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## GreenTown Los Altos Newsletter – January 2011

Your source for news and updates about adopting environmentally sustainable practices in our homes, schools, businesses and governments.

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### Welcome to 2011 – A Letter from Our New Executive Director

Hello GreenTown Los Altos Friends,

It's a new year, which means it's resolution time. Here's one of mine – to involve even more people in GreenTown, and to make it the model of an inclusive organization. I want to be sure that our programs, activities and priorities reflect the interests and needs of Los Altos and Los Altos Hills residents. Together, we'll reach out to nearby communities to take on regional issues in sustainability. We'll lead where needed and team up when possible.

We'll kick it all off with our first public meeting of the year on Tuesday, January 18 at 7:00pm, at the Hillview Community Center, Rm 16. At that meeting, we'll listen and discuss the most meaningful issues for the year. We'll define our annual program agenda and hone our focus. I invite you to attend and look forward to hearing your input. Plus I certainly hope to enroll and engage many of you to help us continue to move the "sustainable lifestyle" needle.

Actual tactics for reaching our goals will come out of work sessions that follow, although I am aware of conversations taking place now around adding an exciting and unique special event this year.

An ongoing priority for GreenTown is reducing vehicle trips. I anticipate an increased emphasis on bicycling and making that a more visible component of our program lineup. And there are big opportunities in the water conservation arena.

It's a big agenda, and there's none more important. We can make a world-changing difference from right here at home. Be part of it – be a bigger part of GreenTown. I look forward to working with you this year and in the years to come.

Keith Turner  
Executive Director  
[keith@greentownlosaltos.org](mailto:keith@greentownlosaltos.org)

## Now is the Time to Add Native Plants to Your Yard

As most of you know, California native plants use much less water than most plants typically used in residential landscaping. By using less water, there will be less runoff that could carry pollutants into the storm drains that flow into our local streams.

Native plants offer additional benefits beyond just saving water. For starters, they do not require fertilizers, pesticides, or herbicides. And native plants require less maintenance and trimming, thus saving time and gasoline otherwise consumed by mowers, trimmers, blowers, and other modern gardening tools.

They also attract wildlife by providing a little island of natural respite for hummingbirds, native bees, and migrating birds and insects. Natives also help to restore the healthy microbes that are within the top foot of your soil. And finally, you are extending the rich heritage of the natural and Native American history of our area through the use of native plants.

Now is the time to plant natives so they can get established during the wet season and be ready to survive the naturally dry summer months.

- To see how beautiful they can be, here are a few pictures of spring-blooming natives: [Natives in Bloom](#)
- You can see examples of them in the gardens at most of the Los Altos elementary schools.
- Here is a [list of local nurseries](#) that sell native plants
- Finally, here is a list of invasive species that should NOT be planted because they have an adverse effect on California's ecology: [Non-Natives to Avoid](#)

## California Gardens: Beauty & Sustainability with Native Plants

The California Native Plant Society is hosting a daylong symposium titled, "California Gardens: Beauty and Sustainability with Native Plants." It features talks by California's top horticulturists and designers, plus a plant sale and book sale. The theme is creating and maintaining attractive and sustainable landscapes using California native plants. Topics range from plant selection to garden design and maintenance to habitat value, chosen to inform, educate, and inspire landscape professionals, home gardeners, and native plant enthusiasts.

**When:** February 19, 2011, 9:00am-6:00pm

**Where:** Foothill College

**Cost:** \$90 early bird special until January 15

[More Information here](#)

## New Publication: Slow it, Spread it, Sink it!

According to CalWater, the average annual rainfall in Los Altos is 15.4 inches. With that amount of rainfall, a 2,000 square foot roof sheds 19,200 gallons of water of year and a typical 1/4 acre Los Altos lot receives over 104,000 gallons of rainfall a year. This is about 40 percent of the average annual water usage of 251,000 gallons for a family of four, based on CalWater's calculations.

Therefore, the more rainwater you keep on your property, the less you need to purchase from CalWater. Additionally, much of Los Altos is over the aquifer from which CalWater draws 32% of our drinking water so by letting water seep into the soil, you are helping to re-charge this source.

A new free publication called "*Slow it, Spread it, Sink it!*" details the benefits and techniques for keeping rainwater on your property. Once thought of as a nuisance, storm water now is recognized universally as one our most important natural resources and proper management is more important than ever.

