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HOME & GARDEN

A LOS ALTOS TOWN CRIER PUBLICATION • SPRING 2025

IN THIS ISSUE

LUSH SUMMER GARDEN

SOIL&WATER GARDEN
WEIGHT OF CLUTTER
FRUGAL WATERING
NATIVE PLANTS *AND MORE*

A professional headshot of Cynthia A. Wemyss, a woman with short, dark, wavy hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a black blazer over a white top, a silver chain-link necklace, and silver hoop earrings.

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ON THE COVER:
Head Farmette Charmaine Turbow holding a bucket of fresh cut Polka dahlias. *COURTESY OF CHARMAINE TURBOW.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS



5

GARDENING GROUP

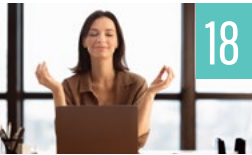
Soil&Water Garden connects residents to nature



10

FLOWER GARDEN

Flowers or Bust:
A guide to creating a lush summer cut flower garden



18

CLUTTER'S EFFECTS

The hidden weight of clutter:
How your space affects your mind



22

Q&A

Q&A with a professional organizer



24

NATIVE GARDEN

California plants bring native beauty to front, back yards



30

PESTS

What should we do about rat and ant pests around Los Altos?



36

WATER WISELY

Be a waterwise gardener

Soil & Water Garden

CONNECTS RESIDENTS TO NATURE

BY CHRISTINA CASILLAS

STAFF WRITER | CHRISTINAC@LATC.COM

A community-operated garden is not what many expect to find in a public park, but it's what passersby will find if they venture into Mountain View's seemingly unsuspecting 1.2-acre Heritage Park.

The city of Mountain View established Heritage Park, 771 Rengstorff Ave., in 2017. It's dwarfed by the sizes of and amenities offered at other parks in the city, and to some in

the community, it's not that intriguing.

But for Soil&Water Garden volunteers, it's the perfect place for a community garden. On almost any given Saturday from January through October, they can be found tending to and growing delicious and nutritious fruits and vegetables.

The garden, which volunteer Karen (who chose not to give her last name for privacy concerns) described as a co-op, includes raised garden beds

with an array of veggies – from varieties of zucchini and lettuce to bok choy, trailing sugar snap peas and root vegetables – to herbs and a number of flowers, like dahlias and zinnias.

Like any other garden, what's being grown there is dictated by the season.

Because Mountain View is in USDA Hardiness Zone 9b, volunteers plan to plant tomatoes sometime in April, while butter lettuce heads and basil sprouts are already growing quite nicely.

Although the city of Mountain View owns Demonstration Garden in Heritage Park – where Soil&Water Garden is located – it operates differently than the number of other community gardens the city owns, including the Latham, Willowgate and Senior Center community gardens. ➤

Soil&Water volunteer Dianna packs soil into a container soon to hold a recently germinated plant on March 29. Early spring is when veggies and fruits are harvested in the summer months tend to sprout. PHOTO BY CHRISTINA CASILLAS | TOWN CRIER



The Latham, Willowgate and Senior Center community gardens have paid plots (ranging from \$50 to \$150) that residents can join a waitlist for, and the plants grown on the plots are the responsibility of the resident to whom it's assigned.

Plants that are grown in the Soil&Water Garden are decided on by volunteers; what people bring to be planted is cared for by everyone, and what is harvested is only harvested by a plant's planter – apart from those trees and plants donated to the group by people who are moving or have no space at home for them anymore.



It's perfect, Karen said, because it operates differently than Mountain View's gardens and there's no waiting list and there's always going to be someone to care for the plants. "You just show up here and plant," another volunteer said.

Unlike years prior, Karen said this planting season is a bit different as frequently returning volunteers have divided up the care of different plants. "This year, people signed up for (caring for different plants)," Karen said. "I signed up for – me and (volunteer Pirouz Zarrinkhat) over there – we signed up for managing the tomatoes. And then someone else said, 'Oh, I will manage the herbs.'"

Many of the volunteers have their own special responsibilities; Zarrinkhat and Karen are both part of the watering committee. Volunteers can also be part of the planting or tech committees. The planting committee, as the name suggests, is dedicated to the location and planting of different sprouts and seedlings, while



the tech committee helps with the group's website, Instagram page and newsletters.

