

GREENBRAE

SPRING 2011 GREENBRAE LANDSCAPING REPORT

PUBLISHED BY THE GREENBRAE PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION
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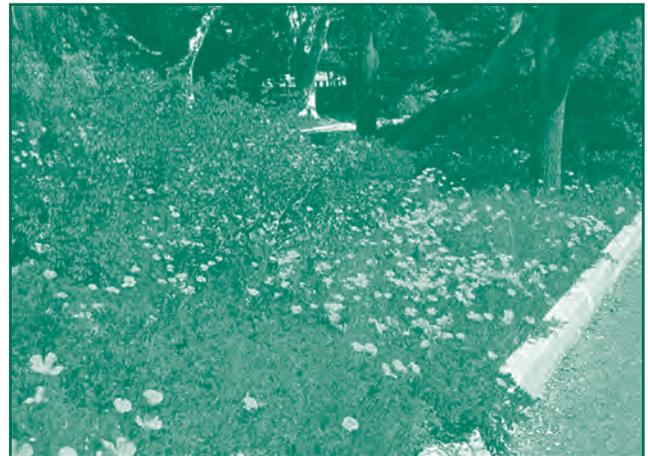
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Did you know that ~1/3 of the water that our water district (MMWD) supplies goes to landscaping? Thanks to a great start to our “rainy season,” our reservoirs are full. Drought concerns are eased, for now. But, remember we have no rains in the summer and water from MMWD is increasingly expensive. We need to conserve water using best practices and new technologies in our homes and landscaping. For specific resources and suggestions, see www.marinwater.org.



*California Poppies and Crimson Clover
in the Spring in Greenbrae*

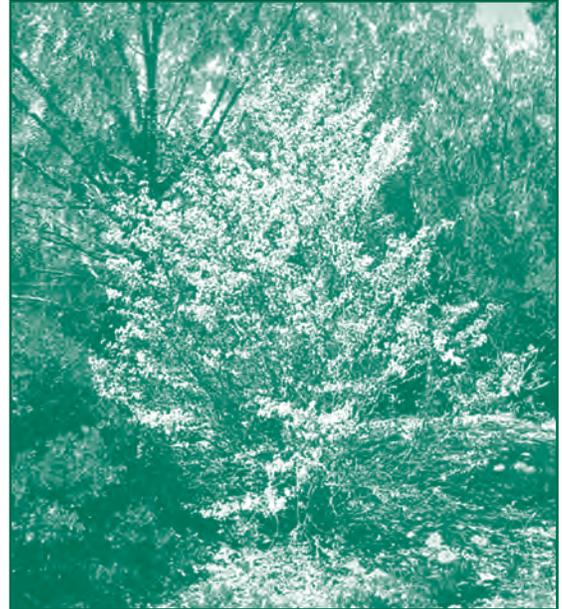


For our beautiful community of Greenbrae, we're up to several new landscaping projects and we've become a commercial leader in water management while we maintain and improve our community's medians, Sir Francis Drake frontage and parks. We're using "integrated pest management" approaches to controlling pests (rats, gophers, moles, insects) and fungi (Sudden Oak Death "water molds" and others). We're mulching heavily to improve our soils and mitigate weeds and now we fertilize using strictly certified organic materials. All to be as "green and sustainable" as we know how.

On a regular rotation and as required, we structurally and architecturally prune small to large heritage trees in the islands and curbsides to keep them healthy and to minimize limb and tree failures. Those of you who've lived here for decades will recall how typically in winter trees and limbs littered our roads after each storm. Not so any more. Our annual, preventive inspections and pruning have paid off.

As it warms up and flowers and new leaves push out everywhere, we all rejoice. It's time to celebrate our landscaping successes and to seek even more improvements in our community. And many improvements are coming (see below).

This winter, we pruned numerous heritage and street trees across Greenbrae. Many neighbors and the GPOA installed Barn Owl boxes across Greenbrae to encourage owls to join our community. Owls are voracious consumers of rodents (gophers, rats, moles, voles) helping to control our rodent populations without the need for pesticides. You've likely noticed the intensive mulching of our islands and parks with free "arborist chips" (from our winter tree pruning and similar work in the County). Mulching continues year round. This controls weeds, significantly limits our need for herbicides and, as the chips break down, really improves our living soil and thereby the health and beauty of our landscapes.



