



Descanso
Gardens

Impact Report 2023

Our Mission


**At Descanso Gardens,
we connect people with
nature and one another.**




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Gardens Foundation

FROM OUR CEO, JULIANN ROOKE

At Descanso Gardens, we dream big. And I can't thank the staff, supporters, volunteers, community, and visitors enough for helping us create this special place.

In 2023, we worked hard to ensure that our projects in the Master Plan would come to fruition. Much of that work was behind the scenes. Still, we did add new amenities to the Courtyard and, importantly, started realizing the true potential of the Ruth Borun Nursery and Propagation Center, a beacon of our future growth and development.



A new look

We also took this year to reflect on our mission and brand. With much input from members, staff, and the community, we debuted a new logo and website encompassing our mission to connect people with nature and one another. Our new look symbolizes our ongoing growth and botanical spirit.

A year of growth

When I think about Descanso and its future, we are dedicated to its legacy and preserving this special place. In these pages, you will read about all the wonderful things we achieved in 2023 and see the people who made it happen. This spirit will help us grow and flourish.

It is only through the unwavering support of our members, the dedication of our volunteers, and the generosity of our donors that Descanso continues to grow and thrive. Your support is not just appreciated, it is the very foundation of our progress. Together, we will propel Descanso Gardens into the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Growing, blooming, thriving

Growing the future

The first full year of operations at our state-of-the-art Ruth Borun Nursery and Propagation Center has been productive. The horticulture team propagated historic plant varieties and imperiled native species and created entirely new varieties with traits to withstand more climate extremes.

Lilacs and camellias constitute the bulk of our historic collections. The Descanso lilac collection contains 13 cultivars found nowhere else. For the first time in decades, we have succeeded in taking, rooting, and establishing cuttings from the rarest of our historic lilacs. We expect to release new “Descanso Lilac” varieties in 3-5 years. We’ve had similar success with our camellias and chrysanthemums. Breeding new varieties of plants progresses our historic collections into the future.

Imperiled native species were also at the forefront of our preservation efforts. By working with other organizations, the Descanso team acquired material from many rare, endangered, and vulnerable native plant species, which we actively propagate at the nursery. We germinated thousands of milkweed plants

needed to recruit and increase the endangered Western Monarch butterfly population. Many of our visitors took home these milkweeds to help with this goal.

We could mention more achievements—including the establishment of self-reproducing populations of *Astragalus brauntonii*, the first plant listed on the United States Endangered Species List—but we cannot talk about the nursery without mentioning its importance to preserving our historical coast live oaks. You can read more about our oaks below.

The Ruth Borun Nursery and Propagation Center has already produced many horticultural achievements. As we continue preserving our natural resources, we also position ourselves as a leading center of plant propagation and preservation.

Preserving our oaks

After years of drought, we had more rainfall in a few months than in years. The rain softened the ground, and many majestic oaks came down. We lost 22 substantial trees. Wet winters like this make the work at the nursery vital for preserving our oaks. We nurture about 300 oak

seedlings propagated from our mature oaks for future planting in the garden and community.

Additionally, we were committed to finding new life for our fallen oaks. We have already repurposed logs and branches throughout the garden and intend to use more for tables and bars in our new restaurant, fencing, and in areas of the Descanso Railroad.

As we look to the future, we plan to turn our wetter winters into water conservation and habitat preservation opportunities through our lake restoration project starting in 2024.

Connecting people with nature

Studies show that nature is essential for well-being. Educating people about nature and natural resources and giving them experiences in the outdoors continued to be a priority. It is so important to us that our new core mission is connecting people with nature and one another. Our educational programs teach future stewards about nature, and our free admissions programs allow more people to access nature. We also focused our programs on wellness and



the well-being that comes with spending time in the garden.

A new look for Descanso

As we embark on exciting projects as part of our master plan, we wanted to reflect the spirit of growth and sustainability with a new mission, logo, and website. We asked members, guests, donors—everyone with a stake in the garden—for their opinions. We listened and developed a streamlined mission, more user-friendly website, and a new logo that depicts the ongoing botanical spirit of the garden.