The committees were started because many of the responsibilities were falling on the shoulders of the lead gardeners. The committees are a way to help volunteers feel more connected to the group's mission and helps keep responsibilities balanced, Karen said. ➤



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A volunteer waters the soil in a planter box awaiting the planting of more veggies. To the side of the empty planter are different varieties of lettuce. PHOTO BY CHRISTINA CASILLAS | TOWN CRIER

HISTORY

Although Soil&Water Garden is operating out of its own space, its beginnings were modest, according to lead gardener Susan Harder. Soil&Water Garden founder Kavita Dave Coombe started the project because she and a few friends wanted to introduce their young children to the value of gardening.

But the waiting list for a city plot was long, and eventually Coombe and her friends found someone who let them grow plants in part of their backyard, Harder said.

“That’s how they got started as a group,” she said. “And then after a few years, a couple seasons passed, then they had this negotiation with the city to get this space.”

The garden has been in Heritage Park for eight years, and during that time, volunteers have come and gone; on average, Harder said they have an average of 90 to 110 unique volunteers every year. Most Saturdays bring out around 16 to 24 volunteers of varying ages, from children to older adults, to the garden.

The city of Mountain View provides the water and space to the garden, but the rest of the responsibilities belong to the group.

“Any hardware supplies; when our irrigation breaks, we do our repairs, so we need to purchase supplies for that. We purchase seedlings, seeds, the soil – all those things cost money,” Harder said, gesturing at a load of soil one of the high school volunteers was unloading. “I think that load of soil is probably close to \$1,000 nowadays. We spend hundreds of dollars on soil a year.”

Funds are given to Soil&Water by individual donors, the Los Altos Mountain View Community Foundation, Google, the Mountain View Kiwanis Club and the city of Mountain View.



In an effort to encourage children’s participation and knowledge of the garden, the Mountain View Kiwanis Club recently donated a few tables, a chair and a camera to the children of the group to use.

Harder, who also helped create Living Classroom curriculum for Mountain View classrooms, is one of the main leaders when it comes to creating projects for kids to work on at the garden, Karen said.

Karen’s children come with her to the garden often; the garden is inclusive and children can be found helping plant seedlings, drawing banana slugs and sharks, or simply roaming about, asking other volunteers questions while surrounded by nature with no screens in sight. 🌱

For more on Soil&Water Garden, visit soilandwatergarden.org. Donations can be made to the group through the Los Altos Mountain View Community Foundation.





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FLOWERS OR BUST:

A guide to creating a lush summer cut flower garden

BY CHARMAINE TURBOW

SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

Before starting my flower farm in Los Altos, I spent hours combing the internet, scouring countless garden books and dreaming of creating a floral oasis in our backyard. I loved the idea of bringing the garden indoors, having flowers spill into our kitchen with lush arrangements.

The hours quickly transformed into days, and then into months. I realized that creating a lush cut flower garden can be overwhelming. I also made a lot of mistakes. Based on my experience, I created this guide to help others design a cut flower garden with ease. ➤



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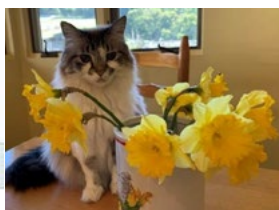
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Growing a garden may seem difficult, but Charmaine Turbow has been doing it for some time. All the spring blooms included above were grown in Turbow's own farm. All members of the family can join in on the fun of planting, growing and harvesting one's own blooms. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHARMAINE TURBOW AND BY SHELLY BOWERS | SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER



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PLAN

Find a sunny spot: Summer cut flowers generally love sunshine. An area of your yard that receives 6-8 hours of sunlight is best. Even areas that receive late afternoon shade should be fine. Consider planting in the ground, in raised beds or even using pots.

Amend your soil: Use organic matter, compost/humus and a natural fertilizer. Flowers will be healthier and perform better with proper feeding.

Appropriate irrigation: When watering and battling our local clay soil, consider drip irrigation because it is more efficient than overhead spraying and hand watering. Most summer cut flowers like regular irrigation. Irrigate after the sun has set to minimize evaporation and maximize absorption.

Head farmette tip: Dripworks.com is a great resource for instructions and plans. For the DIYers, we love using EasyLoc irrigation parts that can be purchased at our local hardware stores.

Choose a color palette: Before choosing plants, I suggest choosing a section of the color wheel as your foundation for selecting plants. Don't get me wrong – I love the rainbow. Selecting plants can become overwhelming with too many choices. ➤

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Summer may feel like it's months away, but spring is the perfect time to start seeds and purchase rootstock, seedlings and plants.

Sourcing: It's easy to purchase seeds. Because most seeds are packaged and viable for a growing season, try asking a neighbor, or join a local garden club and share seeds. When purchasing root stock/tubers and plants, I recommend sourcing locally from flower farmers and nurseries. By shopping locally, root stock and plants are naturalized to our climate.