*Winter flowering "Red Bud"
(Cercis occidentalis) in Greenbrae*

OUR NEXT LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

Last year, we completed new landscape designs for the:

- Southern part of the enormous middle island of [Via la Cumbre](#)
- [Terminal cul de sac islands on Corte Balboa and Corte Cayuga.](#)
- [Sir Francis Drake frontage between La Cuesta and Corte Morada Park](#)

We are in the process of soliciting bids for the first 2 locations, Via la Cumbre and the two Cortes. The County asked (insisted) that we postpone the SFD frontage project since it plans to put in a new sidewalk bike path along the existing path sometime in 2012 and doesn't want to damage the new landscaping during sidewalk construction. As of this writing in mid-March, the County expects to advertise for the new construction current projects soon. Be assured that your CSA 16 Board and I are pushing to get the construction underway as soon as possible within the contracting requirements of the County and the State under which we ultimately



operate. Occasionally, neighbors contact us inquiring, “**When will our street’s median will be improved?**” In time, we will make improvements to all islands across Greenbrae. It takes time, money, and personal effort (not just telling others you want it done). Entrances, medians and islands with the highest visibility and traffic were improved first so the greatest number of residents and visitors experience the improvements. And areas where eucalyptus trees were removed years ago after the Oakland Hills fire were a priority (Eliseo, Bretano Way, Almenar, North Almenar). To participate in planning improvements to an island near your home, please contact your Block Captain (see the list below), organize your neighbors, and contact the GPOA at landscaping@greenbrae.org and info@greenbrae.org.

AIMING TO IMPROVE ALL OF GREENBRAE WITH A LIMITED LANDSCAPING BUDGET

We wish we could do more landscape improvements, faster...but doing this work well and safely takes significant monetary resources. We pay for these improvements through our semi-annual assessment for Marin County Service Area 16 (CSA 16). The assessment has not changed in step with the increasing costs of construction, so we work within our budget and do new areas as we save up the resources.

These improvements are increasingly expensive. Our capital improvements budget comes from our CSA 16 property assessment—not from our voluntary GPOA dues. The Greenbrae bond issue several years back sought to increase our assessment to allow us to improve more medians faster yet did not pass by the required 2/3’s majority. Over 900 homeowners voted for an increased assessment. If 34 additional persons had voted “for”, it would have passed. But, since it was defeated, after paying for maintenance and related costs, we are constrained to limited funds each year for landscape improvements. We wait several years to accumulate the resources to do large projects such as Via la Cumbre and the Sir Francis Drake frontage.

“BARN OWL BOXES” TO CONTROL RODENTS

Several years ago, the GPOA and CSA 16 installed 4 “owl boxes” in median islands across Greenbrae to help control the diverse rodent population living in our ivy, lawns, hillsides, and gardens. Several homeowners in the greater community also have owl boxes with resident owls. The barn and screech owls that take residence across Greenbrae are moving in from west and north Marin. A few years ago, a barn owl family took up residence in a similar box at the Marin Art and Garden Center. These owls hunt up to 3 miles from their



homes and typically not in the immediate area of their home. So, with more boxes throughout the community, we all stand to benefit from fewer rats, mice, gophers, voles, and moles. You can order a box from the Hungry Owl Project, part of Wildcare in San Rafael, www.hungryowl.org.

The beauty of this “biocontrol” is that it is sustainable and involves no poisons to kill rodent pests. We ask that residents refrain from poisoning rodents. Otherwise the local owls, in their nighttime hunting, eat poisoned or dying rodents and die as well...thus, defeating our program.



Barn owls are part of our “integrated pest management” program, <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.org>. If you have rodent problems (whether it’s gophers and moles in your garden or mice and rats in or near your home), first exclude, prevent, and try to trap them; plus, encourage the owls. The Hungry Owl Project can recommend pest control companies that don’t use poison and can help with any questions. There is information on their website www.hungryowl.org and at (415) 454-4587.

As related by Alex Godbe, the Director of HOP, “Having Barn Owls in the community is such a joy.” I have found that once the owls move into a neighborhood they soon become the celebrities and are furiously protected ... they become “our owls.” Building nesting boxes as a community and family project can be wonderful. Seeing a glimpse of these pale, ethereal hunters of the night never fails to be inspiring and if you are lucky enough to have a family move into a nesting box close by, it will be irresistible to go and watch them each night along with your neighbors. Please do respect that these magnificent little birds need to be left in peace and do not disturb the boxes in any way. Once the juvenile owls fledge, anytime from May to August, you will be able to see the youngsters just after the sun goes down in the trees close to their nest box for several weeks before they disperse.

Listen at night for the Barn Owl’s eerie scream, which can be heard at <http://www.owlpages.com/sounds.php>. See if you recognize any owls from the barn owl and screech owl samples. We definitely have a screech owl somewhere in our immediate neighborhood of North Almenar, have heard it at night for years. Above is a photo of a screech owl that took up residence in our community owl box on Corte Lodato.



