

GREENBRAE

SPRING 2015 GREENBRAE LANDSCAPING REPORT

PUBLISHED BY THE GREENBRAE PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION
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In this Issue

**Sustainable Landscape Design
Water Conservation**

**Landscape Maintenance
Calendar**

**Wildflower Seeds Across
Greenbrae**

Pruning our Heritage Trees

Owl Boxes to Control Rodents

**Recent and Future Landscape
Improvements**

**Optimizing Within our
Landscaping Budget**

Our 'Block Captains'

**Our Community Web Site
and Email List (Sign Up!)**

Sustainable Landscape Design

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



Winter flowering 'Red Bud' (*Cercis occidentalis*) in a Los Cerros median island. This is a native species adapted to our dry summers.



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, labor, 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.

Water Conservation

Did you know that ~1/3 of the water that our water district (MMWD) supplies goes to landscaping? Drought concerns are higher than ever. Our landscapers are adjusting our irrigation systems to meet the Governor's recent reduction mandate. This includes stopping turf irrigation in our entry medians. We also are watering conservatively elsewhere. Should some plants die, we will look to replace them, eventually, with others with lower water needs. We need to conserve water using best practices and new technologies in our homes and landscaping. We installed 'smart' irrigation controllers at our 3 Sir Francis Drake Boulevard (SFD) entrances. These controllers measure daily temperatures and water more and less depending on recent tempera-



California Poppies and Crimson Clover in the Spring in Greenbrae. Drought tolerant, attractive, and beneficial to insects and soil fertility.



Summer Flowering Crape Myrtles in Greenbrae. Drought tolerant and flowering when most other trees are not.

tures. For other specific resources and suggestions, see www.marinwater.org.

For our truly beautiful community of Greenbrae, our County Service Area 16 (CSA 16) Advisory Board and the County have designed several new landscaping projects, including major improvements to the entrances of Eliseo and La Cuesta. Yet, due to the 4-year drought, these projects are on hold since they include replanting of trees and water-conserving plants. Recently, the entire mile-long frontage of Greenbrae along SFD was pruned back significantly to mitigate what was a chronic challenge to keep the sidewalks open and clear of hazards from ever-growing trees and shrubs. In the process, we uncovered several fences in disrepair. The County is working closely with the CSA 16 and GPOA Boards to consider options for replacing these fences with new ones that match the 'Greenbrae Fences' similarly installed over the past 20 years to improve the frontage of our entire community. The drought does not affect proceeding with these improvements.



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 will install more 'smart' irrigation controllers and recently developed a very useful water management tool with a 'dashboard' showing water consumption at each of our CSA 16 water meters across Greenbrae. In concert with County Parks experts, we're following 'Integrated Pest Management' (IPM) guidelines and practices to control pests (rats, gophers, moles, insects) and fungi (Sudden Oak Death 'water molds' and others). We mulch heavily to improve our soils and mitigate weeds and fertilize now using organic materials. All this to be as 'green and sustainable' as we know how.

Many neighbors and GPOA have installed Barn Owl boxes across Greenbrae to encourage owls to join our community. They are voracious consumers of rodents (gophers, rats, moles, voles) that promise to really help control our rodent populations without the need for pesticides. And likely you've noticed the intensive mulching of our islands and parks with free 'arborist chips' (from our community tree pruning and similar work in the County.) Mulching has been going on for years and its benefits are clearly visible. This controls weeds, significantly limits our need for herbicides and, as the chips break down, directly improves the soil and thereby the health and beauty of our landscapes.

Landscape Maintenance Calendar

Below is a general calendar of major Greenbrae landscaping activities. A professional landscaping company performs ongoing maintenance for our community under the direction of professionals in County Parks and myself. We have a signed agreement with very specific weekly and monthly activities identified over many years managing our complex site.

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

In the winter and spring (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.





