

SPRING/SUMMER 2026

Descanso

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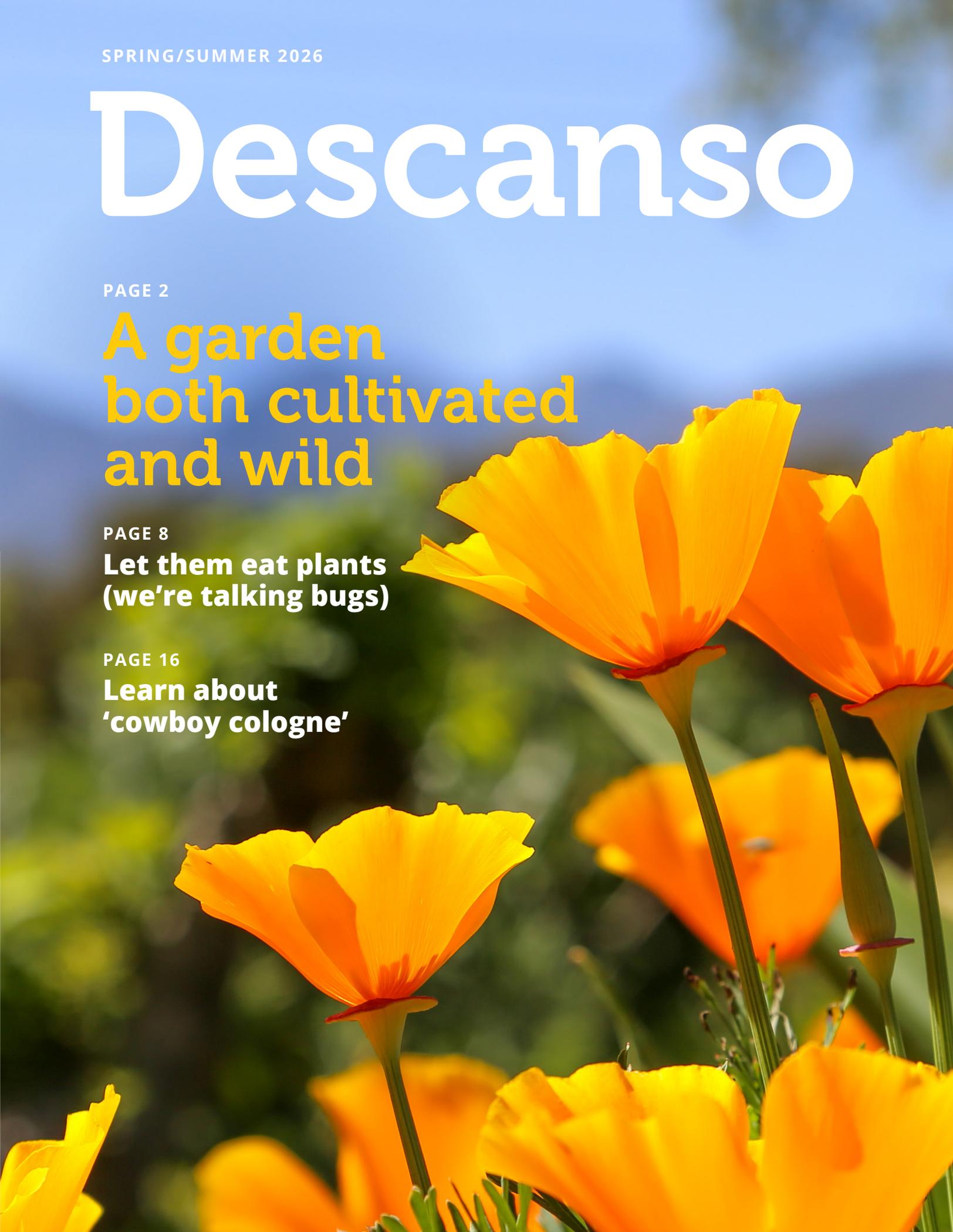
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both cultivated
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'cowboy cologne'**



Our Mission

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

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The soul of Descanso is wild and cultivated



The idea of Descanso’s soul being both cultivated and wild first surfaced a few years ago, when we began developing our Master Plan. It was a concept that had lived quietly in my mind for a long time—something I had always felt about this place, but had never quite put into words.

A duality

Descanso is cultivated and wild, and that duality is what makes it so extraordinary. Here, the hand of the gardener and the spirit of the land exist side by side. You can stroll among the tulips in the spring, the Promenade glowing with color, and then slip into the quiet shade of the Oak Woodland. You can find stillness in the carefully tended Japanese Garden and then lose yourself in the untamed beauty of the Camellia Forest.

In these pages, you’ll discover what it takes to keep Descanso both cultivated and wild. It’s a balance that requires constant care, creativity, and respect for the land. It takes a remarkable horticulture team—wonderfully skilled, deeply knowledgeable, and endlessly imaginative. They bring not only their technical expertise, but also their passion to everything they do.