The guidebook is full of useful information including:

- Understanding & evaluating storm water runoff on your property
- How to protect your property and increase its value
- "Do it yourself" techniques

- Rainwater harvesting
- Resource guide to help you locate information and get started

[Download rainwater guidebook now](#)

## Upcoming Acterra Workshops

### **Rainwater Harvesting and Rain Barrel Building**

Learn about the simple parts and tools needed to build a single or multiple barrel system, design and construct a multi-barrel system for collecting rainwater from the roof, and leave with a “how-to” guide, a list of parts, and new friends interested in setting up rain barrel systems.

All parts and tools will be provided; Please wear clothes that can get dirty.

**When:** Saturday, January 29, 12:00pm-3:00pm

**Where:** Palo Alto, near Ohlone School. (The exact address will be sent after registration.)

**Cost:** \$35

### **Oak-Friendly Landscaping Workshop**

Did you know that summer irrigation can leave oak trees susceptible to root rot? Learn how to replace your lawn and thirsty perennials with locally native plants that have evolved to live under the dry shade of a California oak tree.

Topics to be covered include: description of native plants for under your oak tree; when, where and how to plant around your tree; sudden oak death; pruning and other oak care considerations; and common oak galls. Optional hands-on segment: place and plant some of these natives around oak trees at Redwood Grove!

**When:** Saturday, February 5, 9:00am-12:00pm

**Where:** Shoup Park Garden House, 400 University Avenue, Los Altos

**Cost:** \$35, includes \$25 credit for plants at the Acterra Nursery

[More information and registration](#)

## New Water and Energy Programs in the Making

*(Note: We're rerunning this article from December, this time with Margie's correct email address for those of you who are interested in getting more involved.)*

You asked for it and we responded. Now we need your help. In a survey that GreenTown conducted last year, residents of Los Altos and Los Altos Hills expressed a strong interest in our developing programs to address water conservation and home energy savings.

GreenTown is now looking for volunteers to work on implementing two new programs: the **Water Stewardship Program** and the **Energy Savings Program**. If you're interested in these programs, please contact Margie at [programs@greentownlosalto.com](mailto:programs@greentownlosalto.com)

## Why the Brays Support GreenTown Los Altos

Don and Suzanne Bray are Bay Area natives and have lived in Los Altos since shortly after their marriage nearly 20 years ago. They are the parents of three children, all of whom attend Los Altos public schools (Egan Junior High and Los Altos High).

Don is the co-founder and President of AltaTerra Research, a



professional services firm providing research and consulting on clean technologies for the business marketplace. Don first got involved with GreenTown about three years ago and quickly began to contribute to the organization in several ways, including co-chairing the Working Group on Water and Waste. In that role, he helped to organize community forums and to write and present a report and recommendations to the Los Altos Environmental Commission and the Los Altos City Council. The efforts of this working group influenced the new waste contract recently signed with Mission Trail Waste Systems. Don now serves on the Los Altos Environmental Commission. Suzanne is currently participating in the year-long Acterra "Be the Change" environmental leadership program and focusing on land preservation. She recently signed on as the vice-chair of the GreenTown education program.

Don and Suzanne have enjoyed being involved in GreenTown. They like getting to know a broader circle of people who share a common interest and like being able to contribute when time permits. The Brays are also donors to GreenTown, and they hope that their contribution will encourage others to donate, too.

"There are lots of groups trying to make change at a state level but GreenTown focuses on Los Altos and Los Altos Hills. Working at a community level, you can really get things done," says Don. Suzanne adds, "We've lived here a long time and there's a good chance our kids will end up here. When you love a place like this, you want to do what you can to make it a great place to live."

## GreenTown Launches New Website!

Check out GreenTown's newly designed website at [www.greentownlosaltos.org](http://www.greentownlosaltos.org) Special thanks to Shona Davidson & team at [i2i Interactive](#) for their in-kind donation to develop the site. We'd love to hear your [feedback and suggestions](#).

## GreenTown Wants You!

GreenTown is looking for volunteers as we kick off 2011.

- Volunteer Coordinator
- Energy Program Chair
- Water Stewardship Program Support
- Membership Committee
- Marketers and Writers

Contact us at [info@greentownlosaltos.org](mailto:info@greentownlosaltos.org) for more information.

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