



Novato Community Garden Committee

A Community Garden Proposal

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROJECT OVERVIEW.....3

THE NOVATO COMMUNITY GARDEN COMMITTEE4

WHY NOVATO NEEDS COMMUNITY GARDENS.....5

HISTORICAL ROOTS IN AGRICULTURE.....6

SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL EQUITY.....7

MISSION & VISION STATEMENT8

PROJECT OF MARINLINK.....9

REQUEST FOR PARTNERSHIP10

SUMMARY12

NOVATO COMMUNITY GARDEN COMMITTEE BIOS.....13

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR A NOVATO COMMUNITY GARDEN.....15



Project Overview

Community gardens provide people from diverse backgrounds with access to land for raising fruits, vegetables, and flowers for themselves and others. These spaces allow people to reconnect with the land and the natural systems from which our food is grown. In addition to a reconnection with the land, community gardens foster a sense of community when neighbors meet neighbors and work together to nurture the garden space. Just as a garden thrives on diversity, so too does a community. These garden spaces bring together people from diverse religious, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as people of different ages and abilities. There are multiple health benefits associated with community gardens including, physical exercise, improved nutrition and mental health. Community gardens foster a culture of service among members that work together to plant, nurture and harvest food for themselves and others.

Many Novato residents living in apartments or condominiums lack access to healthy fresh food and recreational opportunities. Among these residents we find some of the most vulnerable members of our community such as low-income families and individuals, seniors, recent immigrants, and young children. These individuals are

disproportionately impacted by food insecurity, a lack of nutrient-rich foods, overweight/obesity and/or related health problems. Community gardens offer a sustainable community-based strategy for addressing these issues by providing people with access to land to grow fruits and vegetables to supplement their diet.

The Novato Community Garden project aims to increase the availability of and access to community gardens to promote healthy eating and active living as the norm in our community. The project is particularly committed to targeting, engaging, and including the abovementioned diverse community members as key to our success in this endeavor.

Community gardens have the unique potential to bring together a wide range of Novato residents to support each other, reconnect with natural systems, and reap the benefits of improved nutrition and exercise for a small amount of resources relative to other community-based efforts.

The Novato Community Garden Committee

The Novato Community Garden Committee (NCGC) was formed in August 2006 and is comprised of approximately 8-10 volunteers from throughout the community.

Committee members bring diverse interests and experience together with the common goal of building a community garden for the people of Novato. (*See Appendix Committee Member Bios*) Since August 2006, the committee has met on a regular basis to create and refine our vision and to craft a strategic plan. We held an open meeting to assess public interest in February 2007, with nearly 40 people in attendance. In addition, we have met with other community garden representatives in Marin and toured several local community gardens.

NCGC has sought and will continue to seek ways to leverage existing and new resources and partner with related organizations. To date, we have secured the following funding:

- \$2,500.00 From Supervisor Judy Arnold, through the 2006-07 County of Marin Community Services Program for start-up costs; and
- \$5,000.00 through the Kaiser Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Initiative for building a demonstration garden, outreach and education, and plots for Novato residents with limited resources.



Why Novato Needs Community Gardens

Novato is the northernmost city in Marin County, comprising approximately 28 square miles. According to the 2000 Census Data, the population of Novato was 47,630, which broke down to approximately 76.3% White, 13.1% Hispanic, 5.1% Asian, 1.9% Black and 3.6% all other races.¹ The Marin Independent Journal recently reported that Novato is the fastest growing city in Marin, thanks in large part to developments at Hamilton. This has raised the population of Novato to approximately 52,246 people as of January 1, 2007.² While the City of Novato enjoys a great deal of open space and parks, there are currently no community gardens available to the citizens of Novato.

¹ City of Novato web page http://www.ci.novato.ca.us/about_nov.cfm

² Marin Independent Journal, May 3, 2007 http://www.marinij.com/fastsearchresults/ci_5806654

Historical Roots in Agriculture

The hills and valleys of Novato were once the hunting grounds of Miwok Indians. Their village located north of Novato, named Olompali, is now a State Historic Park. In 1843, Olompali was granted to a Native American, Camilo Ynitia, who raised wheat and became a successful cattle breeder.³

Most of the land that is the present day City of Novato was known as Rancho de Novato and was originally granted to Fernando Feliz, who served in the Mexican Army.