Art bloomed at the gallery

From the seasonal artworks featured in *SHIKI: the Four Seasons in Japanese Art*, to the animal-centric *Living in a Wildlife Corridor* with Arroyo Foothills Conservancy, to the depiction of nature's underworld in *0 Horizon: Art of the Forest Floor*; this year's

exhibitions at the Sturt Haaga Gallery and Boddy House were exciting and appealed to a wide range of interests. We also opened the gallery to local artists in our *Shape+Form* juried competition. We ended the year with an exhibition at the Boddy House. *Descanso: LA's Garden* was curated by our Programs and Education staff and explored the rich history of our plants, people, and environmental factors that have shaped the garden.

Our Courtyard got a makeover

New dining options and a new gift shop enlivened the Courtyard. Jones Coffee Roasters, a Pasadena favorite, set up shop and became an instant hit with members and guests.

We reimagined the former Café space as The Market, offering a diverse range of hot and cold grab-and-go items,

gourmet snacks, and an enticing assortment of beverages.

The Store was remodeled into a beautifully designed space featuring hand-painted murals. We shifted the focus of our assortment to local, artisanal products reflecting sustainable and ethical consumption.

We continue to look for ways to improve the guest experience by elevating our food offerings, and we are excited about the upcoming opening of Farmhouse at Descanso Gardens, a farm-to-table restaurant.

70 years of stewardship

We celebrated the 70th anniversary of Descanso Gardens. In 1953, Manchester Boddy's private estate became a public garden owned by Los Angeles County. A few years later, the Descanso Gardens Guild was formed when community volunteers banded together to preserve the garden for future generations. It is still through community that we continue to grow and thrive.

As a thank you, we invited members and La Cañada Flintridge residents to an End of Summer/Anniversary celebration where everyone enjoyed food, music, and fun activities.

BY THE NUMBERS



Highest one-day attendance

8,530



Baby owls spotted

2



Years as a public garden

70



Inches of rainfall

45

(almost double the average)



Enchanted guests since 2016

929,009



Oak seedlings cared for at the nursery

300

493 Volunteers completed

16,835 Hours of service

New electric train

1



Member households

29,686

Free coffees given at Jones grand opening

955

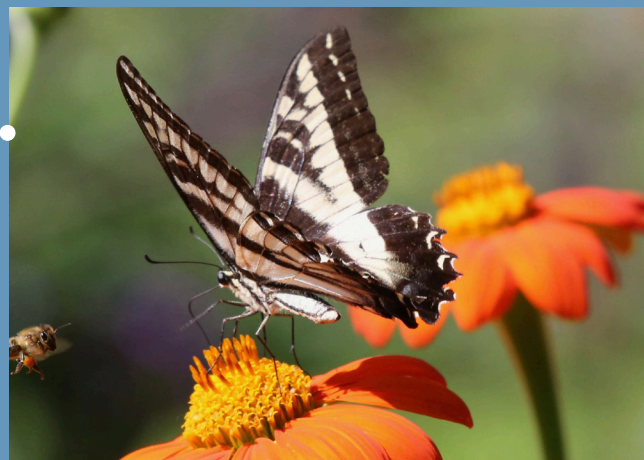


Admissions

920,695

Plants we have recorded in the garden

13,072



A garden for everyone

It's well known that public gardens provide many benefits, including improved mental and physical well-being, better air quality, and increased biodiversity. At Descanso Gardens, we are proud of the many school visits, free admissions, and programs we offered in 2023 to make nature accessible to everyone.

At the garden, we provided 54,701 free admissions to EBT cardholders, students, teachers, military personnel, and the general public on Free Tuesdays. We also stayed open until 7pm during extended daylight hours so that people could visit the gardens after their workday.

Our education department aims to support and enhance visitors' experiences of discovery and connection—and to do so in an inclusive way. With this in mind, we offered 211 free classes, workshops, and events. We hosted 12,936 students and adults on field trips, many of which were from Title 1 schools.

With our upcoming lake restoration project, we plan to make nature more accessible by adding ADA paths and walkways around the lake so that wheelchair users and others can come closer to nature.

