

KELLETT GARDEN IN LOS OSOS

Low maintenance by design



TRIBUNE PHOTOS BY JAYSON MELLOM

The deck in the Kelletts' backyard, retained from the original layout, overlooks the back garden and provides a glimpse of the ocean. Below, redbtip Protea bracts glow in front of Mexican sage.

Sage Ecological Landscapes makes a Los Osos couple's yard easy to care for and easy on the eyes

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Ken and Darlene Kellett left Southern California in 1987 and established a new business, D&K Packaging, in San Luis Obispo.

A former aerospace engineer, Ken is skilled in customized design. His company produces a variety of packing and shipping containers, ranging from decorative bags and boxes for wineries to floatable packaging for equipment to be airdropped onto offshore oil rigs.

The Kelletts moved into their current home in Los Osos seven years ago. Although the grounds had been neglected while the house was vacant, the backyard retained some good features: Arbutus "Marina" trees, some shrubs, a wood deck half-way up the slope, and a sinuous pathway of decomposed granite.

Having had little gardening experience, both Kelletts admired the "green thumb" of Darlene's father, who had been a landscaper for the city of Los Angeles.

"He would walk through a garden and snip tips of branches; then he'd pot them up in his backyard greenhouse and have new

plants," Ken said. Some of those plants, which he loved to share, now grow in their walled courtyard garden, where they are visible from the living area.

The Kelletts didn't change their garden immediately. Instead, anticipating a complete garden remodel, they painted the stucco house a

vivid terracotta color.

Three years ago, they contacted Sage Ecological Landscapes in Los Osos, and filled in the questionnaire that prospective Sage clients are given, describing their preferences and expectations before their

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TRIBUNE PHOTOS BY JAYSON MELLOM

Above, native California fuchsia (*Zauschneria californica*) blossoms echo the house color, while a grassy meadow and Arbutus trees offer green contrasts. Above left, the silvery-lavender leaves and coral flowers of an *Echeveria* hybrid highlight the walk to the front door. Below left, bright yellow yarrow in the front garden.

TIPS FROM THE KELLETT GARDEN

- Learn how large each plant will grow before planting.
- If possible, have a drawn plan of the underground watering system.
- Conserve water by installing an automatic shut-off, rain-sensing irrigation meter.
- Create spaces for relaxation outdoors, and take time to enjoy your garden.



At left, the terraced slope and newly paved patio and path give the back garden a refined appearance. Above, nocturnal animals leave their body impressions in the unmowed meadow of red fescue grass.

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initial consultation.

Their primary requirement was that the garden be low maintenance and drought-tolerant.

Darlene wanted color, predominately blues and oranges to complement the house color; she also requested that plants be spaced so that each could be appreciated individually, rather than viewed as masses.

Ken specified a patio near the house that would be more private and wind-sheltered than the wooden deck; he also wanted the patio and pathway to have solid pavers.

Knowing their preferences, Sage owner Todd Davidson and landscape designer Michael Leonard then presented a preliminary plan for discussion and refinement. The final plan incorporated the existing deck, added a paved patio next to the house, recontoured the slope by the patio with terraced planting beds, and realigned the path.

Rather than running the underground water and electrical lines directly up the hill, those utilities lie beneath the path, which will allow easy access without disturbing plantings.

In the front yard, some mature "Dark Star" Ceanothus were retained. But the overgrown rosemary ground cover was beyond saving. The crew spent a full day digging out its woody roots. A large boulder, previously hidden, now sits prominently near the front door, accompanied by matching rocks along the walkway.

New plants were selected for year-round color. Yellow flowering phlox and yarrow are set off by low-growing violet-blue geraniums and lavender-gray succulents, *Echeveria lilacina*.

The Kelletts are delighted with their new drought-tolerant garden. As requested, it requires only twice-monthly maintenance by a crew from Sage.

Sharon Crawford is a freelance writer who lives in Los Osos.



Above, flowers aren't the only way to have color contrasts, as shown by this blue-green stem color golden breath of heaven. Above right, Darlene and Ken relax on their deck, which has an electrical outlet and a gas grill. At right, a whimsical moose sculpture appears to emerge from its ferny habitat.