Photo: Novato History Museum

In 1856, Francis DeLong (left) and Joseph Sweetser (right) formed a partnership and bought Rancho de Novato. Upon finding the climate favorable, the pair set out to plant one of the largest orchards in the world. Fruit grown in Novato was shipped throughout the United States and to several other countries.

In 1879, Sweetser sold most of his share of the Novato Rancho to his partner, DeLong. When Francis DeLong died in 1885, he left his estate to his son, Frank Coye DeLong.

³ Novato History Museum web page <http://www.ci.novato.ca.us/prcs/museum.cfm>

The Home and Farm Company purchased the Black Point Ranch from Frank DeLong in 1888 and divided the 6,000 acres into lots and sold them as business and residential sites. That was the "new town of Novato".

According to Jim McNern, a native of Novato and President of the Novato Historical Guild, "Novato was an agricultural community with small dairies and chicken ranches and orchards dotting the landscape".⁴

Today, most of those dairies, ranches and orchards are now subdivisions.

Sustainability and Social Equity

In October of 2003, the Novato Citizens Advisory Committee produced a Community Strategic Plan titled "Novato 2028 Visions and Strategies – A Plan for Novato's Future and How to Get There". The plan was the result of more than 25 people working for over a year to produce a tool that would guide decision makers towards providing and maintaining an outstanding quality of life for the residents of Novato.

This community plan stated "**The success of the community in the future will be a collaborative effort of informed citizens, local government, the business community, education resources, nonprofit agencies, service organizations and homeowner associations**".⁵

Section II of the community plan focuses on a sustainable community and includes issues related to the Natural Environment, Economy and Social Equity. Vision 2(e) specifically recommends, "Develop and implement policies to preserve, restore, and enhance historical and local agriculture around Novato".⁶

⁴ *The Novato Historian*, vol.31, no.1, January-March 2007, p. N-2.

⁵ *Novato 2028, A Community Strategic Plan*, pg. 2,
http://www.ci.novato.ca.us/docs/Nov2028/Nov2028_ChairLtr.pdf

⁶ *Novato 2028, A Community Strategic Plan*, pg. 7,
http://www.ci.novato.ca.us/docs/Nov2028/Nov2028_HowToGetThere.pdf

Developing a network of community gardens offer a unique opportunity for citizens, nonprofit agencies, faith communities, education resources, and local government to collaborate in support of a more sustainable community. A network of community gardens could also prove to be the first step in restoring a small amount of local agriculture to Novato.

The changing demographics of Novato, coupled with the alarming rise in childhood obesity rates make the need for access to land even more critical. Research shows that a child's taste for fresh fruits and vegetables is developed early. Community gardens provide access to land in order to grow fruits and vegetables to supplement a family's nutritional needs.

Mission & Vision Statement

The Mission Statement

Growing A Healthy Community, From The Ground Up

The mission of the Novato Community Garden Association is to build and support a network of community gardens that enable people from diverse backgrounds to grow food and foster community in a sustainable manner.

The Vision

The vision of the NCGC is a healthy, sustainable community where people from diverse backgrounds come together to reconnect with the land, grow food for themselves and others, and cultivate a truly integrated community. A series of local community gardens provide the foundation for growing a healthy community.

- Through advocacy, we help others to envision and support a thriving network of community-based gardens accessible to people of diverse ages, abilities, and cultural backgrounds.
- Through partnerships with nonprofit organizations, parks and recreation departments, schools and colleges, and civic and faith-based groups, we work to empower people through gardening.

- Through the www.novatocommunitygarden.org web site, we share information and resources, locally and globally, to foster a supportive climate for community gardening.
- Through local workshops, trainings, and networking, we offer technical assistance to individuals and groups working to establish sustainable community gardens.
- Through garden-based education and outreach programs, we help the people of our Novato build self-reliance and interdependence through community gardening.
- Through support of anti-hunger initiatives, we encourage gardeners to give back to the community by sharing their garden produce, skills, knowledge, and dedication with others.
- Through collaborative projects, we envision a local food system where more people experience the rewards of gardening and become healthier through improved diets, exercise, and positive social interactions.⁷