Harmony is key

As you wander through the garden, you may see them at work—planting, pruning, tending, and nurturing. They are the quiet stewards of this living landscape, caring not only for the plants but for the delicate harmony between human intention and natural beauty.

Descanso reminds us that beauty can be both shaped and spontaneous, both designed and discovered. It is always cultivated and wild.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juls". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "J" and a long, trailing "s".

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GARDEN



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Learn about California Sagebrush.

A garden both cultivated and wild

Descanso is a place where wild nature and carefully curated beauty exist side by side, and that is part of what makes it so special.

The California Garden showcases carefully curated and cared-for native plants.



Honoring the spirit of Descanso Gardens

by Kelly Fernandez, Director of Horticulture and Facilities

As a lifelong resident of Los Angeles, I grew up surrounded by a dense urban environment—rows of stacked apartments overlooking a bustling thoroughfare. Green spaces were rare (and still are), often hidden and hard to find. It took a concerted effort during my young adult years to seek out these small pockets of nature in a sprawling metropolitan tapestry.

With a majority of Angelenos living in apartments, many of us navigate daily life with limited access to the natural world. I'm not entirely sure what first sparked my curiosity, but I remember the simplicity of scattering a seed in a patch of empty dirt and the thrill of growing and watching them sprout in my parents' backyard. Those moments felt essential—crucial even—to my sense of purpose.

Through college courses and over a decade of hands-on experience growing food and flowers and nurturing a passionate community of volunteers at a botanical garden, I came to deeply understand the

profound value of stewardship of living collections and the inherent connection we have to the natural world. Botanical gardens are often designed to educate and inspire, telling stories of plant history and the curated environment. Yet, for city dwellers like myself, they serve an equally vital purpose: offering a place of rest and respite from the relentless pace of urban life. Gardens provide a chance for us to slow down, breathe, and reconnect with the rhythms of the natural world.

Harmony and balance

Whether shaped by extreme weather events or the natural progression of a growing season, the environment around us is in constant flux, cycling through stages of growth and renewal. As gardeners, we honor each phase with care and patience. We celebrate the horticultural precision of a tulip's peak bloom, in admiration of its exquisite color and form. Equally, we cherish the ephemeral beauty of native wildflowers, scattered loosely and joyously by gardeners and community partners. Their brief bloom season reminds us to be present—to appreciate

the beauty of impermanence and the quiet steadfastness of nature's cycles.

Heritage and Tradition

Japanese garden techniques such as *niwaki*—the artful pruning of trees to create sculptural, naturalistic forms—and *karesansui*, or dry landscape gardens, tell a centuries-old story of harmony with nature, and mindful cultivation. These traditions teach us to listen, observe, and celebrate the quiet beauty found in simplicity and the passage of time.

The oak trees that form a canopy over our Camellia Forest, Japanese Garden, and Ancient Forest stand as living examples of resilience. These venerable trees provide a cool and shady microclimate for both animal and human visitors. Their sprawling branches and steadfast presence remind us that while seasons and blooms may come and go, the roots of this land run deep—grounding us and inspiring stewardship for generations to come.

Completing the Cycle

As plants reach the end of their growth cycles, the garden's story continues through renewal

Located in a natural bowl, Descanso includes many habitats. The California Garden, top and middle, and Rose Garden.

and regeneration. At Descanso, we honor this natural process by composting most of our green waste—transforming fallen leaves, spent blooms, pruned branches, and even worn-out pumpkins to provide rich nourishment for the soil.

This practice closes the loop of cultivation, returning life-giving nutrients back to the earth and supporting the health of our plants without reliance on synthetic chemicals. Our commitment to being an all-organic operation reflects a deep respect for the environment and the delicate ecosystems we nurture—ensuring that every stage of growth and renewal contributes to a thriving, sustainable future.

By weaving together our love for nature, our respect for its natural beauty, and our commitment to honoring its cycles, we listen carefully to what the gardens need and honor the stories of those who came before us. It is this delicate balance between the wild and the cultivated that makes Descanso so special. 🌱



CULTIVATED AND WILD



A gulf fritillary butterfly gathers nectar from 'Autumn Joy' stonecrop along the Promenade.

Let them eat plants! Insects in the garden

by Autumn Ayers, Manager of Horticulture and Collections

In my first year as a horticulture student, my university hosted a guest lecture by entomologist and author Doug Tallamy. His book *Bringing Nature Home* took the country by storm, inspiring people to grow native plants and consider the impact of home gardening on the ecosystem. In one powerful moment from his presentation, Dr. Tallamy showed a beautiful garden with a mix of native and non-native plants. In the following slide, he had photoshopped statues in place of all of the non-native plants, explaining that to creatures in your ecosystem, this might as well be what your yard looks like.

