
VENTURA BOTANICAL
GARDENS
2024 ANNUAL REPORT
CULTIVATING THE FUTURE



LETTER *from* LAURENCE NICKLIN

2024 PRESIDENT

FROM SEEDLINGS TO SAPLINGS, WE'RE SHAPING FOR OUR FUTURE.

As a landscape designer with an extensive background centered on the conservation, care and aesthetics of plant communities, it is heartwarming to see how much progress was made in 2024, growing the Gardens.

One of my favorite new projects was the Volcanic Garden located in the Ramble, our largest California garden. This display garden focuses on a community of plants found in Ventura County, on a lava rock outcrop. The plants are unique in their ability to survive in a dessication environment. The implications of this for creating resilient landscapes is so important as we experience the various California drought cycles.

We've also made great progress in the South African Gardens. We continue to grow the Fynbos Garden and this year, we had the most spectacular bloom yet. One of the species you should keep your eye on is the Giant King protea, located near the bridge over the dry creek bed, which last year wowed visitors with spectacular blooms. Another popular feature for visitors is our Silver Leaf trees. Their gray-green foliage with dramatic silver-white undersides seems to sparkle in the sun, enchanting visitors throughout the year.

The Karoo Garden continues to expand as well. The spiral viewing feature was completed and on foggy days the experience there is surreal. We also added a number of new aloe trees to our collection and are looking forward to their winter blooms.

As our Gardens continue to evolve, the acquisition pipeline has moved from filling space with appropriate plants to providing homes for endangered and rare species. This pipeline approach provides greater diversity as many of these plants are difficult to acquire. This is the arch of how we grow the Gardens.

The most exciting development that we've initiated is the acquisition sequence for plants from western Australia. Thirty imported tree species have already begun their development from seed to sapling. And with patience, in the next three years, we will be able to establish these trees in the ground on location.

All this takes a focused and dedicated group of caretakers. We welcomed our new horticulture director, William Cavazza, who leads an amazing group of staff members and interns keeping our Gardens healthy and beautiful throughout the year. It's exciting to see our progress and what's on the horizon for 2025!

Laurence Nicklin

ENVISIONING, PLANNING, AND PLANTING FOR GROWTH IN THE GARDENS.

The year 2023, stands out as a time of cultivation for the future of our organization. Our energetic team of staff and volunteers made the best use of the resources we have to better serve our community and make progress on building the Gardens and our conservation programs. This annual report provides a snapshot of an organization celebrating our many successes.

Throughout our history, our visitor numbers had increased steadily by roughly two thousand per year. In 2022, we had around 45,000 visitors per year. In 2023, the increase was over 15,000 resulting in over 65,000 annual visitors!

New pathways in the California coastal sage scrub plant community and steps in the diversity olive grove made these areas and associated seating more accessible for school groups. The plantings we struggled to get in the ground following the Thomas fire grew to a significant size. Many of these plants flowered for the first time, including the California lilacs which provided spectacular spring color in our chaparral garden. Of course, true to our mission, we continue to care for and increase the numbers of rare and endangered plants as part of our ongoing conservation programs and partnerships. For us, this is rooted in building respectful partnerships with like-minded organizations and expanding mission-motivated education.

Great progress was made on planning for growing the Gardens. This solidified our goals and strategies and set us on the path to make the best use of the resources we have to more thoughtfully serve our entire community.

Our volunteers worked overtime on water, fire, engineering, landscape and other planning efforts. We continue to be true in spirit and in fact to the long-term vision that was created by the community. This significantly includes spaces for community gatherings and the arts, which will be incorporated into new areas where we expand our plant collections.

We thank all of you for joining us in making 2024 year such a positive year, and invite you to look ahead with us to planning our next big step.

Joe Cahill



LETTER *from* JOE CAHILL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CARING FOR THE GROWING PLANT COLLECTIONS; EXPANDING PATHWAY NETWORKS; BUILDING NEW STRUCTURES; AND ATTENDING TO MAINTENANCE ASSURE SUSTAINABILITY OF OUR GARDENS WELL INTO THE FUTURE.