A Project of MarinLink

The Novato Community Garden Committee is a sponsored project of MarinLink, a non-profit 501c3 organization that offers groups in Marin County opportunities to work in partnership to leverage resources and create collaborative solutions. MarinLink is

⁷ Adapted with permission from Friends of Burlington Gardens, <http://www.burlingtongardens.org/Vision.htm>

committed to linking key service areas including: health, sustainability; education; spirituality; business programs and service.⁸

The leadership of MarinLink includes Nancy Boyce, RN, MA, and Mary O'Mara, MBA. Nancy is the Founder and President of Marin Link. A Marin resident for over 30 years, Nancy has been honored as a Public Health Hero by Marin County's Department of Health & Human Services for her work as a school nurse, founding the Marin Integrative Healing Network, and creating the Pre-School Health Resource Manual. She has served on numerous boards and councils in Marin and is committed to creating community connections for the people and programs of Marin County.

Mary O'Mara, MBA, is Executive Director and Co-Founder of MarinLink. A former teacher and school administrator, Mary utilizes her education in Strategic Leadership to help programs that serve the needs of children and families. Mary is a native of Novato.

Request for Partnership

In September 2006, we made an initial contact with a Novato church inquiring whether they would be willing to lease the undeveloped space on their property to us as a site for a community garden. Our inquiry was met with some interest, so our committee continued its research and scheduled a public meeting to assess community support of such a garden. Our public meeting showed the public support for a community garden was extremely high.

In February 2007, we met with the Pastor and Facilities Director. In the months that followed we communicated with several Board members and moved forward to secure this site. In the process of doing "due-diligence" we addressed issues related to zoning, property tax, liability insurance, lease agreements, and funding. In July 2007 we met

⁸ <http://www.marinlink.org/>

with the Board to discuss these issues. As several cannot be resolved at this time, we have decided to pursue other sites. We are currently looking into a public site in Novato, have started the conversation with public officials, and have been given some guidelines on how to proceed next.

Draft Community Garden Plan

- A property lease, preferably on public land in Novato
- A fully fenced garden (post and wire 7' high)
- Fence will include climbing flowering plants for an aesthetic appearance
- Locked gates – accessible only to members
- A diverse group of members including; seniors, singles, families, people of different abilities, apartment and condominium dwellers
- Members pay an annual fee to cover administrative & water fees
- All plots are to be hand watered – no sprinklers. Conservation techniques will be emphasized throughout the garden
- Members are required to participate in 2 community work days each year
- A volunteer Governing Group will oversee day-to-day administration
- By-laws with requirements as to acceptable behavior, keeping plots tidy, weed control, etc.
- Membership Application and Liability Release Waiver
- We will actively seek to partner with the Novato Garden Club, Marin Master Gardeners, Senior Access and other organizations

Considerations:

- **Property Lease** – The Novato Community Garden Committee seeks to lease approximately 1 acre of undeveloped space. Our intent is to use the property for as long as possible with the understanding that the site may be developed in the near future.
- **Public Access** – Gates will be locked. Access only for members.
- **Tax Exempt Status** – Novato Community Garden Committee is a project of MarinLink, a 501c3 tax exempt organization.

- **Liability Insurance** – As a project of MarinLink, the Novato Community Garden Committee is able to be "additional insured" on a 1M liability policy.
- **Legal Status** – As a project of MarinLink, the Executive Director of MarinLink has the legal status to enter into a contract on behalf of the Novato Community Garden Committee.
- **Water Usage** – The NCGC has had several conversations with the North Marin Water District (NMWD). We will work with the NMWD in identifying an optimal site near a water source. If needed, the NCGC will secure funds to bring the water to the garden. We will also work with the NMWD to provide education and training on effective methods of watering and water evaporation prevention measures. We will also provide joint trainings on the benefits of planting drought tolerant and California native plants. We will incorporate "best watering practices" from other Marin County Community gardens. The garden plot fee will pay for the water usage. We anticipate this to be from \$1,500 to \$2,500 per year.
- **Numbers of Users** – **If the site is 1 acre, preliminary plans reflect** a minimum of 36 or over 80 spaces for use by members of the community. This number is dependent on plot size.
- **ADA: Parking & Accessibility**– According to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) the garden is required to have ADA parking and ADA accessibility.



