

## Demonstration Garden Comes to Fremont Weedy Quarry Lakes land turning environmentally sustainable

Carol Spindler, Alameda County Master Gardener

Alameda County Master Gardeners, through an agreement with the East Bay Regional Park District, are developing a demonstration garden in the Quarry Lakes Regional Recreation Area located in Fremont. We also work in cooperation with the Alameda County Water District.



Although the garden was originally conceived to introduce the community to the use of plants that tolerate our dry summers with little or no additional water, our approach necessarily broadened to creating an environmentally sustainable garden. This includes soil building and composting, planting to attract beneficial insects, planting for wildlife, demonstrating the beauty of many non-thirsty plants, as well as saving water.

In 2010, we were offered a nearly four tenths of an acre plot of derelict land that is about 75 percent flat with the rest being a gentle slope. The years of gravel extraction with heavy equipment at the site had compacted the soil to 98 percent of its ability to be compacted. We couldn't dent it with shovel. It was also home to weeds of every kind and dozens of rabbits that seemed to enjoy watching what we were doing.

To control weeds and build soil, we covered the slope with mulch and then covered that with corrugated cardboard in the fall, before the rains. The park staff raked the flatter area with a soil ripper. We then seeded it with Soil Buster Cover crop seeds, covered it with straw, and hoped for rain. The cover crop (with the help of a watering or two due to late rains) took off beautifully and grew to about 4-feet tall. It has since been mowed down and will soon be tilled in by the EBRP staff. Then we will see if the soil is workable. Anyone taking out a driveway or other paved area at their home could use these same soil-building and aeration techniques to prepare planting areas.

To protect the roots of the three oak trees on site, we will place weed block cloth around their root areas and cover the cloth with mulch donated to us by Waste Management of San Leandro. It is good policy to keep heavy equipment, pathways, and summer water needy plants away from the trunks of oaks.

Our path plan divides the site into four irregular areas with a central area that in the future may be a place for benches, brochures, and perhaps signs. The planting plan will follow the installation of an irrigation system. One idea is to make each area display plants with specific characteristics such as insect attracting plants, bird friendly plants, native grasses, and so forth.

This park is exceptional in many ways: it is 539 acres, close to highly populated areas, has several lakes, fishing areas, a swimming beach, a volley ball area, picnic areas (some with

covered kiosks), trails, wildlife and the most stunning views of Mission Peak and the East Bay hills that you'll ever see. Our Demonstration Garden, located in a park with so much to offer, is in an excellent position to reach the public and offer education about environmentally sustainable gardening practices. We hope you will visit and watch our progress.

This will be the third Alameda County Master Gardener demonstration garden with one in Livermore showing landscape plants adapted to the region and one at Lake Merritt in Oakland testing vegetable and landscape plants for their adaptability to that area. For more information, visit our website at <http://acmg.ucdavis.edu/>

*Alameda County Master Gardeners (ACMGs) are adult volunteers of all ages and from all walks of life who want to help the diverse communities of Alameda County learn more about gardening. ACMGs are trained through the University of California and UC Cooperative Extension to extend research-based knowledge and information on home gardening issues. The Master Gardeners have two demonstration gardens in the county and offer a number of outreach programs to serve the public. For more information, visit.*

#### Free Talks

On the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of the month, the Alameda County Master Gardeners offer free talks on gardening topics at their Lake Merritt Trails Garden in Oakland. The 15-20 minute talks begin at noon. This month, on July 23, the topic is "Planting for Native Bees" by Celeste Ets-Hokin, native bee expert.

Getting there: The Trials Garden is located in the center of the community garden area behind the Lakeside Garden Center at 666 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland.