

# DESCANSO

Fall 2022 – Winter 2023



**Working on  
Wellness**

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# A Season for Wellness and Fun

by Juliann Rooke, Executive Director

We don't plant the flowers or protect the oaks for awards, but it sure feels good to be recognized for our efforts. Descanso Gardens was named 2022 California Nonprofit of the Year for Assembly District 43. Thank you to Assemblymember Laura Friedman who nominated us for this honor and invited us to lunch in Sacramento where I got to meet the leaders of nonprofits making a difference from all over California. It was an honor.

In this magazine, you will read about the new walking labyrinth in the Rose Garden. We have taken a genuine interest in wellness here at Descanso. Nature and mental wellbeing have long been connected, but we have really put a priority on wellness since COVID started. We became a real place of escape and refuge during that time, and it felt right. The labyrinth and programming will further our goal of being a place of wellness.

Come to the garden to relax, but have fun too! Carved and Enchanted Forest of Light are returning. Members get two weeks of exclusive access to tickets and a huge discount. (We love our members.) Carved will be bigger and better this year. I am most excited about the Día de los Muertos display at the Amphitheater. With help from our partners at Self Help Graphics and Art, we will be setting up a beautiful altar. *Enchanted* will return with all your favorites. I'm excited to have artists Tom Fruin and HYBYCOZO back. I'm also happy that we will have a chance to pump up the electric tulips, also known as Flower Power. This is one of our more popular experiences at Enchanted, and the tulips will be brighter than ever.

*Thank you for being part of the garden.*

*We can't wait to see you in the coming months.*



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### Our Mission

Descanso Gardens is a unique Southern California landscape distinguished by its specialized botanic collections, historical significance, and rare natural beauty. Our mission is to practice exemplary stewardship of Descanso's distinctive character and assets; offer people an experience close to nature; and cultivate understanding of the natural world and people's place in it through inspiration, education and example.

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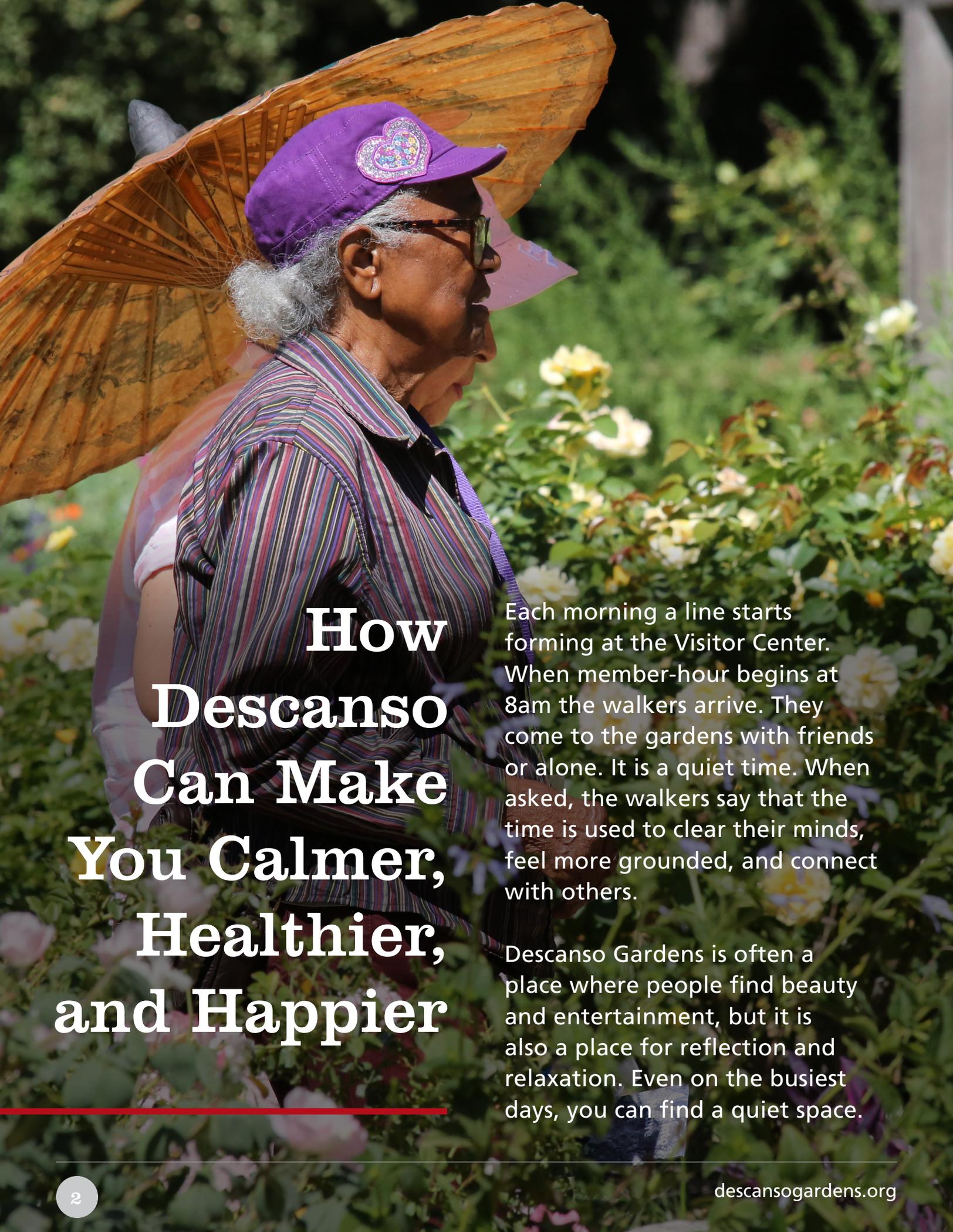
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A woman with grey hair, wearing a purple cap with a heart-shaped patch and a multi-colored striped shirt, is walking in a garden. She is carrying a large, traditional wooden umbrella. The background is filled with green foliage and yellow and white flowers.