Summary

In summary, we believe the opportunity to partner with public entity represents the best way to bring together diverse groups of people from throughout our community in a spirit of service. Based on our research, we feel the optimal site has public visibility

with easy access, a water source, and all-day sun exposure. The site should be in close proximity to many apartment and condominium dwellers. It is easily accessible by public transportation.

The Novato Community Garden Committee envisions a future where neighborhood gardens offer people a place to grow food for themselves and others in the community. We envision a future where neighborhood gardens foster a sense of community by bringing diverse groups of people together. We envision a future where neighborhood gardens promote a healthy and sustainable community. We want to work with the Novato Community to make this vision a reality.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Novato Community Garden Committee

Novato Community Garden Committee Bios

Gail Altschuler, MD – is the Medical Director of The Altschuler Clinic. She has been practicing medicine for the past 25 years in Marin and Sonoma Counties and is a Specialist in Bariatric Medicine, which is the medical treatment of obesity and related health issues. She is Board Certified by the American Academy of Family Physicians and is a Diplomat of The American Board of Bariatric Physicians.

David Bedar – grew up in Brooklyn New York and as a child was involved with the Brooklyn Community Garden This experience stayed with him throughout his life. He recently retired after a career as a high school physical education instructor in the East Coast and in Novato. Being involved with high school age children for many years in Novato, David and his wife often heard similar teen laments – "Boring Novato." A community garden would add an area of interest and possibilities for kids of this age and genre. A garden would create a sense of pride on a personal level which spills over into pride in our community.

Jane Crownover – loves to grow anything green and prides herself with a green thumb for 30 years. Jane has an Associate of Science degree in Landscape Design from City College of San Francisco. She currently lives in Novato and works for the Registrar of Voters at The County of Marin where she provides administrative and technical support.

Tori Graw – has been married to Gary for 19 years and is a Novato homeowner (16 years). They have two daughters: one at San Marin High School and the other at Sinaloa. Tori is a member of The Quest Church. She is also an organic gardener. In the early 1980's Tori created a college community garden, that included a geodesic solar greenhouse, to provide fresh herbs and vegetables through the local food co-ops. She owns and operates Marin Landscape Management with her husband, utilizing IPM (Integrated Pest Management) techniques. Tori has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Science (Stockton State College, N.J.) focusing on toxic waste and water analysis.

Jennifer Guenther, RN – is a wife and mother of two, and an intensive care nurse who most-recently worked at Novato Community Hospital. She has been a Novato resident for three years and believes she has found her home here. Jennifer has been a nurse for eight years, notably spending four of those years as an Army Nurse. She now spends her time volunteering for Olive Elementary and Hill Middle School as a PTA member, disaster preparedness coordinator, classroom representative and monthly PTA newsletter editor. The environment, health, and gardening are her passions, and for Jennifer they merge perfectly in the community garden.

Donna West, RN – grew up gardening with her Mom and Grandfather and has fond memories of enjoying fresh-picked strawberries, peas, and tomatoes from the family garden. Donna is a Novato resident who has worked as a Public Health Nurse with children, families, and caregivers in Marin for the past 14 years. Increasingly, this work has focused on addressing the childhood obesity epidemic by creating environments which promote healthy behaviors. Supporting the development of early childhood gardens and intergenerational garden experiences has been an important aspect of this effort. Donna's participation in the Novato Community Garden project allows her to blend her lifelong passions for growing food and healthy communities.

Veronica Valero, Garden Chair – moved to Novato with her husband in 1996. They have a 7 year old boy and a 22 year old daughter. Veronica is a founding member and Executive Director of the Novato Live Well Network, a volunteer based non-profit focusing on sustainable living, eating and gardening. She is a 2006 graduate of Novato Chamber of Commerce's "Leadership Novato" Program and recipient of the "Leadership Novato" Ed Stark Award. Veronica is a member of Sustainable Novato, sits on the Novato Unified School District (NUSD) Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Committee and the NUSD Wellness Committee. Veronica initiated the Novato Community Garden Project with Karen Losee. When she is not volunteering, Veronica is "The Computer Tutor of Marin"—a one-on-one computer tutor/consultant. Veronica has an M.A. in Biblical Studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley.