Free admissions	54,701
Free Tuesday guests	32,124
EBT cardholders	8,267
Field trip visitors:	12,936 students, teachers, and chaperones on 249 field trips

Programs with Title 1 schools

More than 7,300 children from Title 1 schools and underserved communities attended our free field trips and educational programs. We were pleased to serve almost

1,500 participants through our school partnerships including programs such as My Masterpieces: Discovering Art in My Community in collaboration with the Pasadena Unified School District and Pasadena Educational Foundation.



Cultivating community

Connecting people with nature

At Descanso, inviting people to participate and discover nature is important. Member and donor support has allowed us to offer numerous opportunities for adults and children to learn and discover nature.

To encourage our visitors to engage, we offer a variety of programs, including horticulture classes, nature tours, and displays; bird walks and nature meditations; and poetry readings and workshops.

For our youngest visitors and their families, we had monthly story times, crafts, and sensory play in the garden.

All of these programs are included with membership or admission, giving more people access to meaningful natural experiences.

Celebrating summer

We love to celebrate the seasons at Descanso and our program Cultivate is one way we do it. Cultivate was held five times in the summer and featured garden tours, live music and dancing, walks and talks, and nature-themed crafts. Attendees learned about native plants, poetry and art,



mindfulness and wellness, animals and their habitats, and our natural resources.

Live music and the allure of the gardens during cooler hours brought in many visitors. Between the Summer Music Series and Camellia Lounge in the Japanese Garden, we had 45 live performances.

Visitors also got to experience Pacific Opera Project's *Hansel and Gretel*. The program, included with admission, was a fanciful take on the story and presented under the oaks at the amphitheater.

Fostering a love of nature

Our educational programs helped children discover the natural world around them. For the first time, field trip

attendance was back to pre-pandemic levels.

In addition to our guided and self-guided field trips, we held several Homeschool Discovery Days attended by 2,215 parents and children.

We also worked with community partners to provide the outdoor space for seven weeks of summer camp.

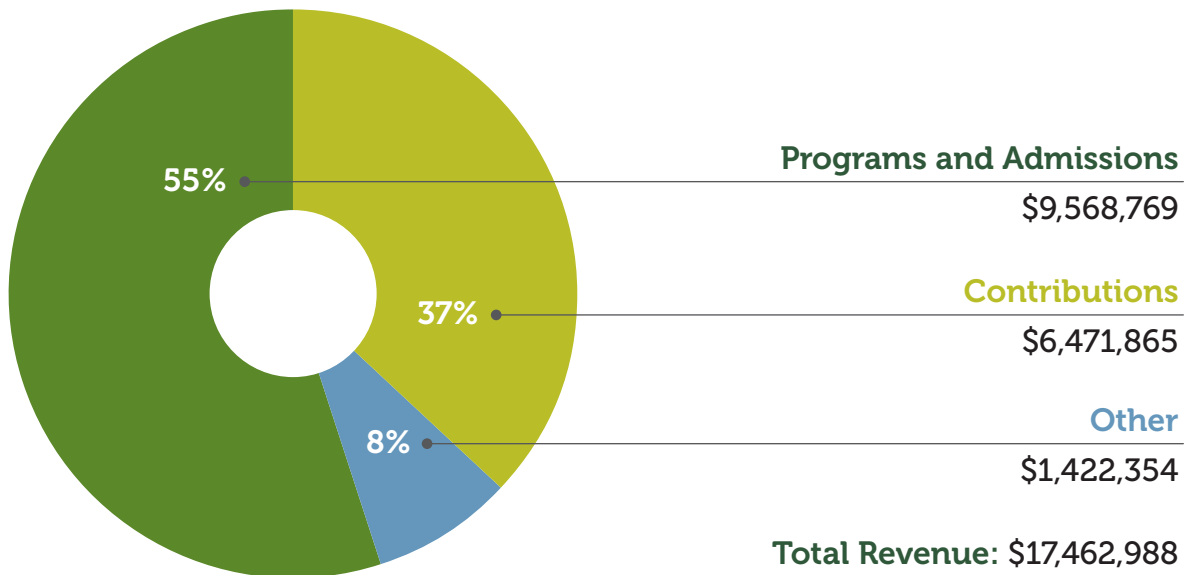
Appreciating our members

We always appreciate our members' support. We celebrated at events exclusively for members, including two Member Appreciation Nights and our End of Summer Celebration. Perennial Circle members were invited to monthly events reserved for our highest membership levels.