Wildflower Seeds Across Greenbrae

In the past, in the fall around Halloween, we sprayed seeds of wildflowers and flowering perennials onto open spaces in medians across Greenbrae. The seed mix included 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 increased the seed count of the most successful plants to date and

added 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 expect 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.

Pruning our Heritage Trees

On a 5-year rotation, and as required based on growth rates, following professional arborist standards we structurally and architecturally prune small to large heritage trees in the islands and curbside to keep them healthy and to minimize limb and tree failures. Those of you who’ve lived here for decades will



recall how trees and limbs littered our roads during winter storms. Not so any more. Our annual, preventive inspections and pruning have paid off.

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 standards and we have developed beautiful canopied roads. To see some of our best canopied roads, take a stroll or drive the Eliseo entrance, Corte Morada, Via Cheparro, and 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 the other streets. Remember: if you have curbside heritage trees in front of your home, you own them and can do what you wish with them. Yet, we ask that you refrain from pruning them. CSA 16 does it professionally, every 5 years or so, to create a consistent neighborhood look. Yet, if there is a hazardous condition or your block is not up for pruning in the next round or two, we recommend you have them professionally pruned for structural integrity, beauty, and to create a canopied road. Some homeowners over the years have removed their curbside trees, which is in your rights if you so prefer.

We also prune out diseased and dying branches on small and large shrubs throughout our medians. As was done along the frontage of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard earlier this spring, older, disfigured, hazardous, and woody shrubs are pruned to the ground to rejuvenate them. At first, this creates gaps. Healthy plants rejuvenate with fountains of growth. This helps to keep our hillsides green and growing and eliminates fuel for fires.



Owl Boxes to Control Rodents

Several years ago, GPOA/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 (MAGC). 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 residents to not poison rodents, since the owls, in their nighttime hunting, will 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.edu/>. 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 concerns and there is information on their website www.hungryowl.org, at (415) 454-4587, and info@hungryowl.org.

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 Owls 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 many years. Here 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.*



Recent and Future Landscape Improvements

Over the past few years, professionals at the County, with input and guidance from the GPOA and CSA 16 Advisory Boards, designed and installed new landscaping at the:

- Southern end of the 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.

As mentioned elsewhere, beautiful new hardscape and planting designs now exist yet are on hold due to the enduring drought for:

- The entrances on SFD at Eliseo Drive and La Cuesta Drive
- Open sections of Almenar Drive.

Be assured that your GPOA Board and CSA 16 Advisory Board are working closely with our County Parks colleagues to get this construction underway as soon as possible. We await future major rains and the easing of drought conditions before proceeding.

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 GPOA at landscaping@greenbrae.org and info@greenbrae.org.

Optimizing Within our 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 tax 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 budget comes from our CSA 16 property assessment—not from our voluntary GPOA dues. The Greenbrae bond issue several years back to increase our assessment, to allow us to improve more medians faster, did not pass by the required 2/3’s majority. Over 900 homeowners voted for an increased assessment, and if 34 persons more had voted ‘for’ rather than ‘against,’ 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 have to accumulate the resources for several years to do large projects such as Via la Cumbre and the entrances at Eliseo and La Cuesta.



Our 'Block Captains'

We are fortunate to have helpful neighbors across Greenbrae who volunteer to represent their block's needs and interests to the GPOA Board of Directors and the CSA 16 Advisory Board. Sadly, some have moved away, passed on, or finally after 15 or more years asked to be removed from this important community role. We could use some more helpful, constructive Block Captains. If you want to volunteer (it's not a big job and time requirements are quite limited), please send an email to landscaping@greenbrae.org. If your street currently has a Block Captain (see the list below,) please contact them first with ideas and needs. They know the history of local landscaping issues.

- Ardith Plimack, 136 Almenar, Block #1
- 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.)

Our Community Web Site and Email List (Sign Up!)

In 2000, 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.

Please feel free to let us know what you think—at landscaping@greenbrae.org and info@greenbrae.org. We love to hear compliments as well as issues and concerns. Have a happy and healthy spring and 2015!

Scott Sherman, PhD
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