Choose purposeful greenery or foundation plants: As our farm is also our home, we are all about beauty and function. Every plant we put into the ground not only needs to be a part of our landscape plan, but inevitably serves a purpose for future cut flowers, filler or greenery. Choose varieties that are not only robust, but also do well cut in a vase.

Don't forget the filler: Create visual interest in your garden and floral works of art by using plants with texture and height. ➤

Planting a garden today can result in beautiful blooms tomorrow. Planning ahead and knowing where you're going to get rootstocks, seedlings and plants can make the summer bloom gardening process easier, and in no time you'll have flowers as beautiful as the ones pictured at right. TOP PHOTO: SHELLY BOWERS | SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER. BOTTOM PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CHARMINE TURBOW



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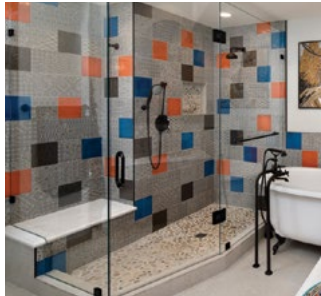
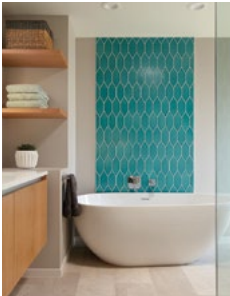
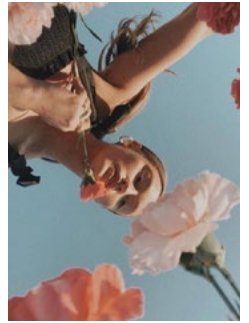
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Head farmette's favorite foundation plants:

- Scented Geranium
- Abelia, Edward Goucher
- Australian mint bush, Prostanthera ovafolia 'variegata'
- Honeysuckle, Lonicera

Head farmette's favorite summer blooms:

- Dahlias: Cafe au lait, Diva, Terracotta
- Roselilies
- Zinnias: Benary and Blush varieties
- Cosmos: Apricotta and Double Click Cranberry

Head farmette's favorite summer fillers:

- Celosia
 - Lemon Basil
 - Love in a puff vine
-



HARVEST

In a few short months, your garden will be teeming with blooms. Be sure to cut flowers regularly and feed with a flower fertilizer or compost tea. Harvest flowers in the early morning when temperatures are cool and flowers are most hydrated. Be sure to rest your blooms for several hours in a cool and dark spot before handling. 🌸

For more growing tips, and to learn how we are growing rainbows in zone 9b Los Altos, watch the videos posted to our YouTube channel, @TurbowFarms.

You can also subscribe to our newsletter by visiting [TurbowFarms.com](https://www.turbowfarms.com).

Charmaine Turbow is Turbow Farm's head farmette.

Growing common and not-so-common blooms, Turbow Farms offers a unique blend of floral farming and design through their workshops and team-building events. Floral arrangements and subscriptions are also available through the farm's website.

Charmaine also shares her love of floral knowledge as a regular contributor with California's Farm Bureau television series, "California Bountiful."

PLANTING

Transplanting: When you're ready to plant, protect your seedlings and young plants from transplant shock. Plant when the forecast calls for a few days of steady temperatures and plant in morning when temperatures are cooler.

Watering: Water your site deeply prior to planting. This ensures hydration for young and tender plants as they transition and set their roots.

Mind the vermin: If your garden is prone to gophers, moles and rabbits, be sure to select plants that will fend for themselves or provide ample protection. For example, when planting dahlias, consider using a gopher basket or construct one using half-inch hardware cloth. If this isn't possible, pot planting is a great alternative.





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The hidden weight of clutter:

How your space affects your mind

BY DR. DANIELLE KAMIS

In today's fast-paced world, clutter can accumulate almost unnoticed. Yet, the impact of a chaotic environment on mental health is profound. Studies have shown that excess clutter can increase stress, reduce focus and even contribute to anxiety and depression. The good news? Decluttering and organizing can provide a sense of control, relief and improved well-being.

The mental toll of clutter

Clutter is more than just an eyesore – it has psychological consequences. When surrounded by excessive items, the brain struggles to process the overload of stimuli, leading to feelings of overwhelm and fatigue. A study by UCLA's Center on Everyday Lives and Families found that people with high levels of household clutter exhibited increased cortisol (stress hormone) levels, particularly in women. Additionally, a Princeton University study concluded that a cluttered environment makes it harder to focus and complete tasks efficiently.

