

# Inside Bay Area

## Plants, trees bloom in garden in former Livermore wasteland

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LIVERMORE — Granada Native Gardens spans just one-third of an acre, yet it takes Louann Tung an hour to get from one end to the other.

That's because she is constantly bending down to pick up non-native grasses that blow onto the site or stopping to admire a tree that has grown a foot or so since she last saw it.

She also takes time to describe a plant that to an untrained eye looks like an ordinary, brightly colored bush, and in so doing turns into a kind of preacher for nature's unsung heroes. Instead of a Bible, she holds a large photograph book in her right hand. She points with her left to the secrets that lie within the Cleveland Sage, a semiround shrub with purplish flower heads.

"Native Americans would cook with it, roasting the seeds and mixing them with water," said Tung, a part-time scientist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

Tung and a handful of volunteers have learned a lot about sage and other plants during the past year. Volunteers, some of whom like Tung are affiliated with Friends of the Arroyo, have turned a formerly desolate, garbage-strewn piece of land near Granada High School into a thriving public garden featuring more than 50 plant species, 21 trees and artwork of endangered animals.

Alrie Middlebrook of San Jose, a landscape designer, was one of the few professionals who helped with the project.

It has not been easy. In addition to the arduous work of putting in the garden, volunteers return on a regular basis to water and nurture the plants. They also have had to cope with vandals, who tore apart the mosaic artwork on many of the park's tables last month. Someone also uprooted a big leaf maple tree, apparently taking it home.

Participants say all the work has been worth it. Jim Smith, who helped put in the garden, took time out from his commute from Pleasanton to Oakdale to view the site on a recent afternoon. He could not believe what he was seeing.

"It's wonderful," he said. "It's maturing very, very well."

"Right now, you can't go into a large chain store and find many native species, but we think that will change. There is not enough water for our thirsty plants. The future is native," Tung said.

The garden is one of nearly 60 places in Alameda and Contra Costa counties that will be featured in the Bringing Back the Natives Garden tour on Sunday. As in other native gardens, volunteers will be on hand at Granada from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. to explain facets of each of the plants and trees.

Admission is free. For details of the tour, call (510) 236-9558.

The park is on Murrieta Boulevard, one block south of Stanley Boulevard.

The Arroyo Mocho separates the garden from Granada High School, and a small foot bridge allows students to walk to the park and eat lunch on picnic tables.

Tung came up with the idea for the park after meeting with school officials about the problem of garbage being thrown into the arroyo. She conceived it as a small area with a few tables and plants, but it has grown over time.

As it stands today, volunteers estimate that the park would have cost \$250,000 to build if not for community help. The school district provided the land, and General Electric gave a \$12,000 donation for materials. GE made the donation in lieu of paying a fine from an unrelated project. Numerous workers from the company continue to volunteer at the park.

For more about Native Gardens or "Bringing Back the Natives" tour, visit [www.bringingbackthenatives.net](http://www.bringingbackthenatives.net).