

# NeighborhoodVoice

FROM NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT NETWORK MEMBERS AND THE CITY STAR



For more on the Neighborhood Empowerment Network, contact Daniel Homsey at 554-7114 or visit [empowersf.org](http://empowersf.org) on the Web.

## Spreading the Green Throughout San Francisco

By Jane Mariefrancis Martin  
and Alexa Fábrega  
*Special Guest Columnists*

San Francisco is internationally renowned for its natural beauty and ecological awareness. Despite this reputation, those of us who live here know that our neighborhoods suffer from being overly paved. This results in a bleak landscape with little greening, all-too-frequent sewer backups and sewage overflows to the bay and ocean.

Plant\*SF is a local community-based organization that has been making significant efforts to counteract these conditions since 2003. As the organization's acronym (Permeable Landscape As Neighborhood Treasure)

indicates, its mission is to promote sustainable "in-the-ground" plantings in San Francisco's neighborhoods to make them more delightful. This is accomplished through public education and outreach, including an informational Web site and neighborhood presentations, advocacy such as policies and practices that discourage sustainable planting and by creating permits to encourage more opportunities for greening.

The signature of the Plant\*SF project is sidewalk landscaping. By advocating for greening city sidewalks that go far beyond street trees constricted in tiny basins, it has shown that a more beautiful and sustainable option is possible. Working with city agencies,

Plant\*SF pioneered a new permit to allow property owners to permanently convert excess areas of sidewalk to gardens. Administered by the Department of Public Works' Bureau of Urban Forestry (DPW-BUF), the Sidewalk Landscaping Permit is a streamlined, inexpensive process that requires only a simple drawing and plant list, along with property owner signature. While this can be done by even one individual property owner, the permit fee is reduced when even one other nearby property owner applies. Larger groups can also be accommodated. The Plant\*SF Web site ([www.PlantSF.org](http://www.PlantSF.org)) has a "How-To"

page that details the process and provides a downloadable form and instructions.

Beyond the obvious beautification amenities, sidewalk landscaping has many other benefits. A sustainable sidewalk garden is inherently low-maintenance due to the use of native and/or drought tolerant plants which thrive naturally in our climate. They require no irrigation once established because they are planted in the ground, instead of in raised or hanging planters which expose the soil to dryness and require frequent watering. The months from November through January are an ideal time to be installing a sidewalk garden, as the plants will benefit by the rains brought during our natural



The individuals behind Plant\*SF would like to see more of San Francisco look like this stretch of 22nd Street.

water cycle.

Further, native plants provide important habitat to local butterfly, bird and beneficial insect populations, some of which — like the Mission Blue Butterfly — feed and reproduce only on particular native plants — without them they will become extinct.

The first cost of sidewalk landscaping is roughly the same as replacing concrete (about \$10 per square foot) and has the financial benefit of never having

concrete be replaced in those areas, effectively removing them from the costly repair/replace cycle.

Sidewalk landscaping provides a healthier environment for street trees than the typical small "tree pits." It is also a good option for areas which cannot have a street tree because of underground or overhead utilities. While trees must be kept away from utility covers, sidewalk landscaping areas are allowed right up to them, providing

many more opportunities than street trees alone.

Plant\*SF relies on donations to continue its work. If you share its vision, please consider making a tax-deductible donation in any amount (from \$25 to \$25,000). Checks payable to SFPT/Plant\*SF may be sent to SFPT/Plant\*SF at 501 Stanyan St., San Francisco, CA 94117.

Let's see what a beautiful, ecological San Francisco looks like. Put a little love into your sidewalks today!

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### Who are they?

Name of Organization: Plant\*SF

Web Site Address: [www.PlantSF.org](http://www.PlantSF.org)

E-mail Address: [info@plantSF.org](mailto:info@plantSF.org)

Phone Number: 431-2777

One-Sentence Mission: Plant\*SF promotes sidewalk gardening to beautify San Francisco and keep stormwater out of the sewer system.

Next Big Event: 26th & Bartlett Planting: Ten households are turning concrete sidewalk space into gardens by planting them on Saturday. The 26th Street Neighborhood Coalition is working with Plant\*SF for this neighborhood planting in the Mission District. Come join us for a hands-on sidewalk gardening work party installing soil, mulch and drought-tolerant plants. Concrete removal of the sidewalk will be done professionally prior to Saturday.

Date: Saturday, Nov. 10

Location: 26th and Bartlett streets

Volunteer shifts: 8 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Bring: work gloves, refillable water bottle, hand tools if you have them (shovel, trowel, etc.), and your enthusiasm for greening San Francisco! Potluck lunch dishes welcome.

RSVP: name, time and food to [za@intersticesarchitects.com](mailto:za@intersticesarchitects.com). Same day RSVP OK or just show up!



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