How to organize for mental wellness

Rather than viewing organization as a chore, shifting perspective toward it as an act of self-care can make all the difference. Here are practical ways to declutter while prioritizing mental well-being:

1. Start small

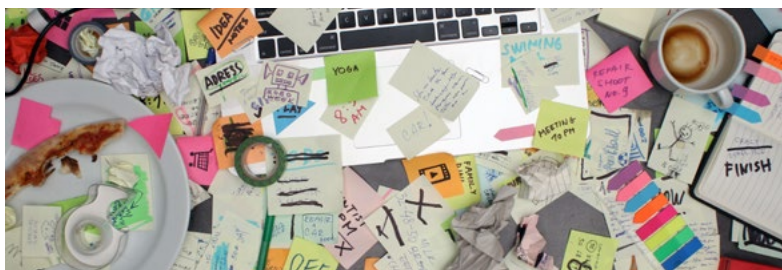
Taking on an entire home at once can feel overwhelming. Instead, begin with a single drawer, a shelf or a corner of a room. The sense of accomplishment from completing one small task can fuel motivation to continue.

2. Follow the "one-year rule"

If you haven't used an item in the past year, consider donating or discarding it. This method prevents unnecessary hoarding while making space for things that truly add value to your life.

3. Embrace mindful decluttering

Instead of hurriedly tossing items, approach decluttering mindfully. Ask yourself: Does this item bring me joy? Does it serve a meaningful purpose?



This technique, popularized by Marie Kondo, helps maintain a balance between sentimentality and practicality.

4. Establish daily habits

Spending just 10-15 minutes a day tidying up can prevent clutter from accumulating. Simple actions such as making the bed, putting away dishes and organizing a desk each evening contribute to a cleaner, more peaceful environment.

5. Prioritize functional spaces

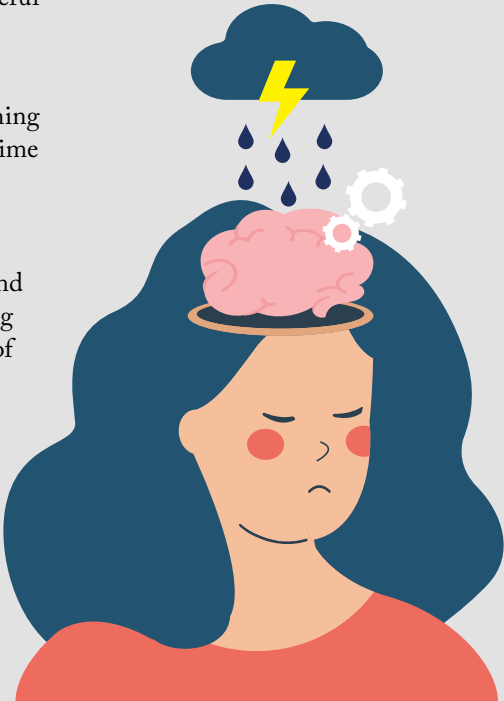
Designate specific areas for frequently used items, ensuring everything has a home. Organized spaces not only reduce stress but also save time spent searching for misplaced belongings.

Caring for your home as a form of self-care

A well-maintained home fosters a sense of calm and control. Beyond decluttering, incorporating soothing elements such as plants, soft lighting and calming scents can enhance a space’s therapeutic effect. The act of caring for your home becomes an extension of self-care – nurturing your surroundings nurtures your mind.

Decluttering isn’t about perfection; it’s about creating a space that supports your mental and emotional wellbeing. By making small, intentional changes, you can cultivate a home that brings you peace rather than stress. The journey to a clutter-free life starts with a single step – and that step can lead to a clearer mind, a lighter spirit and a happier home. ❖

Danielle Kamis, M.D., is a licensed psychiatrist with a practice in downtown Los Altos. For more information on her practice, specialties and services, visit kamismd.com.



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Q & A

WITH A PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZER

Los Altos resident Lyn Rogers has been a professional organizer, in addition to a decluttering and life management specialist, for more than 45 years. Her organization tips have also helped many through her Los Altos Town Crier column, “Conquering Clutter.”

What led you to specialize in professional organization, decluttering and life management?

I’ve always been others-oriented and I saw a great need in those areas. It feels especially important to be non-judgmental and to be a safe place for people to get the help and inspiration that they need.

Does organizing and decluttering bring you joy or any other positive emotions?

It brings me incredible joy to be in a space that’s uncluttered and organized. It’s peaceful and calming and relieves much of the stress that I’ve experienced during the day.



When clients call requesting your help, what’s the most common call you get?

The most common theme to every call is that people feel so overwhelmed that they don’t know where to start, and they’ve all but given up trying.

Has the clutter that people tend to accumulate changed over your years as a professional organizer?