COMING OF AGE

As we cultivate our Gardens, we're seeing the rewards of dedicated attention to our mission. Caring for the growing plant collections; expanding path networks; building new structures; and attending to maintenance assures sustainability of our Gardens well into the future.



As we add complexity and interest in both plants and structures, our Gardens are beginning to mature. This year the addition of the distinctive new entry below Rotary Plaza strengthens the recognition of the Gardens as a destination. The angular steel shape reflects the profiles of adjacent hillsides while the leafy filigree pattern relates to the botanical pleasures to be enjoyed within the boundaries beyond.

New paths and stairways in the California Ramble lead visitors through our native pine and manzanita chaparral. New pylon signs identify the boundaries of the California Ramble and informational signs provide visitors with facts about the native species.







Weathering, daily path usage and our thriving plant collections are further signs of our maturing Gardens. This past year, the staff and volunteers spent hundreds of hours repairing worn pathways, installing retaining walls, trimming and pruning plants, repairing rock walls, and refreshing the Welcome Center and Nursery area.

The next time you're in the Gardens, take a minute to enjoy the shade of growing trees in the Chilean and California gardens; look for puya and the brightly colored Cistanthia grandiflora; notice the hummingbirds busy in the Fynbos and Karoo gardens; and appreciate the improved path surfaces.





As you walk through and explore our new pathways, keep an eye out for some of the garden features you may have overlooked. A recently opened side path in the Chilean Garden takes visitors on a loop along the hillside and offers new views. At the turn of the loop, visitors can rest on the stone wall or return to the main path.



In the California Ramble, the stone labyrinth is often missed. This terrace is accessed from a short uphill path and can be glimpsed from the Mediterranean path above it. The hidden character of the labyrinth creates a special stop for those looking for quiet restoration.



In the Mediterranean Garden, the main walkway and multiple stairs offer opportunities to reach the highest garden terraces. With our striking palm silhouettes; over 50 varieties of olive trees planted over the last four years; lavender spilling over the brick stairs and long wall; and recessed sandstone seating; this hilltop area is developing its own unique character.

All of these new additions reference a young garden coming of age with so much promise as we continue to cultivate for the future.





LAST YEAR'S BOUNTIFUL BLOOMS INSPIRED A RECORD NUMBER OF VISITORS TOURING THE GARDENS

TURNING ONE INTO MANY

An abundant and diverse future for our Gardens is what our horticultural team is working on right now. Each year for many years, we have continued to expand the diversity in our plant collections. With that diversity comes a significant learning curve to better understand the exacting conditions to ensure optimal survival for all of our new plants.

To acquire the species that will eventually populate the Gardens, our staff, volunteers and partner organizations receive the seeds and plants through our acquisition pipelines in California, Chile, South Africa, and now, Australia. In our nursery, we also germinate seeds and propagate cuttings from current plants. This is especially important for those plants that have only one or two individuals represented in our collection.

Part of our propagation program includes experimentation. From time to time, we conduct trials to optimize cultivation and increase effectiveness. In addition, our partner gardens share protocols for propagation specific to each species. These protocols are important and varied to include cold stratification for specific time periods, acid, heat/smoke treatments, and/or chemical treatment with plant hormones.

All of these propagation efforts are closely intertwined with our broader conservation initiatives, creating an approach to preserving biodiversity and insuring the survival of our plant species for future generation. For example, the Channel Islands Tree Poppy (*Dendromecon harfordii*) is considered a vulnerable species. We successfully germinate the plant from seed. This species blooms early in the year and displays an abundant splash of brilliant yellow along the new pathways through our chaparral, Torrey pine, and manzanita regions. Viewing the road from Summit Plateau, visitors delight in the ribbons of amber weaving through the California native plant garden as one of our earliest blooms of the season.