*A Screech Owl in an owl box
up on Corte Lodato, November, 2008.*

ANNUAL LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE CALENDAR

On the next page is a calendar of our major landscaping activities. A local landscaping company, Gardeners’ Guild, performs ongoing maintenance for our community. We have a signed agreement with very specific weekly and monthly activities identified over many years working together. Right now they are incredibly busy weeding and mulching to mitigate the abundance of weeds that otherwise grow tall with the season’s rains, as well as pruning and mulching to keep our islands open and beautiful.



GPOA ANNUAL LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE CALENDAR

	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Ongoing Maintenance	X	X	X	X
Heritage Tree Pruning				X
Oak & Pine Spraying	X		X	
Shrub Pruning	X			X
Landscaping Improvements (larger projects)	X		X	
Hydroseeding of wildflowers			X	

Other professionals also help us with tree pruning, disease and insect control and installing landscape improvements such as the projects planned along Sir Francis Drake, along Via la Cumbre, and the cul de sac islands across Greenbrae (see above). Every winter, arborists prune our community’s heritage trees in the medians and along curbs to ensure their long-term health, beauty, and safety. Many of us are quite aware of the disease affecting many cherished trees and shrubs, “Sudden Oak Death” (SOD). We have top University of California and commercial experts consulting on and treating our trees when appropriate. There is a preventive treatment, the first of its kind approved for oaks with SOD, and we continue to spray our major oaks across the community.

The treatment is called Agrifos and UC (scientific) studies show it actually prevents and can reduce symptoms of SOD. Keep in mind, only a very few trees in our islands show signs or symptoms of SOD. That’s because we closely monitor them, treat them annually with Agrifos, and work hard to ensure they get the conditions and horticultural care they need.



Summer Flowering Crape Myrtles in Greenbrae

In the fall and winter (and as needed for safety), we prune shrubs back from the roadways. Then, flower buds develop to provide all the color we love in the spring and summer. And our larger landscaping improvement projects tend to be in the spring and fall, avoiding the heavy rain and erosion season, allowing for gentler rains and cooler seasons to establish our plantings. All of these efforts are complemented by the wildflowers and flowering perennials seeded regularly onto our open hillsides. Notice the colorful displays that begin in late winter and continue through early summer. Look on our website, www.greenbrae.org, for photos of flowering medians from recent springs and summers.



ANNUAL HYDROSEEDING

Sometime in the fall, around Halloween, we spray seeds of wildflowers and flowering perennials onto open spaces in medians across Greenbrae. Look for the green slurry of seeds, mulch, and fertilizer sprayed from a huge truck onto our islands. Within the mulch are a broad variety of spring- and summer-flowering annuals and perennials. Every spring, the show of flowers is stronger as species take hold and sow their seeds, too. We've increased the seed count of the most successful plants to date and added some new shade-tolerant and butterfly-attracting species and others from areas similar to microclimates and conditions across Greenbrae. We do not include any grasses in our mix to minimize potential "fuel" for fire on our hillsides and islands.



Each median and hillside has unique characteristics of exposure, soil depth, and rock. So, from the same mix of seeds, each area uniquely germinates and establishes itself. Some areas blossom with many species. In other areas we see only a few (or no) species germinating and growing to size. Yet, overall the number of wildflowers is increasing and many new areas are flowering as never before. Our most significant successes are along the Sir Francis Drake frontage and along Almenar, Bretano, and Via la Cumbre—streets with large open hillsides. We will continue to seed these areas as well as Via Cheparro, Via Navarro, Via la Paz, and Via Barranca and hope to see an even better show of flowers everywhere in coming years.

If you are interested in seeding your property, some of the species most successful to date are Clovers (in various colors, good for drawing nitrogen out of the air to the soil); Calendulas; California Poppy; Coreopsis; Farewell-to-Spring; Gazania; Lupines; Pride of Madeira; Tidy tips; Baby Snapdragon; Shasta Daisy; and Yarrow. These are "common names" and you can find them in the Sunset "Western Garden Book."

You can order the seed mix directly from S&S Seeds in Carpenteria, (805) 684-0436 (ask for Gilbert). There is a minimum order so you may want to go in with a few friends and neighbors to make up a sufficient order size. If you see areas for improvement, please let us know via your Block Captain (see the table below), call our GPOA hotline, 461-7338, or send an email to landscaping@greenbrae.org. If it is a real emergency, call 911 or Gardeners' Guild at 457-0400, as appropriate.