It only changes with the age of the client, but the issues are the same. Perhaps too many toys for families with young children, inherited furniture and household goods for those in their middle ages, and seniors have all of the above, plus excess medical supplies.

Sometimes it’s hard for people to let go of their things. How can someone who is trying to declutter but has issues donating or throwing things away do so more effectively?

Start with a charity that you really believe in or a family in need that you know. Oftentimes, it’s much easier to give directly to someone who will love it as much as you do because you want them to honor that memory.

Some people call themselves organized or disorganized by nature – is this a true belief? Can being organized be learned?

Unfortunately, people try to organize themselves exactly as they were taught by their parents, which doesn’t always work with everyone. There are both micro and macro systems, and you need to find the one that works for you so it’s easier to maintain. It can be learned with a patient teacher who will show you all the right tools specific to you.

Some people just don’t have the motivation to start decluttering or organizing because it’s overwhelming and they don’t know where to start. What would you suggest to those people?

Start with something small and only for 10 minutes. Get rid of trash and anything expired. Once you begin with things you shouldn’t have in your home or office, it becomes so much easier to continue. Just 10 minutes a day can make a huge difference.

Have you noticed a connection between a home’s clutter or disorganization and the mental health of those who live in the home?

One thing I notice is the lack of real self-care. It’s vitally important to balance decluttering with rewards that bring inward peace and better health. Clutter is a very heavy mental weight that will make you depressed and feel like a failure. I know you’re not a failure; you just weren’t given the right tools to succeed by a professional organizer.



What advice would you give to those who need help with decluttering or organizing but don’t reach out because they’re too embarrassed or ashamed?

I never pass judgment and everything is confidential. You can show me pictures first if that helps. Lots of people take my organizing classes so they can DIY their home’s reorganization until they’re more comfortable having me visit. I usually meet for an hour to assess the needs of the family, and then I give homework, which may seem small but will make a huge difference before we start working together. Calling me first to ask questions is always the best first step. 🌸

Los Altos resident Lyn Rogers, a professional organizer, is owner and CEO of Lyn At Your Service. For more information, visit LynAtYourService.com.



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If you want plants for your front and backyards that offer the most seasonal beauty with the least amount of water and maintenance, native California plants are the way to go. Like other plants, they will require care and water for the first year or two as they become established. By year three, depending on the weather, most natives can thrive with deep watering once a month or less in the summer.

Every garden requires some maintenance, of course. In my own gardens, I've noticed that maintaining a small clump of non-native bearded irises – considered one of the lowest-maintenance flowering plants – requires more time and attention than maintaining a whole bed of adjoining natives. By contrast, native irises can be more floriferous while needing much less maintenance.

Maintaining a native garden may call for a change in perspective. The best-designed native gardens change with the seasons. Designing for a sequence of blooms, rather than adding “annual color,” adds an element of surprise as flowers appear throughout the year. Native gardens look like California, rather than trying to look like another part of the world. For instance, Japanese-style gardens stress the use of plants native to the region, so in California, a Japanese garden uses California native plants. ➤

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It was an absolute pleasure to work with Ryan. Both the smooth process and the amazing result of our Los Altos home sale exceeded our expectations. Nobody knows the area like Ryan does, and his first-hand involvement in preparing us for the process, prepping the home and being onsite to personally sweat the details was incredibly valuable – especially since we had moved out of the area and essentially sold the house "remotely" with Ryan's local guidance. Bottom line—if you want a stress-free/excellent outcome experience, with a partner that's super-easy to work with, call Ryan!

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Above: Featured on the 2025 Growing Natives Garden Tour, this garden in north Los Altos was designed to support wildlife and features California fuchsia under the front windows. At right: Golden currant blooms in midwinter to early spring, followed by berries beloved by birds. Espalier this sprawling shrub to enjoy it in a smaller garden. PHOTOS COURTESY OF TANYA KUCAK



Native gardens are welcoming to birds, butterflies and pollinators, so pesticides are not used, and plants can be chosen to attract certain pollinators or to provide food or shelter for specific birds.

Longtime native gardener and garden designer Patrica Evans has a list of favorites that she has used in her own Los Altos garden and in clients' gardens. Shrubs and perennials are "easier to fit into small gardens, easier to maintain," and do not need to be replanted, as annuals

do, she said. Here is a partial list of plants she has grown in her own garden and in clients' gardens "with a lot of neglect, limited water and limited maintenance (mostly seasonal pruning)."