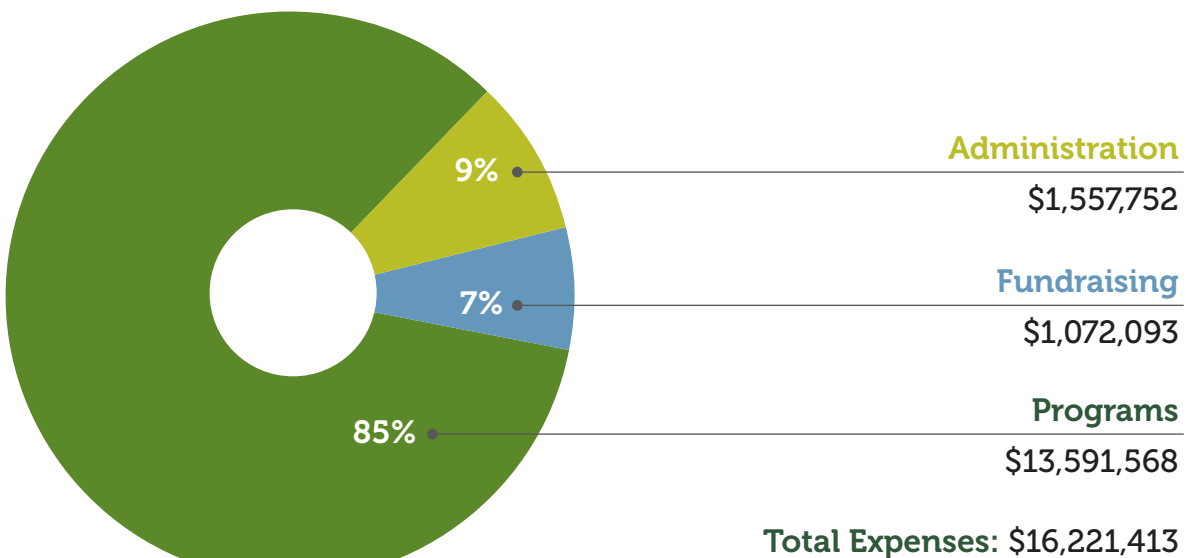
FINANCIALS

2023 financials are below, for the complete audited financial report, visit descansogardens.org.

Revenue



Expenses



LEADERSHIP

Board of Directors

Donald Voss, *Chair*
Sandra Mays, *Vice Chair*
Laura Furey, *Secretary*
Jim Levin, *Treasurer*
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Diane Binney
Darcy Coleman
John D'Angona
Christy Hobart
Lovell Holder
Lola James Kelly
Kay Linden
Ben Logan
Ann Murphy
Blythe Haaga Parker
Patsy Pinney
Marie Queen
Steven Rosen, M.D.
Hope Tschopik Schneider
Brad Schwartz
Linda Segal
Karl Swaidan
Jacob Tujian
Clarissa Weirick
Juliann Rooke (*Ex Officio Trustee*)
Chief Executive Officer, Descanso Gardens

Senior Management

Juliann Rooke
Chief Executive Officer

Emi Yoshimura
Chief Operations and Administration Officer

Somer Sherwood-White
Chief Advancement Officer

David Bare
Director of Horticulture and Garden Operations

Jennifer Errico
Director of Communications

Cristeen Martinez
Director of Exhibits and Engagement

VOLUNTEERS

Nearly 500 volunteers supported Descanso Gardens both on a regular basis and at our Community Service days. They tended the gardens, greeted guests, served as docents for exhibitions, educated visiting students, and helped in many other ways. Their contributions are invaluable, and we appreciate every one!