# How Descanso Can Make You Calmer, Healthier, and Happier

Each morning a line starts forming at the Visitor Center. When member-hour begins at 8am the walkers arrive. They come to the gardens with friends or alone. It is a quiet time. When asked, the walkers say that the time is used to clear their minds, feel more grounded, and connect with others.

Descanso Gardens is often a place where people find beauty and entertainment, but it is also a place for reflection and relaxation. Even on the busiest days, you can find a quiet space.



The buzzword right now is wellness, but what does that really mean? According to the dictionary, wellness means overall well-being. It incorporates the mental, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of a person's life. And nature can play a big part in that wellbeing.

"Time spent in nature is essential for wellbeing for everyone, including children. A lot of important research is being done on this by scientists, but I also think you can see evidence of this every day at the gardens," said Emi Yoshimura, Director of Education and Volunteer Programs. "We see it in the way people move, breathe, laugh, and find moments for quiet contemplation when they are in our green spaces. The range of conversations and interactions the garden supports — from deeply serious to calm to joyous — is always moving to me. And visitors often tell us about how time here helps them feel renewed."

As part of its commitment to wellness, Descanso just finished a walking labyrinth in the Rose Garden. A labyrinth is an ancient archetype used for centuries across cultures as a tool for contemplation. Unlike a maze, there are no dead ends, but one clear path to the center and out again. Our Roman-style labyrinth is made of decomposed granite and pavers that lead you through four quadrants, and then to the center.

"Spending time in nature promotes a healthy mind-body connection. Breathing in the natural oils released by plants can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, boost the immune system, and improve emotional wellbeing," said Mariko Tu, an artist and educator who specializes in mindfulness. "Being in nature also allows us the opportunity to slow down and fully experience the present moment."

The experts agree. The University of Minnesota's Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality and Healing outlines four ways nature can help with well-being including reduced stress, and better health.

The research revealed that being in nature reduces anger, fear, and stress and increases pleasant feelings. Exposure to nature not only makes you feel better emotionally, but it also contributes to your physical wellbeing, reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and the production of stress hormones. In addition, nature helps us cope with pain. Because we are genetically programmed to find trees, plants, water, and other natural elements engrossing, we are absorbed by nature scenes and distracted from our pain and discomfort, according to the center.

One of the most interesting areas of research is how nature affects general wellbeing. In one study in the journal "Mind," 95% of those interviewed said their mood improved after spending time outside, changing from depressed, stressed, and anxious to more calm and balanced.

Another positive is that time spent in nature can increase our ability to pay attention, according to researchers. Because humans find nature inherently interesting, we can naturally focus on what we are experiencing when in a place like the garden. An outdoor space can also be a rest for overstimulated brains.

But you don't need others to tell you how nature can help make you healthier and happier, try it yourself. Next time you are tired of being in front of a screen or feeling a little stressed, come and take a walk. See what a little nature can do for you.