Dr. Tallamy's approach is strongly rooted in his entomological background. For many of our natural food webs, insects are at the base. Even seed-eating birds feed on baby caterpillars, an easy-to-eat, nutrient-packed food source. But as we lose natural spaces to human use, like development and agriculture, insect populations suffer the loss of important sources of food and shelter.

When the base of a food web is scarce, larger species further up the chain suffer as well. But the destruction of natural spaces isn't the only challenge that insects have to contend with. Many insect species evolved alongside their host plant partners, meaning that they cannot make use of just any plant, only the ones native to their ecosystems. As in Dr. Tallamy's memorable example, our city is full of non-native ornamental plants, which to local insects are as inert and unusable as stone statues.

Organic all the way

You may not know this, but Descanso Gardens is an entirely organic facility. As part of our interplay of cultivated and wild spaces, we understand the need to be more than a garden of statues. Although not every plant in the garden has leaves recognizable as food to local

insects, because we don't use pesticides, insects are welcome to collect pollen from the flowers or take shelter among the branches.

Organic practices go beyond avoiding the use of chemical sprays; in some cases, we use gardening practices that actually encourage creating and maintaining habitat for local critters. We leave most of the oak leaves that fall in place to break down and naturally feed the camellias and other plants. We compost much of the plant material we remove from the garden, and we reuse fallen branches and other logs as garden infrastructure.

All of these practices help create food and habitat for insects throughout the garden, which in turn feed the rest of the food web. Ecologically-minded gardening practices help to bring insect populations into balance, subsequently balancing the populations of their predators.

People seem to be choosing plants not just for what they can bring to a garden aesthetically, but for what functions they can perform for the ecosystem and the world at large.

CULTIVATED AND WILD

Chemical management can often have the opposite effect by controlling insect populations so harshly that their natural predators die off as well, leading to future out-sized pest populations. By taking a milder approach when pests show up, we avoid huge pendulum swings in insect populations, keeping our overall need for control methods much lower.

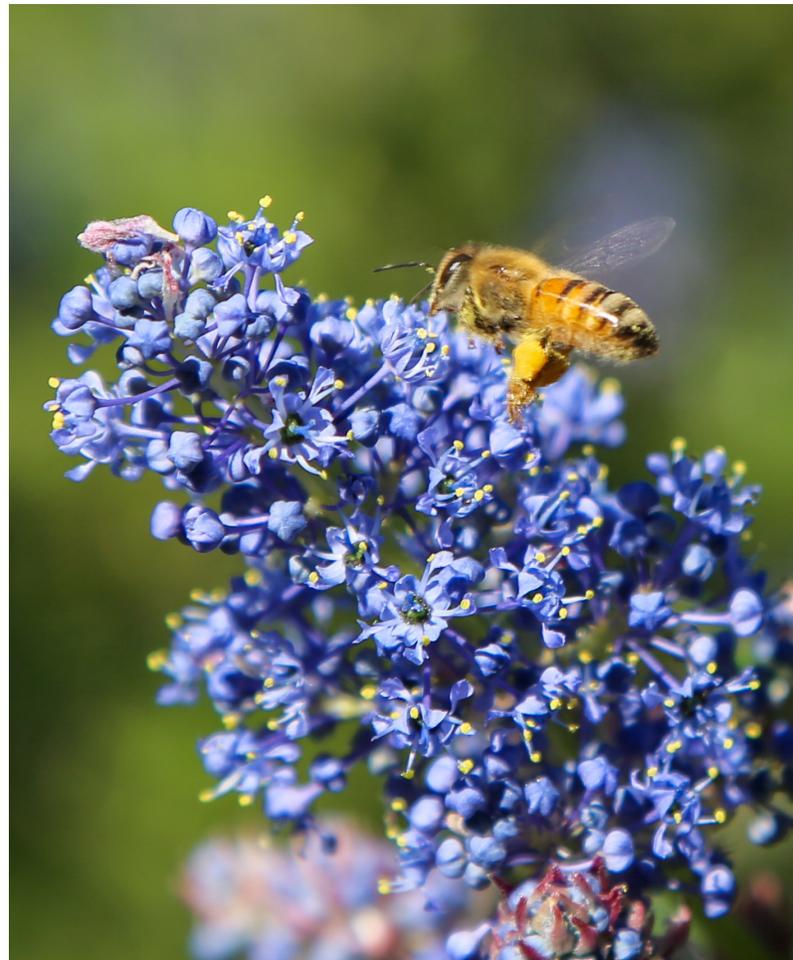
Gardening as an act of restoration

Bringing Nature Home captured a moment of shifting zeitgeist in American gardening practices.