Our volunteers

Heather Adams
Marilyn Allen
Kevin Altar
Richard Andrews
Stephanie Arakaki
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Denise Atlas
Yeva Ayvazyan
Andrea Backes
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Margaret Bee
Catherine Bellomo
Dimple Bhasin
Lorri Biasi
Megan Bingham
Cathy Biondi
Mary Blakey
Ellie Bloomfield
Victoria Bodwell
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Lauri Bortz
Thomas Brady
Lois Bramwell
Bonnie Bryant-Brittan

Jody Budman
Maureen Burch
Susan Burger
Elizabeth Burleson Mortilla
Kevin Byrnes
Rossiter Castinado
Mary Cenovich
Germaine Chapman
Deborah Charlie-Bartell
Sonia Cherumandanda
Jessica Chou
Debbie Chung
Ana Collisson
Robin Comingore
John D'Angona
Jack Danna
Richard Davenport
Sandra Davis
Molly Dell'Omo
Harsha Desai
Linn Dietz
Christopher Dixon
Elsa Donlucas
Cathy Doub
Virginia Duggan
Elaine Edelman
Lady Edwards

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Christine Ferioli
William Ferioli
Bernard Fitzmorris
Rene Flamenco
Claudia Forbes
Jennifer Fox
Brenda Franklin
Kurt Freidenberger
Steven Gaglione
Gretchen Gantner
Donald Garner
Jeanne Gentillon
Melissa Gerard
June Ghil
Sara Gold
Nel Graham
Marietta Grimaud
Bruce Hale
Cameron Hall
Susan Hallgren
Craig Hamilton
Anne Harnagel
Maureen Harrigan
Virginia Hatley
Petty Heinrich
Stephanie Hernstadt

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Gay Hill
Karen Hoge
Nancy Hogg
Diane Hong
Richard Hough
Karen Howard
Barbara Jahnke
Kathryn Johnson
Edward Johnson
Susan Kachikian
Alan Kahn
Amy Karbelnig
Rui Katayama
Lisa Kaye
Joe Kertes
Sylvie Khayat
Kathleen Kovalcik
Sonja Krause
John Kruesi
Kathleen Kubota
Kim Labinger
Frank LaCasella
Sabrina LaFargue
Nancy Lambrecht
Val Lardner
Eileen Lau
Becky Learner
Jun Lee
Janice Lee
Christine Levine
Alan Lichtenstein
Michael Lichtman
Andrea Lichtman
Paulett Liewer
Bill Light
Kenneth Lin
Ellen Lloyd
Kathi Lombardo
Alice Loo
Deeya Loram
Mary Lotz
Michelle Lutz

“It keeps me committed to spending time in such a beautiful place. The employees, volunteers, and foundation are committed to doing what is best for the land and the community. I really admire all of the effort put into keeping this place special, beautiful, and engaging.”

— Heidi Neilson

Betty Ma
 Sharon Macgregor-Scott
 Nao Magami
 Kristine Majich
 Linda Markley
 Rita Marshall
 Gayle Marshall
 Connor Martin
 Rick Martinez
 Kirra Martinez-Bennett
 Irene Masharo
 Monica Mata
 Theresa Mazurek
 Linda McCollum
 Kate McDaniel
 Patricia McGinnis
 Leonora McGugan
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 Lindsay McMenamin
 Charles Meehan
 Jenia Mehrabians
 Felicia Michell
 Vera Milosevic
 Yvette Minassian
 Catherine Mires
 Logan Mock
 Carol Montes de Oca
 Megan Mushonga
 Lila Nastro
 Heidi Neilson
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 Jia Ng
 Violeta Oganessian
 Michelle Ojeda
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 Jessica Sears
 Maria Shufeldt
 Lisa Sievers
 Blanche Sindelar
 Dilmit Singh
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 George Thomas
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 Dorothy Wooddell
 Peggy Wurtz
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 Spencer Young
 Carolyn Young
 Halle Yuhan
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 Gabriella Zecchetto
 Pauline Zuniga

SUPPORTERS

Thank you for your tremendous support

Annual giving in the form of memberships, donations, grants, sponsorships, and other contributions is vital for our mission and ensures the gardens' sustainability for the future.

\$100,000+

Anna and Harry
Borun Foundation
County of Los Angeles
Department of Public Works
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remain anonymous*

\$50,000+

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\$25,000+

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\$5,000+

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