- Concha, Ray Hartman and Yankee Point ceanothus
- Howard McMinn, Lutsko's Pink, Dr. Hurd, Lester Rowntree and Rosy Dawn manzanita
- Cleveland, Bee's Bliss, Figueroa, hummingbird and white sage
- Claremont and golden currant and fuchsia-flowered gooseberry
- Everett's Choice and Calistoga hummingbird fuchsia
- Sticky monkeyflower (stick with the species; "hybrids are not as tough")
- Island alum root and Old La Rochelle coral bells
- Common wooly sunflower (*Eriophyllum lanatum*)
- Chaparral clematis and virgin's bower
- Twinberry and pink (or California) honeysuckle
- Ken Taylor fremontia
- Coyote mint
- Ocean spray or cream bush

Evans makes the most of small spaces by espaliering some of these plants, including Yankee Point ceanothus, Lester Rowntree manzanita, fuchsia-flowered gooseberry and golden currant.

You can see many of these plants in person if you attend the Growing Natives Garden Tour (gngt.org), held each spring, which features mostly home gardens. The tour took place on April 12 and 13 this year, and you can browse the website anytime to see photos of gardens and plant lists for inspiration. If you want to venture ➤

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farther, you can still sign up for a free native garden tour May 3-4 in the East Bay (bringingbackthenatives.net) and a free eco-friendly garden tour May 10 in Marin and Sonoma County (savingwaterpartnership.org/eco-friendly-garden-tour/eco-friendly-garden-tour-2025/).

In addition, browse the GNGT website for public gardens you can visit throughout the year, such as the Woodland Library Drought Tolerant Demonstration Garden in south Los Altos, which was featured in last year's tour and boasts 40 native plants. On the page listing the gardens, look for the Public Garden logo (gngt.org/GNGT/Gardens.php?year=2025): eight on this year's tour, and 10 last year in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. 🌸

Tanya Kucak gardens organically.

Clockwise: Native douglas irises bloom profusely in low, spreading clumps. Pink-flowering currants are some of the most spectacular blooming native shrubs. Emerging in late winter, the flowers sparkle with raindrops during the rainy season. Depending on the variety, ceanothus shrubs can bloom in shades from white and sky blue to deep blue and violet. Fuchsia-flowered gooseberry's vibrant red flowers attract hummingbirds. It is one of the first to bloom once the winter rains start. Its large thorns make good cover for wildlife, but in a small garden it can be espaliered or tucked into a corner. PHOTOS COURTESY OF TANYA KUCAK



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The gnawing question

in one pest pro's mind:

WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT RAT AND ANT PESTS AROUND LOS ALTOS?

BY ZACH SMITH

SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

Every year, I reflect on the overwhelming number of calls I receive about rats and ants invading everything from kitchens and cars to RVs, pool equipment, sheds, gardens and attics throughout Los Altos and its neighboring communities. These recurring pest issues continue to bother our community, leaving many wondering how to make them stop.

We'll discuss that later, but first it's important to understand who we're fighting.

First, let's talk about rats. For the past 16 years, I've been called to resolve countless rodent issues, and the biggest culprit we encounter in our community is the native woodrat (*Neotoma*). Woodrats

aren't closely related to the invasive rats that make headlines across the country – namely, roof rats (*Rattus rattus*), also known as black rats and Norway rats (*Rattus norvegicus*), commonly called sewer rats.

Unlike the invasive species, woodrats are native to California and have a unique lifestyle, building intricate stick nests in shrubs and wooded areas just beyond our property lines. They also have a

much shorter tail, larger ears and a more rounded face compared to the sleek, long-tailed roof rat.

While some species of woodrats are protected, the majority we encounter locally are not. Regardless of their status, the damage they cause is similar to all rats. They gnaw relentlessly on car wiring, household insulation and even PEX pipes – the plastic tubing that carries water throughout our homes.

When any species of rats take up residence in a home, another problem often follows: rat mites. These tiny arachnids are similar to chiggers, nearly invisible to the naked eye, and leave itchy welts where they bite. While rat mites can't survive on human blood for long, they'll certainly try if their rat hosts disappear. In fact, we often get calls

from people thinking they have a flea problem when it's actually rat mites.

Whenever we help homeowners with rat issues, we don't just focus on the rodents themselves – we look at the surrounding environment. I always check >

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for conditions that encourage rats to settle in. If needed, we help homeowners trim back brush and lift tree limbs away from the house, along with removing food sources and hiding spots. It's much easier to make a property unappealing to rats than to stop them from visiting in the first place.

And now let's shift to ants: specifically, Argentine ants. The number one ant offender these days is the Argentine ant. This invasive species has become established in much of California and the western U.S. Unlike many other ant species, Argentine ants don't fight among themselves. Instead, they cooperate to grow massive super-colonies. And they are very thirsty ants, invading homes for moisture whenever they must.