Sandy Wollenberg – A graduate of Environmental Forum of Marin. As a final project she collaborated with Susan Doyle to create an environmental, bi-lingual book for preschool children on how to grow a garden. She has volunteered for West Coast Green, Bioneers, Sustainable Novato, Novato Live Well Network, Taste of Marin, and Chefs of Marin. She has worked with a grand floral designer arranging floral creations for museums, corporate and private parties. Her passions are gardening, cooking with the bounty from the garden, hiking, and tennis, as well as teaching young children the wonders and nutrition of growing a garden.

Other Community Supporters (Former Garden Committee Members)

David Haskell – Professional Ecologist, Project Manager, and Gardener. He is the Project Manager, Garden of Eatin' Childhood Obesity Prevention Program, North Bay Children's Center and Garden Designer for "Every Child Needs a Garden" for Garden Kids. David had a Degree in Conservation of Natural Resources from UC Berkeley and a Post Grad from Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand. David is a Native Californian and resident (34 years) of New Zealand. He is the father of Liam Tane, Claire Kowhai and Rohan Ray Rakai and grandfather to Kahn TeAriki.

Leona George-Davidson - Leona George-Davidson is an eighteen year resident of Novato, and is the Director/Founder of Life Support Ministries, a non-profit that organization that fosters emotional, spiritual, & life skills through community service & creativity for young people and their adult mentors. Leona is also the Owner/Principal of Business Support where she offers her services in clutter clearing, office organization, & procrastination alleviation.

Karen Losee – an MBA Candidate (2009) in the Sustainable Management program at Presidio School of Management and Director of Sales for a pharmaceutical company serving non-profit women's clinics nationwide. A second generation Californian, Karen's passion for environmental issues has led her to serve as a member of the board of Directors of The Bay Institute of San Francisco, a volunteer docent at Muir Woods National Monument. It was Karen's idea to start a Novato Community Garden Project. As the first chair for the Novato Community Garden Committee, she planted the seed and nurtured the vision. She continues to support the project, at a distance, as she finishes her MBA work.

Community Support for a Novato Community Garden

"I am so happy to see community gardens growing in Novato. I believe they will yield a healthy harvest of renewed community spirit."

Judy Arnold

Marin County Supervisor

P.S. I love fried green tomatoes.

"I and many others are so excited about the potential of a community garden in Novato! I read about other community gardens in cities around the Bay Area and have been wide-eyed at the work they do. They bring people together, teach long term care of plants (and land and beneficial insects), and how to eat what you grow. It brings old and young together in one place. Now that's a community!"

I hope we see a wide range of neighbors, from grandparents to professionals to kids, of course. What a wonderful way for Novato to begin to "turn green"! Perhaps schools and struggling families could receive crops, and tours could be done as we become an example for the county. The possibilities seem endless.

The Novato Mother's Club recently started a Gardening Group which I am currently heading. In my personal opinion the Gardening Group would welcome the additional

land to sow and would be happy to learn more about organics, mulching, composting, etc. My spear-head group, Alleyway Allies, could use cuttings and trimmings from what are sure to be bountiful plots. I look forward to the announcement of Opening Day!!!!"

Stephanie Kline & family

Novato Resident

"The Marin Farmers Market Association, a 24-year old community institution that has served to connect the Marin County community with the freshest, locally and regionally grown delicious produce from small farms, is pleased to support the efforts of the Novato Community to establish a community garden. With adult and childhood diabetes and obesity on the rise, as well as our being faced with a significant environmental crisis due to how large scale agriculture is degrading our planet, it is so encouraging to have local efforts such as the Novato Community Garden emerging to be a positive force in our community. Gardens like these impact more than just the physical space and the people directly involved. They bring about a positive focus on things that really matter – health, community, and taking care of the planet."

Leah Smith

Director of Outreach

Marin Farmers Market, www.marinfarmersmarket.org

"Research abounds on the benefits gardening has on the young, old and everyone in between. Yet for many of us, me included, our housing situation doesn't allow us to garden at our place of residence –yards are too small and/or Homeowner's policies prohibit it – quite ironic that these policies encourage human energy and natural resources be given to maintaining grass but not food!"

