks**

32 garden talks and demonstrations on a plethora of topics were given throughout the weekend of the in-person Tour.

## **The Website**

The Tour’s website featured the gardens on this year’s Tour under “[View the 2023 In-Person Gardens](#).” Each garden is described in detail, and its plant list is provided, as are numerous photographs of each garden.

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

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

## **Tour Partnerships**

The Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour has created partnerships with a variety of organizations that share common values—that chemical-free and water-conserving gardening preserves water quality and quantity, and creates wildlife habitat. The list of major sponsors and supporters of the 2023 Tour include a flood control and water conservation district, two county clean water programs, four water districts and water conservation agencies, four cities, three non-profits, two fish and wildlife commissions, and several businesses. The list of tour sponsors is provided below.



## **Sponsors of the 2023 tour**

**\$16,500**

Contra Costa Clean Water Program

**\$10,000**

Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District

**\$7,500**

Clean Water Program Alameda County

**\$5,800**

Alameda County Fish and Game Commission

**\$5,500**

Contra Costa Water District

**\$4,300**

Contra Costa Fish and Wildlife Committee

**\$3,000**

Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency  
California Native Plant Society, East Bay Chapter

**\$2,000**

EcoPerformance Builders

**\$1,500**

Climate Action Committee of the Bridge Association of REALTORS  
City of El Cerrito  
City of Pittsburg

**\$1,250**

RecycleSmart

**\$1,000**

Alameda County Water District  
City of Antioch  
City of Walnut Creek  
Zone 7

**\$500**

Francesca Crothers  
Anne Chambers and Ed McAlpine  
League of Women Voters  
Pacific Horticulture  
The Summer-Dry Project  
YesPlease.Garden

*Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour*

**\$250**  
Livermore Municipal Water

### **Host Gardeners**

The gardens selected to take part in the tour are chemical-free and water-conserving landscapes that provide habitat for wildlife and contain 70% or more California native plants. Hosts were chosen because of their willingness to be on-site on the day of the tour to talk with visitors about their gardens, and their enthusiasm for, and commitment to, educating others about how to garden in environmentally sustainable ways.

Host gardener recruitment began in the spring of 2022 for the 2023 tour. Potential candidates completed an application, and applicants who met the criteria received a site visit.

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

### **Host Comments from the 2023 evaluations**

- The Tour does a great job of inspiring people to garden with natives and for wildlife, while using less water, and eliminating pesticide use. By visiting our garden people saw what they could do in their own yards. Because of the Tour, visitors could talk to people who are knowledgeable about natives, and they seemed to feel inspired. The website is chock full of good information.
- Our visitors were a nice mix of people: homeowners, students, designers and landscapers, landscape architects and even a teacher and some of his class, well as neighbors and friends.
- Visitors really seemed excited to see what a native garden can look like.
- People appreciated being able to get ideas for their own yards by seeing mine.
- People told me that seeing our garden was inspiring, and that they were going to increase the number of natives in their yard. Folks were also very interested in the keystone species signs and attracting wildlife.
- The presence of our electrification experts worked out really well.
- We loved the new signs explaining how natives support birds, and explaining why to plant natives.
- The tour is well organized and advertised (lots of people came through)! Communication was easy with Kathy. The registration process is simple; I like that the tour is free, and that neighbors can come in without tickets. I was very grateful for my volunteers, who were knowledgeable and able to help me answer questions.
- Visitors appreciated every feature we offered - from information on the native plants and our garden layout, to the labels, signage, handouts, magazines, seeds, plants, restrooms, and music.
- Communication was highly organized, clear, thorough and responsive throughout the process.

- The keystone species signs are a wonderful addition to the Tour, and they are quite beautiful. Excellent decision to make and print them!
- The keystone species signs are fabulous! They are your best contribution for people who are considering or beginning a native plant garden. The people who had the least exposure and least knowledge of native gardening often stopped and read the keystone species signs carefully, looked at the pictures carefully, and learned from the signs.
- A shower of compliments. We had 0 hitches and lots of visitors. The place was hopping, but not too crowded to enjoy. I loved giving the talk.
- The organization is amazing, especially considering the complexity of organizing this tour, and the huge geographic area it serves. It was well-publicized, and the materials set the stage. Thank you for all of the up-front work.

#### Volunteer Comments from the 2023 evaluations:

- The Tour is a wonderful venue for informing the public about native plants, and ecologically-sound gardening and green home opportunities.
- This is truly a wonderful series of events you organize every year; I'm very happy to be a part of it (and wish I had known about it sooner).
- So much enthusiasm for natives is generated by this tour. Thank you for the incredible service to our environment.
- The visitors were enthusiastic and engaged, and they asked good questions.
- I enjoyed talking to people about native plants and their importance to sustaining birds, bees, butterflies and other wildlife.

## Registration Survey and Evaluation

58% of those who filled out the evaluation said they had changed their gardening practices because of the Tour.

What registrants wanted to learn from the Tour:

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| How to select native plants              | 70% |
| How to garden for wildlife               | 61% |
| How to reduce water use                  | 47% |
| About green home features                | 35% |
| How to reduce or eliminate pesticide use | 23% |
| How to replace a lawn with a garden      | 21% |
| How to compost                           | 19% |

| Visitor Count 2023                       | AM Visitors | PM Visitors | Total Visitors |
|--|-------------|-------------|----------------|
|  |             |             |                |
| <b>Alameda</b>                           |             |             |                |
| Betsy Brazy and John Cartan #29          | 41          | 19          | 60             |
|  |             |             |                |
| <b>Albany</b>                            |             |             |                |
| Beatrice and Bjorn Hori #12              | 82          | 115         | 197            |
| Sue Mellers #10                          | 93          | 152         | 245            |
| Joanna Reed and Paul Fine #9             | 88          | 131         | 219            |
| Scott Richerson #11                      | 98          | 161         | 259            |
| Debra Shushan #13                        | 43          | 140         | 183            |
|  |             |             |                |
| <b>BERKELEY</b>                          |             |             |                |
| Sallie Bryan #16                         | 94          | 128         | 222            |
| Pollinator Pathway #18                   | 52          | 101         | 153            |
| Hillside Club #17                        |             |             | 172            |
| Ruth Rogow #19                           | 64          | 64          | 128            |
| Phyllis Rothman #14                      | 62          | 95          | 157            |
| Dave Savidge and Jennifer Braun #15      | 46          | 136         | 182            |
|  |             |             |                |
| <b>Castro Valley</b>                     |             |             |                |
| Mary Cooper #34                          | 42          | 101         | 143            |
| Cecelia Fusich and Steve Falzone #31     | 61          | 127         | 188            |
| Danny Galindo and Eugene Shabelyanau #32 | 86          | 141         | 227            |
| Cindy and Richard Simons #35             |             |             | 127            |
| Susan and Bill Teefy #33                 | 96          | 133         | 229            |
|  |             |             |                |
| <b>El Cerrito</b>                        |             |             |                |
| Michael Graf #8                          | 89          | 104         | 193            |

|                                       |     |     |     |
|---------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>El Sobrante</b>                    |     |     |     |
| El Sobrante Library #4                | 30  | 30  | 60  |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Fremont</b>                        |     |     |     |
| Ed Ellebracht #38                     | 49  | 25  | 74  |
| Joel Lym #39                          | 43  | 33  | 76  |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Hayward</b>                        |     |     |     |
| Josh and David #37                    | 40  | 61  | 101 |
| Miriam Schalit #36                    | 20  | 33  | 53  |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Kensington</b>                     |     |     |     |
| Janet Parks #7                        | 109 | 125 | 234 |
| Seibi Lee and Joel Schoolnik #6       | 57  | 122 | 179 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Oakland</b>                        |     |     |     |
| Julie Benson #24                      | 122 | 172 | 294 |
| Clytia and Joe Curley #23             | 99  | 184 | 283 |
| Barbara Gansmiller #20                |     |     | 204 |
| Alton Jelks #25                       | 98  | 124 | 222 |
| Lewis / Rudraraju #26                 | 53  | 31  | 84  |
| Jamie Marantz #28                     | 44  | 85  | 129 |
| Brian Teng #27                        | 51  | 97  | 148 |
| Mary Ann Walsh and Richard Carter #22 | 113 | 126 | 239 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Piedmont</b>                       |     |     |     |
| Valerie Matzger #21                   | 202 | 203 | 405 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Pinole</b>                         |     |     |     |
| Kim and Jeff Jerge #2                 | 64  | 46  | 110 |
| Jen and Rolland Mathers #1            | 57  | 36  | 93  |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Richmond</b>                       |     |     |     |
| Anita Pereira #5                      | 57  | 77  | 134 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>San Leandro</b>                    |     |     |     |
| Stefanie Pruegel #30                  | 87  | 93  | 180 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>San Pablo</b>                      |     |     |     |
| Melody Esquer Gil #3                  | 17  | 38  | 55  |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>INLAND GARDENS</b>                 |     |     |     |
| <b>Alamo</b>                          |     |     |     |