A single super-colony may contain hundreds or even thousands of queens, producing new workers daily.

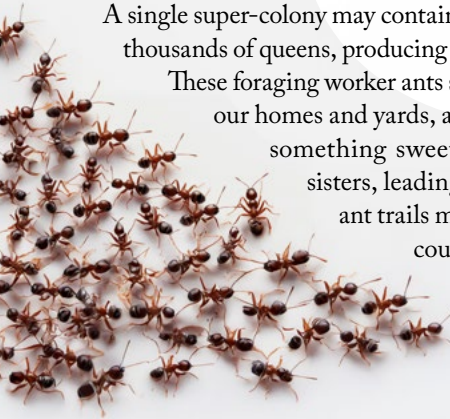
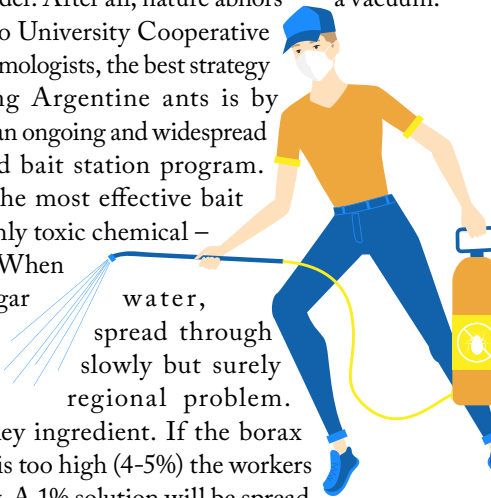
These foraging worker ants spread out through our homes and yards, and when they find something sweet, they alert their sisters, leading to those familiar ant trails marching across our countertops.

It's fascinating to see how quickly an ant problem will come back;

the usual curative treatment only knocks out a portion of the super colony and the vacuum effect will draw in new ants in short order. After all, nature abhors a vacuum.

According to University Cooperative Extension entomologists, the best strategy for controlling Argentine ants is by implementing an ongoing and widespread outdoor liquid bait station program. Fortunately, the most effective bait isn't some highly toxic chemical – it's just borax. When mixed with sugar water, borax will be spread through the colony and slowly but surely kill the whole regional problem. Time is the key ingredient. If the borax concentration is too high (4-5%) the workers die too quickly. A 1% solution will be spread farther as the delay works in our favor.

People who find themselves in a never-ending battle with ants are likely putting out an insufficient number of ant traps or spraying ineffective insecticides, which just knock out the local worker ants. While people may get a quick fix, without a long-term approach, these methods don't lead to lasting results. ➤



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Wildfire Community Preparedness Day

May 3, 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Join us in celebrating National Wildfire Community Preparedness Day in Los Altos Hills. This is our Second Annual Firewise campaign event that encourages people and organizations everywhere to come together on a single day to take action to raise awareness and reduce wildfire risks. It is held annually in the United States and Canada.

Building A Community Preparedness Network

June 18, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM, Los Altos Town Hall



Join LAHCFD as we introduce the Neighbors Helping Neighbors campaign and explore how small actions within your home and neighborhood can create a stronger, more resilient community.

Learn how to strengthen connections with neighbors, share resources, and build a local support network to better prepare for emergencies.

To register for these or any other classes, please visit lahcfd.org/classes

2025 Evacuation Route Program

Our 2025 Evacuation Route Program is underway. Maintenance along the Page Mill Evacuation Route began at the end of April and will wrap up soon. Our next project is continued maintenance along the Moody – El Monte Roads Evacuation Route, which is scheduled for June. Please be careful as you drive, cycle, ride, and walk, in and around the project areas.

For more information about our work to improve fire safety along major routes within the District, please visit lahcfd.org/projects

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Also, Argentine ants love feeding off the honeydew produced by aphids and scale. Without these insects, and with no access to water, Argentine ants cannot thrive outside the home. Keeping the garden free of these insects is key.

As a pest control professional, I get a lot of satisfaction from teaching people about the biology and behavior of common pests. It's incredibly rewarding to see someone's eyes light up as they begin to understand what they're up against, rather than just solving the problem, collecting a check and moving on.

If I were in this business just for the money, I'd have chosen a different career. The real joy comes from helping people and playing a part in their long-term pest management success.

The fixes to the top-two biggest pests plaguing Los Altos are to clean up brush and keep the plants a few feet away from a structure's walls and roof and keep the water and aphids under control. This, in addition to traps and bait for ants, and you can start to have a pest-free home. It takes a big picture approach to stop regional pests from singling out your particular address. 🐜

Zach Smith is a pest professional, owner of Smith's Pest Management in San Jose, and a Cal Poly Horticulturist.