On a call last week with Richard Schulhof (once Descanso's Executive Director and current Board Member at Descanso and the Theodore Payne Foundation), he summed up this shift in a profound way, saying, "People are seeing gardening more as an act of ecological restoration and support for the Earth, as opposed to decoration or a hobby. It's a big shift in how people are thinking about their whole relationship with the natural world." And it's true. People seem to be choosing plants not just for what they can bring to a garden aesthetically, but for what functions they can

perform for the ecosystem and the world at large.

This comes with a shifting mindset about insects as well. When looking at a nibbled plant like a milkweed, instead of disappointment in the reduced attractiveness of the plant, one can rejoice in the knowledge that their garden has helped to save an endangered monarch butterfly. Munched-on plants are plants that are pulling their weight and being appreciated by the local fauna, and those who steward them are playing a part in a larger ecological revolution.



A praying mantis, left, and bee thrive in a garden without pesticide. A Western swallowtail, right, feeds on lantana.



What you can do

What steps can you take to create ecologically balanced gardens at home?

Leave the leaves: Where possible, let leaf litter lie in your garden. It's free fertilizer. If you choose to rake leaves off of lawns or paved areas, leave them to decompose in your garden beds or at the edges of your property.

Stems and seeds are valuable resources: Many of our native insects and animals rely on hollow leaf stems for shelter and native seeds for food in the winter. Leaving wildflower stalks and seeds standing in the garden can help with their survival and also ensure that your wildflowers have time to create mature seeds that will grow in future years. Although

leaving stems upright is best, a middle ground approach would be to wait until plants have mature seeds, then cut the stalks and lay them on the ground by the plants. This helps to preserve aesthetics and still provide food and shelter for animals.

Try composting: Read Descanso Gardener Andrew Martin's article on page 12 of this magazine to learn more about the benefits and process. Even if you don't have space to compost at home, you can contribute to county-wide composting efforts by following your local food and green waste guidelines.

Spray conscientiously: Insects such as aphids and spider mites can often be controlled with regular hose blasts rather than

chemical sprays. If you do choose to spray, make sure to read the instructions on the label. Even organic products, like neem oil, can harm beneficial organisms the same way they harm pests. Care must also be taken when applying organic fungicides, since they can harm pollinators if sprayed near open flowers.

Plant local natives: Not every plant in your garden has to be a native plant, but every little bit helps. One mature oak tree can sustain hundreds of species of insects and provide food and shelter for thousands of animals. If you can't remove your whole lawn, maybe you can find space for some native trees, shrubs, or wildflowers to offset the ecological cost. 🌱

Tulips: A splash of cultivated color

by Taylor Lopez,
Display Horticulturist

For decades, people have been flocking by the thousands every springtime to witness the glorious tulip super bloom here at Descanso Gardens. With over 35,000 bulbs, it's always a surefire crowd-pleaser. But few people know the history of the flowers, the work that goes into bringing them to Southern California, and how far in advance we have to plan these wondrous displays.

A trip from Asia to Europe

I'd wager that when you think of tulips, you think of those grandiose, color-blocked fields in the Netherlands and festivals all over Northern Europe. Did you know that wild tulips are native to the mountainous regions of Central Asia, and that the first cultivated tulips were produced in the Ottoman Empire over a thousand years ago?

According to the Amsterdam Tulip Museum, the word "tulip" stems from the Turkish word "Tülbend" and was chosen because the flower





resembles a turban. Fast forward to the late 16th century, and tulips were introduced to the Netherlands. The bulbs were planted in the botanical garden at the University of Leiden, and soon “Tulip Mania” took over. Today, the Netherlands leads the world in tulip cultivation and produces some 90 percent of the world’s supply.

Tulips in SoCal

Unlike the Netherlands, Southern California is not the typical place you’d see vast expanses of tulips, and it’s all to do with the climate. Tulips emerge from bulbs that are planted underground about 4-6 inches deep, and they need something called “cold stratification” to grow and flower. Bulbs need to be in the ground for about 12 weeks of consistent temperatures below 50 degrees.

As I sit here at my desk writing this, it is December and currently 80 degrees, definitely not cold enough for tulips! So how do we do it? We import them from tulip distributors in Washington and New York, who have pre-chilled the bulbs.

Even though tulips only bloom for a few months of the year, it takes all year to plan for them.

(Yes, they have a really big fridge.) Chilling the bulbs mimics the cold of going through a winter; that way, when they are shipped to us, they’re ready to be put in the ground.

Even though tulips only bloom for a few months of the year, it takes all year to plan for them. We order tulips by mid-summer of the year before. To determine the quantities and types we need to purchase, we must have our design in place and count for each type, color, bloom period, and height.

Tulips differ in petal type, with some having smooth, cup-shaped petals while others have fringed, pointed, or double layers. They vary in color, ranging from solid shades like red, yellow, and white to multicolored, streaked, or green-tinged patterns. Tulips also differ in height, with shorter types growing about 8-12 inches tall and taller varieties reaching 24 inches or more.

