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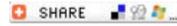
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Essential living: be-ing rooted in place



By Cathie Haynes April 1, 2010 12:25 pm

I have lived in 27 different houses, in seven states, criss-crossing the U.S. west of the Mississippi River. Finally, in 1993, some sanity. I moved to MuRefuge in rural, residential Sebastopol during the time when I was terribly ill with an autoimmune dysfunction. The property was a weed filled three quarters of an acre with a year old spec. house and an eight-foot high white picket fence about the entire property, obliterating the surrounding views.

I knew rehabilitating this land would be a metaphor for my own healing journey. I now realize MuRefuge is my path toward essential living.

The fence came down and a critter-friendly wire fence was strung between the existing fence posts. Windbreaks were planted. A veggie garden was fenced and raised beds built.

Permaculture workshops to hold the water on the land happened. Soil amendments arrived by the truckloads, cases of gopher baskets were purchased as well as hundreds of dollars of perennial plants and bare root trees. An herb spiral was carefully constructed and planted with cooking herbs.

After reading "One Straw Revolution" I wanted to add foraging, egg-laying ducks to MuRefuge. Incorporating ducks was not without trial and error. Clearly reinforcing the fencing to separate the predator (husky) and prey (ducks) became a priority. We now have a stable flock of six female Fawn and White Indian Runner ducks that give us delicious eggs, fertilize our orchard, rid our veggie garden of slugs and snails, and provide us with soothing, burbling sounds.

They also offer us an opportunity to establish a daily and seasonal rhythm since they need to be put into and let out of their duck house each morning and evening.

Compost bins were built and rebuilt. A small greenhouse evolving into a bit larger one provides space for starting seeds and propagation of plants. In the massive concrete back patio, openings were cut out for planting. The concrete blocks were used elsewhere for stepping stones to shore up a ditch and as flooring for the duck house.

Alien plants often did not thrive or died, and some non-natives were removed, like the 24 Buddleia bushes. As native plantings became the focus and flourished, a diversity of creatures: four legged, winged, mammals, insects, birds, beneficial, predatory, now also call this place "home."

Along the way, MuRefuge became a certified wildlife backyard habitat as well as a certified butterfly garden. MuRefuge now boasts over 150 native perennials, shrubs and trees plus an edible orchard brimming with an array of berries, vines, trees, medicinal and culinary herbs as well as seasonal veggies. With the diversity, over 100 birds can be identified through the annual cycle.

We restored the land through trial and error mostly, plus a commitment on my part to be rooted here. Climate change, first wild turkeys then feral peafowl, gophers and other four-legged predators, including feral cats (up to 25), present ongoing challenges. Learning about place is essential living. "Be-ing" rooted in place offers opportunity to observe, reflect, heal, evolve, be present with what is "now."

Anyone interested in a brief glimpse of the evolving native habitat and edible gardens at MuRefuge is invited to participate in a tour sponsored by Cotati Creek Critters, April 11, 9:30 to noon. There will be plenty of time for questions, during the actual walking tour and during the brief introductory talk beforehand which will include microclimate, temperature and rainfall, role and natural cycle of plants, preservation of one's own food.

Plant lists will be provided as well as "pass along plants." Photos of the evolution of the garden will be available. If it is wet, wear boots if you have them. Parking is on a one lane, gravel road so please ride share if possible. Space is strictly limited to 12 so RSVP to jenny@creeks.cotati.info or (707) 792-4422 with contact information, get directions, and to arrange carpooling.

Cathie Haynes has lived in Sonoma County for almost a quarter of a century. She is now a habitat restorationist after a 25-year career as a critical care R.N., college professor and cardiac rehabilitation nurse.

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Mailing Address: P.O. Box 2038 Rohnert Park, CA 94927 **Office:** 100 Professional Center Dr., Rohnert Park, 94928 **Phone:** 707-584-2222

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