For more information on Smith's Pest Management, visit smithspestmanagement.com.



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Without hesitation, I think **Nisha deserves this 5 star Yelp rating** for several reasons, and I **strongly recommend anyone looking to buy or sell** a home in the Bay Area work with her.

Some of the areas where Nisha particularly shines that I will highlight are **market knowledge, connections, and personality."**

— Scott M.



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Be a waterwise gardener

BY MELINDA MYERS

Too much or not enough water and never when your garden needs it. This is a common complaint of gardeners no matter where they live. Make a few changes in your plant selection and garden care to help manage water use while growing healthy plants.

All plants need sufficient moisture after planting and for several months to a year or two to develop a robust root system. Those labeled as drought tolerant are better able to tolerate periods of drought once established. Always water the area surrounding new plantings thoroughly when the top few inches of soil are crumbly and moist. Gradually reduce the frequency, and once the plants are established, you'll need to water less often.

Moisture-loving plants are good choices for areas receiving sufficient and consistent moisture throughout the growing season to meet their needs. In locations where this is not the case, consider grouping moisture-loving plants together so you use less water and can concentrate watering efforts to just one or two locations in your landscape.



Fluctuating periods of excessive and insufficient rainfall add to the challenge. Many native plants, once established, tolerate periods of wet and dry soil and can be found on lists of rain garden plants suited to your area.

Keep water in the garden, out of the storm sewers and reduce the risk of flooding while improving your garden. Adding several inches of compost to the top 8 to 12 inches of soil increases the soil's ability to absorb and retain water. It also improves drainage in heavy soils.

Top dress existing gardens by spreading an inch of compost over the soil surface. Soil organisms will help move it into the soil to improve plant growth. Lend nature a hand by using an auger bit on a drill to aerate compacted soil. This pushes some compost into the top four to six inches of soil.

Mulching the soil with leaves, evergreen needles or other organic matter also helps. This task has many benefits, including conserving moisture, reducing the risk of erosion and compaction, suppressing weeds and as the mulch decomposes, improving the soil. A 1- to 3-inch layer over the soil surface is all you need. The finer the mulch material, the thinner the layer of mulch that is needed.

Collect rainwater in rain barrels or cisterns when it is plentiful and store it until needed. Use this to water ornamental containers and plantings. Always ➤

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check with your municipality first, since some restrict this practice while others offer rebates or rain barrels at a discounted price.

You won't need to worry about mosquitoes breeding inside your rain barrel if you place an organic mosquito control product like Mosquito Dunks (SummitResponsibleSolutions.com) in rain barrels and other water features. Mosquito Dunks provide 30 days of control, are natural and organic, and won't harm pets, fish, wildlife or children.



Leaf mulch conserves moisture, reduces the risk of erosion and compaction, suppresses weeds and improves the soil as it decomposes. PHOTO COURTESY OF MELINDAMYERS.COM

Periods of heavy rainfall create another challenge. Covering the soil with plants and mulch helps protect your soil from compaction and erosion that often happens during these events. Planting trees, shrubs and groundcovers will slow the flow of rainwater, increase the amount of water that stays in your landscape for plants to use and help filter dust and pollutants out of rainwater before it enters groundwater.

Rain gardens are another strategy for managing water in your yard. These are designed to capture excessive rainfall, drain within 24 to 36 hours, tolerate dry and wet periods and filter pollutants from the rainwater before it enters the groundwater.

Start by incorporating one or more of these strategies to help manage rainwater in your landscape. Continue to monitor success, adapt as needed, and include more options to help you successfully garden even during periods of excessive or limited rainfall. 🌻

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including the “Midwest Gardener’s Handbook, 2nd Edition” and “Small Space Gardening.” She hosts The Great Courses “How to Grow Anything” instant video and DVD series and the nationally syndicated “Melinda’s Garden Moment” TV and radio program. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for “Birds & Blooms” magazine and was commissioned by Summit for her expertise to write this article. Myers’ website is MelindaMyers.com.



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- Papillon Kitchen & Bath 35
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First Friday-Live Music

May 2 @ 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm

Living Electric Fair

May 4 @ 11:00 am - 3:00 pm

Downtown Bubbly Stroll

May 9 @ 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm

LAH Pathways Run/Walk

May 10 @ 9:00 am

Downtown Bike n' Dine

May 16 @ 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm

78th Los Altos Kiwanis Pet Parade

May 17 @ 10:00 am - 11:00 am

Head West State Street Market

May 25 @ 10:00 am - 5:00 pm

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