This means there is a lot to consider. If you plant one early bloomer amongst all the late bloomers, that might look a bit silly, and then you’ll have a hole when all of the later blooms come up. It’s also good to strategize which colors and flower forms would look best together, as well as the location. Having a more detailed element, such as a fringed tulip, near the path makes it easier to appreciate up close.

This year is my first time designing the tulips as the Display Horticulturist, so while I’m really nervous about how it will turn out, it’s also exciting to try something new. Hope to see you all this spring! 🌷

Tulips are one of the most popular cultivated displays we do at Descanso .

Garbage in, glory out

by Andrew Martin, Gardener

At the intersection of wild and cultivated, sits Descanso's compost pile. It is unlovely, even homely, and hidden from most visitors at the top of the Auxiliary Parking Lot. Yet the compost pile is a source of pride to the gardeners who tend and dote on it. Compost is the lifeblood of an organic garden like ours—it is, in fact, our whole garden in microcosm. We apply to this pile all our science, art, intuition, and luck, hoping to foster it as a living organism. When it is ripe and ready and

spread around, compost repays our efforts by producing vibrant camellias, fragrant lilacs, and strong, healthy trees.

A recipe for compost

Composting is, in essence, a form of cooking. The temperature in the core of the pile needs to rise to 130-200 degrees to kill weed seeds and harmful microbes, and allow beneficial microbes to perform thermochemical decomposition of organic material and restructure the soil. Turning compost (stirring it up, really) helps the whole

pile cycle through the various temperature zones favorable to a healthy exchange of minerals and gases. Turning it also helps keep the bottom portion of the pile from becoming too wet and compacted, which can create anaerobic zones that hinder beneficial microbes.

TLC for the microbes

We add feedstocks of organic material in rough ratios of "brown"—dead leaves, stalks, and twigs—for carbon; and "green"—spent flowers and fresh leaves—for phosphorus and nitrogen. We hydrate the pile,



The Descanso horticulture staff works hard to make sure the compost pile is healthy.



often with rich muck scraped out of our ponds and streams. And we aerate it by turning it over with the tractor, which coaxes billions more microbes and millions of tiny creatures to make their homes in the pile. These organisms then do the hard part for us, by eating, excreting, and multiplying mightily. Together, we and the microbes can greatly accelerate the slow organic processes that

create nutritious soil. It might take nature 15,000 years to create a foot of organic topsoil and then recycle it into the basic nutrients that plant roots crave. In our compost pile, we can do the same in about a year.

Though cooking compost to high temperatures should kill diseases, noxious weeds, and seeds, we still try to keep as many infected or nuisance plants as possible out of our

Compost is the lifeblood of an organic garden like ours—it is, in fact, our whole garden in microcosm. We apply to this pile all our science, art, intuition, and luck, hoping to foster it as a living organism.

feedstocks. There might be a chance that some layer or pocket in the pile didn't get as thoroughly cooked as the others. Then, if we spread it, we'd be adding germs, viable seeds or corms to our garden, and we might end up with nut sedge, thistle, or nettles growing around the base of our plants. So the invasive herbs and the grasses we pull are sent straight to the trash. Also, we trash most of the camellia litter we rake up, since we don't want to risk concentrating the diseases of canker and petal blight in our compost. But almost everything else—autumn leaves, drooping lilies, fading flowers, pruned snippings, even the straw bales and pumpkins from Carved—is fed to the compost pile.

A noble destination

Sometimes visitors express concern when they see the gardeners pulling out what look like perfectly good living plants, especially from the Promenade beds. We explain that we are carefully saving the perennial plants and returning them to the nursery for rejuvenation, while the annuals are at the end of their season, and the compost pile is a noble destination for any plant near the end of its life. Their remaining vital force is not wasted, but conserved in compost, and will eventually be returned to nourish the soil of the garden. 🌱

Many inspirations cultivated into a unique Japanese Garden

by Jenny Perez-Flores, Gardener

When visitors enter the Japanese Garden, they find an oasis of calm and serenity, but the area is composed of many elements and inspirations that, together, create something special. This one-acre oasis is part strolling garden and part rock garden, combining traditional Japanese gardening with common California plants. Like many areas at Descanso, the Japanese Garden is a homage to both the traditions that define it and the place that is Descanso. Curating this mix requires an understanding of the history and techniques that honor it.

Intentional yet natural

Shinto is the indigenous faith of the Japanese people and remains Japan's major religion alongside Buddhism. It centers on the idea that every object can house a god or "spirit." Natural objects are treated with great care and reverence. Over time, this practice influenced the landscaping of Japanese-style gardens, where every rock and plant is intentionally placed to accentuate the surrounding landscape. All the plants and rocks are carefully arranged to appear as if they sprang from the earth rather than being influenced by human hands. Every plant, tree, and rock serves a purpose.