GPOA LANDSCAPING "BLOCK CAPTAINS"

We are fortunate to have many helpful neighbors across Greenbrae who volunteer to represent their block's needs and interests to the GPOA Board of Directors. (If you want to help as a Block Captain, send an email to landscaping@greenbrae.org), Please contact your Block Captain first with ideas and needs. They know the history of local landscaping issues.



- Ardith Plimack, 136 Almenar, Block #1
- Joe McNamee, 118 Bretano, Block #1
- Shelley Freisinger, 265 Bretano, Block #3
- Bill Hagler, 30 Corte Cayuga
- Tom (Eileen) Harriman, 15 Eliseo, Block #1
- Lee Ingress, La Cuesta, Block #1
- Arnold and Carolyn Piatti, 118 Los Cerros
- Elaine Maurer & Pete Lagarias, 160 Nadina Way
- Scott Sherman, 283 North Almenar
- Alan Kimelman, 356 North Almenar
- Terry Haverkamp, 338 Via la Cumbre, Block #1 (northernmost island)
- Fred Brenlin, 64 Via Barranca
- Ruth Domush, 60 Via Navarro

If your street or block is not represented by a Block Captain and if you would like to be this “point person” to field questions and to communicate with your neighbors and our GPOA Board, please send an email with your contact information to landscaping@greenbrae.org and copy info@greenbrae.org.

OUR COMMUNITY WEB SITE... WWW.GREENBRAE.ORG

In 2000, the GPOA launched www.greenbrae.org to communicate information on “Sudden Oak Death” and other information of general interest and value to our community. The latest additions include new photos of spring flowers, plus a link to [sign up for our Greenbrae homeowner e-mail list](#). We use it sparingly to keep in touch with homeowners on issues of importance to us all.

On Greenbrae.org, you’ll also find links to Sudden Oak Death publications and professionals working hard to mitigate this problem.

DESIGNING A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY LANDSCAPE

For those of you new to Greenbrae, our “plant palette” and landscaping philosophy include native trees and shrubs (e.g., oaks, red buds, Manzanitas, Matilija Poppies) and other plants (e.g., rosemary, Australian Fuchsia, Plumbago, Lemonade Berry) well adapted to our soils and environment—including our climate, deer, insects, and fungi. Plants are placed and selected according to many seasonal factors including flower color and size, leaf form and colors, and the size and density of the tree or shrub when mature (to provide some privacy yet retain views).



A major objective is to enhance our landscape with beautiful plantings that require only limited maintenance and irrigation once established. This controls maintenance costs, frees up resources (e.g., money and irrigation water) for other improvements, and helps to ensure landscaping that flourishes and matures for generations to come. Other objectives include protection of heritage trees, safety of pedestrians and vehicles, and mitigation of fire hazards.

PRUNING

Each summer and winter, we prune many heritage trees along curbs and in Greenbrae's medians. This includes trees planted by Greenbrae's developers, such as Sycamores and Silver Maples, as well as native and planted Oaks, Bays, and Pines. The purpose, in concert with beautifying Greenbrae and helping to maintain property values, is to preserve the trees by removing dead and dying branches, to create a strong branch structure to minimize structural failures, to ensure long-term beauty and safety, and to direct growth away from traffic into the islands. We credit the systematic, professional pruning and monitoring of our community trees for the quite limited branch and tree failures in recent winters compared with the past.

Curbside trees are pruned to similar principles and we aim to develop canopied roads. If you want to see how well this approach is working, take a stroll or drive the Eliseo entrance, Corte Morada or the 1st block of Bretano Way (between Almenar and La Cuesta.) Manor Road curbside tree pruning is an exception—PG&E “directionally prunes” the Sycamores to keep growth out of the power lines and the trees don't have the natural canopied look we have developed on Corte Morada and Bretano Way. Remember: if you have curbside heritage trees, do not prune them. The GPOA does it professionally to create a consistent neighborhood look that benefits the whole community.

We also prune out diseased and dying branches on small and large shrubs throughout our medians. Older, disfigured and highly woody shrubs are pruned to the ground to rejuvenate them. At first, this creates gaps. Healthy plants rejuvenate with fuller fountains of growth. This helps keep our hillsides green and growing and eliminates fuel that would readily burn in the undesired event of a hillside fire.

Please feel free to let us know what you think—at the GPOA's hot line, 461-7338, via your Block Captains, and at landscaping@greenbrae.org. We love to hear the compliments as well as the issues and suggestions. Have a happy spring and healthy 2011!

Scott Sherman

GPOA Landscaping Chairman



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