|                                       |     |     |     |
|---------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Patricia Ramsay and Shawn O'Leary #47 | 106 | 169 | 275 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Clayton</b>                        |     |     |     |
| Kelly Marshall and Mike Weidner #44   | 112 | 132 | 244 |
| Nancy Niemeyer #43                    | 129 | 107 | 236 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Concord</b>                        |     |     |     |
| Dan and Lisa Wanket #42               | 117 | 117 | 234 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Danville</b>                       |     |     |     |
| Maria Sargent #48                     | 94  | 154 | 248 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Livermore</b>                      |     |     |     |
| Laura Cornett and Brad Buehler #50    | 32  | 48  | 80  |
| Maria and David Dawson #52            | 64  | 85  | 149 |
| Stephanie Jones and John Kundert #51  | 75  | 67  | 142 |
| Rodrigue Molyneaux Winery #53         | 31  | 71  | 102 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Martinez</b>                       |     |     |     |
| John Muir National Historic Site #40  | 102 | 101 | 203 |
| Nancy Salsig #41                      | 66  | 108 | 174 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Moraga</b>                         |     |     |     |
| Anne Chambers and Ed McAlpine #54     | 163 | 142 | 305 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Orinda</b>                         |     |     |     |
| Barbara and Phil Leitner #55          | 130 | 160 | 290 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>San Ramon</b>                      |     |     |     |
| Diane Griffiths #49                   | 77  | 107 | 184 |
|                                       |     |     |     |
| <b>Walnut Creek</b>                   |     |     |     |
| Nancy and Bryan Collins #45           | 136 | 244 | 380 |
| Nancy Wenninger - # 46                | 182 | 276 | 458 |

|              |             |             |              |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| <b>Total</b> | <b>4165</b> | <b>5677</b> | <b>10345</b> |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|

*When planning for a year, plant corn. When planning for a decade, plant trees.  
When planning for life, train and educate people.  
(Chinese proverb)*

## *Appendix A*

### **Comments from 2023 Tour attendees**

- Thank you so much to everyone who works to put this on!!!! It's an amazing resource!!
- All the gardens I visited were fantastic and the owners and volunteers were so kind and helpful.
- Appreciated the chance to talk to owners about care and maintenance -- have lots of information from Calscape and nurseries but it's not the same as talking to someone who lives with the plant.
- The new keystone species signs were inspirational!
- Keep doing what you are doing! Every year is different and I always learn something.
- The addition of green houses was like a dream!
- I loved the range of gardens!
- The tour was terrific. There was a nice variety of gardens, it was so well organized, and there was great educational signage.
- You do an amazing job of putting this together, and the hosts and volunteers at the gardens were great.
- I cannot imagine how this event could be improved.
- I appreciated being able to talk with the volunteers, hosts, and designers. Everyone was so welcoming and accommodating.
- The inclusion of green homes was great.
- Wonderful set-up, well-organized, fun atmosphere.
- You do an amazing job, every year. Thank you for your awesome commitment!
- I feel so grateful for the inspiration, thoughtful organization and all the hard work that goes in to these tours. THANK YOU!
- All the volunteers and owners we met were really great; they made us feel welcome, and were happy to engage, and answer questions.
- Such an excellent tour; so well organized. Being able to see photos of the gardens online prior to the tour was really helpful.
- Compliments on the keystone species signs. They are marvelous, informative, and inspiring. I will be planting some of, or more of, the listed plants.
- We really appreciated all the volunteers who participate.
- The information provided ahead of time (maps & garden descriptions) was fantastic.
- Thank you so much for your dedication to this effort. Native gardening is becoming more "mainstream," and that is fantastic. Your efforts are part of that shift in thinking.
- An amazing amount of organization goes into putting on this Tour. We appreciated the enthusiastic homeowners.

## *Appendix B*

Doug Tallamy article: “The Chickadee’s Guide to Gardening”

**OPINION:** NY Times, March 11, 2015

|  
The Chickadee’s Guide to Gardening

**By Douglas W. Tallamy**

March 11, 2015

I GREW up thinking little of plants. I was interested in snakes and turtles, then insects and, eventually, birds. Now I like plants. But I still like the life they create even more.

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

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

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

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

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

But local insects have only just met Bradford pears, in an evolutionary sense, and have not had the time — millennia — required to adapt to their chemical



defenses. And so Bradford pears stand virtually untouched in my neighbor's yard.

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

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

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

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

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

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

By the way, you might assume that my oak was riddled with unsightly caterpillar holes, but not so. Since birds eat most of the caterpillars before they get very large, from 10 feet away the oak looked as perfect as a Bradford pear.

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