In the Japanese Garden every plant, rock and structure serves a purpose.

In Japanese gardens, even sound is made to be part of the experience. Running water is an essential part of the garden, not just for aesthetics but also as a source of sound. Running water in a stream or fountain provides a constant soundtrack that calms and relaxes visitors. When real water is not utilized, it is replaced with rocks and gravel that simulate water.

Rocks as running water

Descanso's rock garden, or *karesansui*, is carefully maintained, and the designs raked into the gravel are done regularly. The designs drawn in the gravel evoke a sense of peace and curiosity and are meant to remind viewers of the ocean or running water. The circles and spirals look like raindrops and waves. The gravel represents water while rocks can represent islands or mountains, depending on their size.

Every pattern is unique because no design can be replicated perfectly. These gardens are called "zen gardens" because they evoke a relaxed, peaceful feeling. The act of raking a design is very relaxing and almost meditative. Every line is intentionally drawn and carefully considered. It is not unusual for a line to be redrawn until it is deemed adequate.

Pruning with purpose

The most essential part of any Japanese garden is the pruning. Traditional Japanese methods focus on enhancing the tree's natural shape and revealing its character or *niwaki*. Every cut is carefully selected to showcase the tree's natural beauty.

This pruning style is most visible in the black pine, *Pinus thunbergii*. These pines are trained to have curved trunks and multiple tiers. Pruning is



done several times a year to maintain the tree's characteristic shape. Descanso features a variety of pines and junipers, each with a distinct look, yet all maintained in the same traditional style.

The maples in the Japanese garden are pruned to display the form of the trunk and branches. The canopy is thinned out to allow light to reach the lower branches. This has the added benefit of giving the tree a more open and graceful look.

The most prominent plant in Descanso's Japanese Garden is the camellia. The camellias in the Japanese garden are specifically pruned into trees to create the appearance of a dense forest. This practice creates the illusion that the garden is larger than it appears, extending far beyond what the visitor can see.

A thoughtful garden

The Japanese Garden is more than just the plants; it is a commitment to the methods used to create the landscape and the reasoning behind the materials chosen. The greenery and hardscape all contribute to the harmony of the garden and the absence of either one would upset the garden's balance. 

The essence of wild California

by Lowell Abellon, Gardener

When I decided to redesign the landscape around my home, it was a no-brainer. I was going native. I wanted my yard to be an inviting stop for local birds, pollinators, and wildlife. But the choice to go with California native plants wasn't just about habitat. It was about nostalgia. *Artemisia californica*, the California sagebrush, is the keystone species of my childhood.

A California Native

I grew up in the beach town of Dana Point, and the California native plant palette was familiar and always present. Dana Point was very suburban when I was a kid in the 1980s, and housing developments were plots of single-family homes nestled in hills covered in coastal sage scrub. The gully behind our house was still home to road runners, kingsnakes, quail, and

horned lizards. It was wild and overgrown with coyote brush, California buckwheat, datura, and bush sunflower (not unlike the chaparral in the San Rafael Hills above Descanso Gardens). And the shrub that dominated the landscape was California sagebrush.

From a distance, the sagebrush popped and made the hills look painted with brush-stroked patches of grizzled green. Up close, it was rustic and unassuming, with delicate, threadlike silver-grey leaves on coarse, woody branches. But to me, California sagebrush wasn't the queen of the coastal sage scrub because of its abundance or appearance. It ruled the landscape with its strong, minty, woody fragrance. That fragrance permeated the hills around our housing tract. It became sweet after spring rains and tickled your nose on dry summer days. We would inevitably brush up against it on hikes, and the scent of California sagebrush would follow us home.

Often called "cowboy cologne," *Artemisia californica* has long been revered for its scent. It was used by indigenous Californians as incense in ritual ceremonies, and by European





settlers as a deodorant. The terpenes produced by the plant are what give *Artemisia californica* its distinct aroma and what makes the scent so easily transferable. Even the slightest contact will leave a trace.

Good for the garden

Artemisia californica is a great choice for California native or drought-tolerant gardens. It appreciates full sun and, once established, it can thrive with as little as a monthly “deep soak.” It has a quick growth rate, and within a couple of years, it can grow from a one-gallon plant to a 4-foot-wide by 4-foot-tall mounding shrub. In a natural-habitat garden, *Artemisia californica* provides cover for birds and supports a host of butterfly and moth pollinators, which in turn attract predatory insects, spiders, birds, and bats.

The perfect mix

In a more aesthetic garden, *Artemisia californica* offers a wonderful contrast in foliage texture, color, and shape. In late spring, it produces inconspicuous inflorescent clusters of very small pale or yellow flowers that eventually dry and fade to an attractive bronze when going to seed. It does well with pruning and shaping, and can be watered more often to maintain a fresh look.

