

COAST VIEWS

MAGAZINE

& *Coastside Home Guide*

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Native California plants, antiques and collectibles are found at the relocated nursery. Photo courtesy of Yerba Buena Nursery.

Going Native with Yerba Buena Nursery

by Elinor Gale

Half Moon Bay is the new home for Yerba Buena Nursery, California's oldest nursery specializing in native plants. The nursery relocated from Skyline Drive in Woodside to a leased greenhouse at Pastorino Farms, on Route 92 in Half Moon Bay. It joins the carnivorous plant, orchid and rose nurseries already on that site.

Visit Yerba Buena Nursery and enter a spacious, 1,500-foot glass-

roofed greenhouse of native California plants, antiques, collectibles and whimsy. A cradle and children's toys hang from above – it *is* a nursery – with chandeliers and a train-station clock, all reflecting owner Kathy Crane's personality.

History

The nursery began in the 1960s when Gerda Isenburg started collecting native plants discovered in



Top left: Native iris Silver Moon. Top right: Mimulus, commonly know as monkey flower. Above: Charlie relates to the serene setting. Photos: Elinor Gale.

the hills of the Isenburg 3,000-acre cattle ranch. She brought the plants home, grew them and loaded them into her woody station wagon to sell to nurseries on El Camino Real. Their response was, “Why would anyone want to buy those weeds?”

Crane, owner and manager of Yerba Buena Nursery for 18 years, says Isenburg “recognized that regular, commercial nurseries didn’t get the whole native plant idea; that’s what prompted her to open the nursery. She wanted to sell only native plants and show people how beautiful and garden-worthy they could be. To that end, she started a garden.”

When an elderly Isenburg had to sell the nursery, Crane, who had a marketing background and casual gardening experience, purchased it. She says, “I’d never even been there. I thought it was an important con-

cept and important place to continue. I didn’t want it to close.” After her 18 years on Skyline Drive, with business flagging, Crane decided to move the nursery to a more accessible location to re-energize the business and attract more return customers.

Why Half Moon Bay?

Crane considered numerous possible nursery sites, choosing Half Moon Bay for many reasons:

- Accessibility.
- Cooperative nursery concept of offering an array of plants for customers’ gardens.
- Light that fosters plant growth. She explains: “Up on Skyline, we were in the shadow of Langley Hill; our winter was really dark. When you’re growing plants and it’s dark, it takes a long time to get

them going for spring. Here, we have no obstruction, so our plants are probably twice as large.”

- Wonderful space and a glass roof.
- Customers who are aware of value of native plants and hands-on about their property.

She adds, “I looked everywhere and thought it made sense to be in a place with other nursery businesses where we could cooperate, have synergy and have customers visit us all at the same time.”

Plants

Unlike many nurseries, Yerba Buena is a production nursery, propagating and growing its own plants – an unusually large selection of approximately 600 kinds.

Crane says, “Our plants are so suited to California. They’re used to our weather, a dry summer and, hopefully, rain in the winter; they’re used to the soil, the temperatures, the wildlife.” She emphasizes that the native plants benefit from the wildlife and provide a habitat for the birds, bees, small and larger mammals. Finally, native plants use a lot less water.

Among Crane’s favorite plants are two she’ll take to the Filoli flower show in May: manzanita and monkey flower.

Manzanita are evergreen shrubs or small trees whose botanical name, *Arctostaphylos*, means *little apple*. Red-barked with stiff, twisting branches, they range from ground-hugging coastal and mountain species to 20-foot trees. They bloom winter to early spring and carry berries in spring and summer. The flower attracts hummingbirds and bees; the fruit draws slightly larger birds, so it has great wildlife value. And manzanita doesn’t need watering in the summer.

Monkey flower, a nursery specialty, is a spectacular perennial – one of the best spring plants, blooming in large flowers of yellow, white, orange, red and pink. Hundreds of flowers on each plant attract hummingbirds and butterflies.

Service

In addition to in-house consultation by its knowledgeable staff, Yerba Buena offers a \$300, four-hour design package that includes special on-site consultation. The Yerba Buena designer visits the customer's garden to assess conditions and create a custom design plan. The customer also receives a \$50 plant credit.

Delivery service is also available throughout the Bay Area.

Website and Newsletter

Anya Crane, Kathy's daughter, manages the nursery website, a useful resource and learning tool. Crane urges customers to explore the site before visiting the nursery and use the *Plant Search* feature to learn which plants meet their specific criteria. They can also subscribe to the monthly e-newsletter, written by Anya, that gives updates on events and plants of interest, and features favorite local businesses.

Crane, who has been a member of the Half Moon Bay Chamber of Commerce since purchasing the nursery and is an original member of the chamber's eco-tourism group, enthusiastically promotes local businesses. She says, "If you invite your customers to see other businesses, they'll want to make a trip to see us all."

Events

"We're going to do the same sorts of things as on Skyline: talks on native plants, tea among native plants, events to draw people to the plants. We tell the customers about the plants, what's of interest, what's blooming, because they're not always the same. Our job is to acquaint them with the nuances of the plants," Crane says.

"I tell people if they come here every three months and note what's happening, they can put a four-season garden together."

Yerba Buena Nursery is located at 12511 San Mateo Road, Half Moon Bay. You can call the nursery at 650-851-1668.

On the Web:

www.yerbabuenanursery.com



Kathy Crane in the gazebo.
Photo courtesy of Yerba Buena Nursery.

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