In our Chilean garden, Carbonillo (*Cordia decandra*) is a fifteen foot tall evergreen shrub native to semi-desert areas. For that reason, and because now it is an established specimen, we don't water this plant at all. The Carbonillo might be an excellent choice for ornamental use, however it does not propagate from cuttings and its woody fruit requires a water soak for many months. Even then, it can take years for the seeds to sporadically germinate. Over the years, our staff and volunteers have been persistent and finally, at long last, we are excited to announce that our many Carbonillo shrubs are in flower. These blooms are prodigious in the spring but will continue to flower all year. When you are up in the Gardens, look for the profusion of white flowers that create a stunning and dramatic visual in April and May, showing our hillsides covered in what looks like brilliant patches of snow.

With so many propagation challenges specific to each rare plant in our collection, it is impressive how much our horticulture team is required to know in order to keep the Gardens healthy. We marvel at the expanse of knowledge they learn, and there is a LOT to learn!













FOR THE LOVE OF GARDENS

BY AMY LAMB

Simply put, I love gardens. Do I have a horticultural background? Can I recite Latin plant names? Was I born with a green thumb? No. What I lack in expertise, I make up for with pure enthusiasm and dirt determination. Where is the best source for inspiration and knowledge for me? The answer is simple — every botanical garden, home garden, park, farm and ranch on the planet.

My husband of 36 years was born in Ventura but we lived and raised our children in Pasadena. We were blessed to have three amazing gardens in our community. I served on the Descanso Garden board for nineteen years with two terms as Board Chair.

This experience was one of great growth for me as a volunteer. I learned that a nimble organization with a committed board and staff can grow in unimaginable ways. I came to appreciate how gardens are more than just a collection of plants. They can be a calm place for parents, a gathering spot for friends and family, a way to learn about conservation and so much more.

Several years ago, we made the decision to make Ventura County our home. Enamored with the Ventura Botanical Gardens, we would head straight up the hill when friends came to visit. What better place to get our steps in, show off a magnificent coastline and wander the paths, while admiring the plant collections representing the earth's five Mediterranean climate zones? It seemed that on each visit, a new project was in the works to enhance the visitor experience. There are countless "seats" for contemplation. How were they getting so much accomplished? We joined the Perennial Society and soon became part of the family. I was asked to join the Board and said "yes" with great enthusiasm.





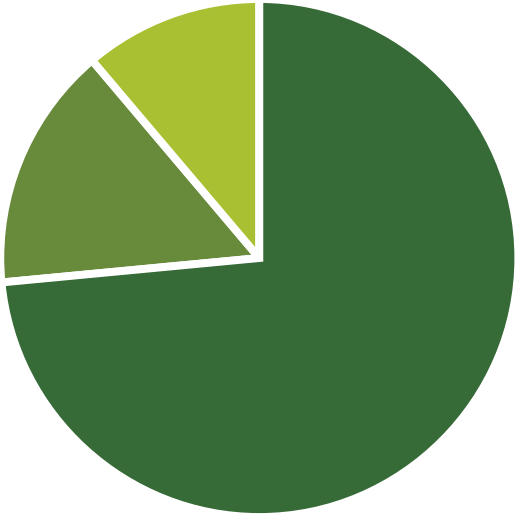
Why VBG and why now? Our community needs this special place a stone's throw away from downtown. It's accessible. It's educational. It's inspiring. It's a place of both prospect and respite. The leadership is mission driven with an executive director that wants things done yesterday. Everyone involved is a dreamer with intent. This is a rarity. Maybe it all comes from the original dreamers with a "seed" of an idea. Look where we are today.

Finally, my absolute favorite thing about the VBG is that it is a public garden. The mission statement says it all, "*to create and maintain public gardens for the preservation, education, cultural contribution & enhancement of the entire community*". As I have learned, gardens are never finished. However, being a part of the growth time line and helping the"garden to grow" is a privilege. Join us.

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

For the Years Ended December 31, 2023 and 2022
(Unaudited)

INCOME



- Contributions and Bequests
- Visitor Program
- Investments, Other Revenue

EXPENSES



- Gardens and Visitor Services
- Fundraising
- Supporting Services
- New Garden Spaces

To Our Key Contributors

THANK YOU

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2024

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