

LANDSCAPES



Landscape architect David Thorne and architect Rich Bartlett worked together on this Craftsman-style home, far left, on 10 acres in Lafayette. Above: Thorne worked to preserve existing oaks. Left: California native lupine and poppies.

Protecting the habitat

"We go back periodically and meet with the client and see what's working and what's not and make sure the garden is thriving. During the project, we worked with a certified arborist, and some trees that were in poor condition had to be removed while others were pruned. We had to do everything we could to protect the existing oaks by reducing soil compaction and trampling. We also added 40 new oaks to create a natural long-term succession that would have occurred if the land had been previously undisturbed.

"Large drifts of native plants provide wildlife habitat and attract pollinators. For instance, seeds and berries of the Manzanita, Ribes (currant and goosberry) and Fragaria (rose family) plants feed native birds. The landscape is lit with low-wattage lighting to keep the site inconspicuous while allowing the homeowners to enjoy evenings outside. The low wattage also reduces negative effects of light pollution on wildlife."

Inspired by natives

Drought-tolerant landscaping in the shadow of Mount Diablo even before dry times

By Sophia Markoulakis

The drought has many home gardeners pushing the pause button on major projects and plantings, but we can still garden vicariously through social sites and "pin" (and pine over) gardens that have inspiring ideas.

Oakland landscape architect David Thorne's award-winning native landscape design is one such garden that's swoon-worthy and packed with great tips for gardeners during these lean water times.

"The beauty of what we did five years ago is that it was a forward-looking design using native plants, native oaks, succulents, storm-water management and a subsurface irrigation system," Thorne says.

The Craftsman-style Lafayette home and landscape sits on a 10-acre ridgetop with stunning 270-degree views of Mount Diablo and the Oakland hills.

Thorne worked with the home's architect, Rich Bartlett, concurrently, and the synergy between them is evident in how the two designs flow seamlessly from home to land and the vistas beyond.

"The client wanted a native landscape. Our goal was to restore and repopulate the barren ridgetop with oaks and native grasses," Thorne says.

The idea behind the design shows how natives and the reclamation of native trees can fit into your own yard today — and for years to come.

Sophia Markoulakis is a freelance writer in Burlingame. E-mail: home@sfchronicle.com



Photos by Treve Johnson / David Thorne Landscape Architect

Oakland landscape architect David Thorne worked to preserve much of the native flora, including oak trees, on the property of a Lafayette home, above, with a view of Mount Diablo.



A rain chain sends water back into the landscape.

Design tips

From landscape architect David Thorne. www.thornela.com

Irrigating natives: "This is a dynamic environment, including the plantings and how they are irrigated. Most areas of the landscape are permeable and rainwater is routed to flow back into the landscape. Swales are strategically placed to collect roof and surface runoff so that when it does rain the plantings near them are sympathetic to the season and the weather. All of the precious rainfall that hits this property is collected."

Planting around oaks and redwoods:

"We have several beautiful native oak trees that we work with in California, and they shouldn't be irrigated in the summer so the best practice is to not plant under our Live or Valley Oaks. Instead, add a bench or birdbath or other sculptural element and leave it be.

"If you do plant under oaks, do so only toward the outer canopy perimeter, add drought-tolerant natives that work in dry shade and tolerate reduced summer watering. For under our coastal redwoods, where many other plants won't grow, try our native ground covers such as Western wild ginger (*Asarum caudatum*) and Wild sorrel (*Oxalis oregana*)."

What to plant: low-water natives

"Cast native wildflower seeds in the fall before it rains. It's an easy way to get color into the garden and provides habitat for birds and bees. If you forget and early spring rolls around, plant California poppies in 4-inch pots in a variety of colors; they'll take easily and reseed. Consider planting Milkweed (*Aesclepias*) as it's a host plant for Monarch butterflies, which need serious help with habitat these days."

FOR DRY SHADE AREAS UNDER OAKS

- ▶▶ Island alumroot (*Heuchera maxima*) and crevice alumroot (*H. micrantha* 'Palace Purple')
- ▶▶ Foothill sedge (*Carex tumulicola*)
- ▶▶ Variegated Carmel creeper, right (*Ceanothus griseus horizontalis* 'Diamond Heights')
- ▶▶ Western sword fern (*Polystichum munitum*)
- ▶▶ Beach strawberry (*Fragaria chiloensis*)



Brant Ward / The Chronicle

FOR SUNNY AREAS

- ▶▶ Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)
- ▶▶ Ceanothus varieties
- ▶▶ Salvias, right, especially Salvia 'Winifred Gilman'
- ▶▶ Penstemons (*Penstemon heterophyllus* 'Margarita BOP')
- ▶▶ Manzanita ground cover (*Arctostaphylos* 'John Dourley')



Alvin Jornada / Special to The Chronicle