But the reason I’ve added it to my garden, and why I feel it makes a great addition to any garden, is for its scent. Scent is often overlooked in landscape design, but my neighbors often comment on how much they enjoy the fragrance as they walk past my house. And California sagebrush offers its chaparral fragrance all year round. That

minty, sagey, woody aroma infuses the garden with the essence of wild California.

And for me, California sagebrush evokes memories. Its scent takes me back in time to Saturdays exploring the gully behind our house with my brothers and the neighborhood kids, collecting tadpoles in seasonal ponds so we could watch them grow into frogs, day-long hikes through coastal sage scrub and pastures to hidden lakes, coming home exhausted and falling asleep with the smell of sagebrush still in our hair. 🌿

The California sagebrush can be found in the foothills and during the spring have beautiful yellow flowers.

America's 250 years, rooted in our oaks

*by Jennifer Errico, Director of Communications
and Membership*

Stand by the heritage oak in the Rose Garden. The one all the way against the fence with the arm that crosses over the path. Rest your hand on its bark and imagine this land as it was 250 years ago.

As the Declaration of Independence was being signed in Philadelphia, this oak was only beginning its life. It may have started as a single acorn that fell into soft soil. Within weeks, the shell cracked. A root pushed downward, anchoring itself in the earth. Over the next few years, it became a seedling establishing its roots before growing taller. By the late 1700s, it was a sapling, thin-trunked but reaching for the sky.

Around it, there was no Los Angeles. No freeways. No cities.

This place—now La Cañada Flintridge—was a vast natural canyon of oak woodlands, grasslands, chaparral, and flowing waterways. Grizzly bears and wolves moved through the landscape. Rivers and wetlands ran clean and alive with fish and

As the United States celebrates its 250th birthday, Descanso Gardens celebrates the oak. These trees are living witnesses. They stood as history was made.



birds. The air carried the sounds of wind, animals, and human voices speaking indigenous languages.

This land was home to the Tongva people. Their villages were connected by trails that passed through this very region. The oak was central to their way of life. Acorns from coast live oaks were gathered, processed, and stored, providing a reliable and nourishing food source. The oak was not just a tree—it was sustenance, shelter, and culture.

Over the next 250 years, everything changed. What was once wilderness became a metropolis. Indigenous populations were displaced. Ranching expanded, then agriculture, then cities. Rivers were dammed—valleys filled with roads and buildings. Southern California has become a global center for culture, innovation, entertainment, and industry, home to millions worldwide.



And the oak remained.

Coast live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) are among California's longest-living trees. Many live well beyond 250 years; some survive for centuries. Evergreen and drought-tolerant, they grow slowly, developing gnarled limbs, broad canopies, and massive trunks. More than 270 bird, insect, and animal species depend on them. Oaks are a keystone species—they support entire ecosystems and enrich the soil beneath them, creating islands of life.

That is why, as the United States celebrates its 250th birthday, Descanso Gardens celebrates the oak. These trees are living witnesses. They stood as history was made. They are also a form of land acknowledgment—rooted reminders of the Tongva people who lived here long before borders, cities, or nations.

This year, Descanso honors the oak in many ways: through reflection, through a new classical music commission inspired by *New Parnassus*, and through a new exhibition at the Boddy House celebrating the oak and its enduring relationship with camellias—both integral to Descanso's heritage.

New Parnassus has been commissioned to create works inspired by our grand oaks and flowering camellias. Performances of these works and others will take place this summer.

Stand by the heritage oak in the Rose Garden. It has seen centuries pass. And it is still growing. 🌿

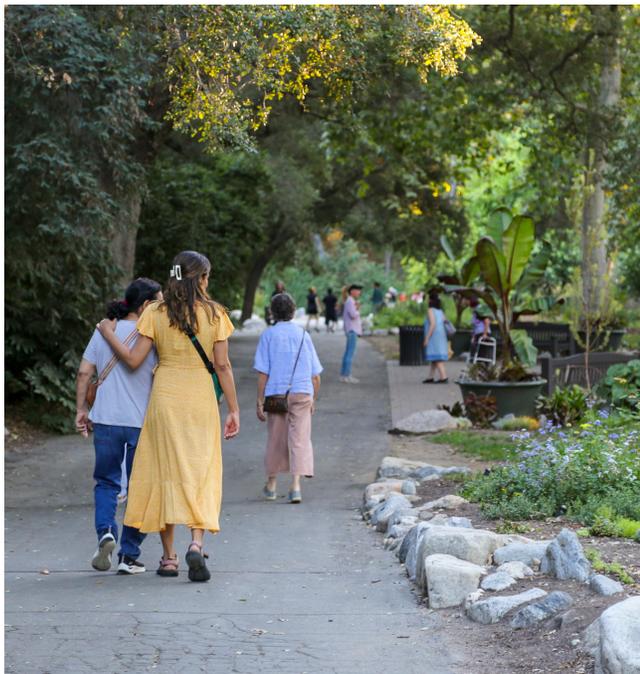
The oak in the Rose Garden is one of the oldest at Descanso.