Prior to moving to Novato, I was a member of community gardening in Oakland and New Hampshire. I know first hand the benefits community gardening has on individuals, neighborhoods and communities: better nutritional, physical and mental health; a greater sense of community and a greater sense of responsibility to community; a greater understanding and appreciation for food and the precious resources that are needed to grow it; neighborhood development and beautification; diversity of plant and wildlife; community education (organic practices and pest control, waste minimization, recycling, composting and mulching).

Community gardens can serve as a catalyst for neighborhood development, beautification, recreation, therapy, and food production. Please move ahead with this missing and vital community service."

Jane McCoy

Novato Resident

"Community gardens produce food, create community, and raise awareness about local agriculture and the connection between healthy soil and a healthy society. I cannot think of a better and more important use of a small plot of land."

Helge Hellberg
Executive Director
Marin Organic, www.MarinOrganic.org

"If you ask most kids today where their food originates from, you'd probably get the name of some fast food chain or mega-supermarket or possibly Spongebob's Crusty Crab shack. While our kids are becoming more and more electronically obsessed and overweight, the connection of food coming from the land is a way of life that is sadly and rapidly disappearing. That's why every town needs a community garden! Not only will a community garden in Novato beautify a public space, but it will make a great outdoor classroom to teach kids and even adults about where "real" food comes. Community gardens improve the quality of life not only for the gardeners but for the entire community. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "To forget how to dig the earth and tend the soil is to forget ourselves." I say, "Forget about what's on TV and go play in the dirt!"

Annie Spiegelman, the dirt diva
Local author, Master Gardener, garden columnist, www.dirtdiva.com

"Sustainable community gardens are important for community development because they can be used to teach a wide variety of people the importance of a balanced life style that includes gardening, fruits and vegetables in the diet, exercise and connection to the land. Community gardens also build ties in the community and protect and or restore the environment."

Fernando Agudelo - Silva, Ph. D.
Professor Biology / Env. Landscaping
College of Marin

"A community garden in Novato could be a joint and shared activity for the entire family, even intergenerationally. It can be an outdoor, healthy family focus that includes planning together, planting, tending, reaping, enjoying. Young children can gain respect and tenderness toward Nature, and older kids and teens can develop skills, responsibility and understanding about reaping rewards from their labors that will prove valuable in later life.

As a child, I was involved with a community garden in Brooklyn, NY It was an experience that stayed with me throughout my life. The pleasure of the toil and the exhilaration of seeing food items and beauty grow from seeds began for me as a young man. There is no better-tasting food than that which one grows him.

A garden would create a sense of pride on a personal level which spills over into pride in our community. Having been involved with high school age children for many years in Novato, my wife and I have repeatedly heard similar laments - "Boring Novato." My own children felt the dearth of attractions and things for them and their friends to do in

our lovely town. A garden would add an area of interest and possibilities for kids of this age and genre."

David Bedar
Novato Resident

"Childhood obesity and the consequential health risks such as Type II Diabetes are increasing in our communities at an alarming rate. Health and wellness education for our students, parents and the community at large is fundamental in addressing this crisis. The National School Meals program can assist with administering wellness education as "Total School Nutrition Environments" are established in schools. The Community garden can support our goals in educating the families about the importance of eating fresh, better yet, growing what you eat. As we develop and grow school gardens, community gardens can provide further support and outreach. In addition to growing healthier foods, community gardens can grow healthier people"

Miguel Villarreal
Director Food and Nutritional Services
Novato Unified School District & San Rafael City Schools
www.nusd.org/fans/fans.html

"Novato will reap manifold benefits from the community gardens coming soon thanks to the legwork of a determined and visionary group of volunteers. Community gardens heal the individual, nurture the greater community and make the healthy benefits of organic gardening available to all. Community gardeners make new friends, learn from experienced gardeners and pass on lifetimes of experience from many cultures to a new generation.

Imagine standing in your garden, eating delicious food that you have hand-raised and harvested at its moment of perfection. Discover or renew your relationship with time, weather and the seasons. Get up close and personal as you learn the life cycles of the interesting and beneficial small creatures that share our earth. Experience the joy and pride of raising beautiful flowers from small seeds or seedlings. The joys of community gardening and its lessons stay with you always."

Jeanne Santangelo, Novato Resident
The Lazy Gardener weekly columnist, Novato Advance
www.lazygardener.org