In the Garden

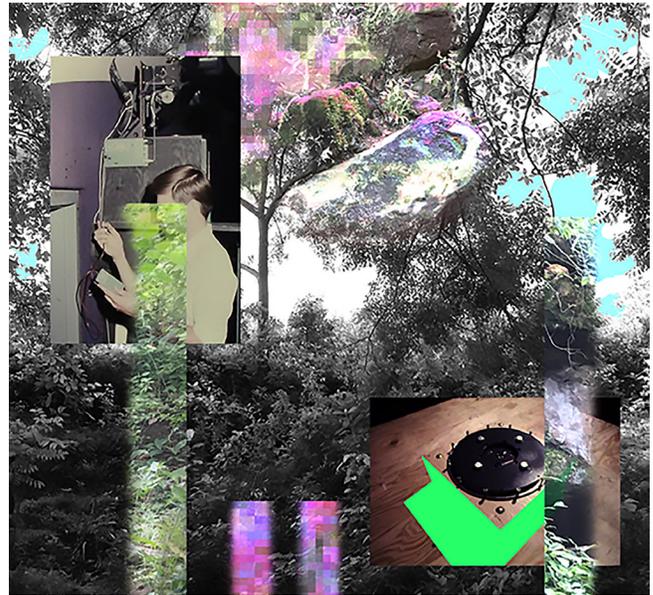
For our members

It's nearly that time of year when we shower our members with extra love and gratitude. Member Appreciation Week will take place March 9-15, 2026. Members get exclusive access to the gardens and our beautiful spring flowers from 5-7pm each night, along with daily perks such as exciting prize drawings, special bloom tours, and other surprises—a different one each day. The highlight of the week—Member Appreciation Night—will be Friday, March 13, when the gardens come alive with music, nature-inspired crafts, fun giveaways, and a variety of special activities.

Member Appreciation Week is just one of the many exclusive benefits that our members receive. It's our way of saying thank you for generously supporting the gardens throughout the year. If you would like to become a member or renew your membership, please visit the "Join Us" page at descansogardens.org.



In the gallery



Natura Naturata: Nature's Action features the work of eight female artists who explore their bond with the natural world through contemporary photography and video. Through the conceptual and visual decomposition of natural elements, this diverse body of work explores our connection to the environment and the complex human impact on nature.

Natura Naturata: Nature's Action is curated by Claudia Pretelin. Exhibiting artists include Luciana Abait, Laura Aguilar, Jackie Castillo, Maru García, Graciela Iturbide, Carolina Montejo, Tricia Rainwater, and Rosana Schoijett. It is open at the Sturt Haaga Gallery through May 31, 10am–4pm daily.

Natura Naturata: Nature's Action and its programs are generously funded, in part, by Perenchio Foundation and an endowment from Heather Sturt Haaga and Paul G. Haaga, Jr.

There will be special events and programs during member week, left. Above, Carolina Montejo, Nature Facts, 2017.

DONOR PROFILE

A deeper connection

For more than twenty years, Karleen Jones has found inspiration at Descanso. “Each season brings new beauty,” she says, “and that’s what keeps me coming back as often as I can.”

Finding meaning

More recently, Descanso became part of something deeply meaningful for Karleen and her family. In the Japanese Garden, they sponsored a cherry tree in memory of their late son, Brice.

“Trying to find grace, peace, and connection in grief takes a conscious effort,” Karleen shares. “Among Brice’s many interests were Japanese gardens and architecture, so when the sponsorships became available for the first time, we loved the idea of honoring him in this way.”

Watching the tree through the seasons has been profoundly moving. “From its quiet winter dormancy to the new life budding and blooming in spring, summer’s fullness, and autumn’s changing leaves, the cycle of the tree reminds me of renewal, hope, and the continuity of life.”

Nature is worth supporting

One day in the Japanese Garden, Karleen met an artist who was sketching nearby. She asked if she could watch and shared that the cherry tree close by had been sponsored in memory of her son. The two exchanged contact information, and a few weeks later, the artist, Rebekah (@rtucker.art), shared a watercolor of Brice’s tree in full bloom.

Spending time in the natural world affects us physically, emotionally, and spiritually—and that’s something truly worth supporting.”

For more information about supporting Descanso Gardens, please visit descansogardens.org.



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You can support the garden through volunteering, membership, or by contributing.

Learn more at
descansogardens.org