# Garden Meditations

You can find an audio version of this meditation along with others at [descansogardens.org/labyrinth](http://descansogardens.org/labyrinth). Printed walking meditations are available at the Visitor Center. Created by Mariko Tu.

## Labyrinth Meditation

Before entering the labyrinth, stand in stillness, take a few deep breaths, and release the day thus far.

Take a moment to think if there is an intention you would like to walk with, a question, or if you would like to just walk to walk. Have this in mind as you take a few more deep breaths.

Enter the path, follow the natural rhythm of your steps, and open your awareness to your senses.

Notice the lightness of one foot as it lifts up from the earth, and the weight of the other foot on the ground to support you.

Notice the feeling of moving forward, the sounds around you, and the scents that make up your experience.

Let yourself freely explore any sensations.

There will be twists and turns along the path. At times you will feel as though you are moving closer to the center, only to move farther away again. But the path will always lead you to your destination.

When you reach the center, pause and reflect on your journey.

Notice how you feel compared to when you began.

And when you are ready, follow the same path out. You can bring awareness to your senses again or contemplate on your experience. The choice is yours; it's just you on your path. The Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh once said:

*The mind can go in a thousand directions.  
But on this beautiful path, I walk in peace.  
With each step, a gentle wind blows.  
With each step, a flower blooms.*





## Senses Meditation

Take a moment to immerse yourself in nature in this senses meditation. If at any time you find your mind wandering during this meditation, just bring your focus back to your breath. You can always begin again.

Find an area in the garden that you are drawn to and sit or stand comfortably there.

Begin to look around at the nature that surrounds you and take in what you see—the colors, the shapes, the textures, and any movements you see. And if you haven't already, lift your gaze up towards the sky and savor what you see above. We can often feel a sense of awe or wonder when we are reminded that we are part of something much larger than ourselves.

Now, gently close your eyes and bring awareness to your ears and listen. Listen in all directions without judgment. Notice the soundscape of where you are.

Take a moment to bring attention now to your nose as you breathe in and out. On your next inhale, take

a deep breath in and breathe in all the aromas of the garden—the trees, the plants, the soil that fills the air—then slowly exhale.

Bring awareness now to the part of your body that is making contact with the earth. Feel the sensations of touching the ground and connecting with the earth.

Now, take in all the nature around you—the sights, the sounds, the scents and touch, and contemplate how we are connecting to our environment and others in the present moment.

The naturalist John Muir once said:

*When we try to pick out anything by itself,  
we find it hitched to everything else in  
the universe.*

Take a deep breath in and a deep breath out.  
Gently open your eyes and notice how you feel.



# Mission Monarch

## Helping these Butterflies Make their Journey

by Layla Valenzuela and Frank Obregon

Descanso Gardens is taking a multifaceted approach to helping with the ever-declining monarch butterfly population (*Danaus plexippus*). The plight of the monarch has been a hotbed issue for conservationists and concerned butterfly lovers alike as the number counts of these migratory butterflies drop drastically. We hope through education, display, propagation, and collaboration we can contribute to a solution to this unsettling issue.



One of the obvious contributions to the monarch's decline is the lack of native milkweeds available to them. Native milkweeds safely feed and host monarch butterfly caterpillars ensuring generational success. Developments, wildfires, and climate change have all contributed to the decline of milkweed throughout the western monarch's migratory path. By growing and planting these milkweeds in different areas in the garden, we strive to provide some support waystations along their migratory routes.

California is considered a hotspot of diversity for milkweed plants (*Asclepias* spp.), with our state boasting well over two dozen different species and forms. Three Californian milkweed species have come into vogue in many local nurseries: narrowleaf milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*), showy milkweed (*A. speciosa*), and woollypod milkweed (*A. eriocarpa*). At the Descanso Nursery, we have been horticulturally experimenting with some of the less common native species of milkweed in hopes of establishing them in cultivation, introducing them to the public, and protecting their invaluable genetic lineages that are currently threatened with extinction. With help from seed companies, plant conservation groups, generous individuals, and seed banks, we were able to amass seeds of more than 10 native milkweed species in 2020–2021.

So far, the following native species have grown well for us: *Asclepias albicans* (white stem milkweed), *A. asperula* (antelope horns milkweed), *A. eriocarpa* (woollypod milkweed), *A. californica* (California milkweed), *A. erosa* (desert milkweed), *A. fascicularis* (narrowleaf milkweed), *A. speciosa* (showy milkweed), *A. subulata* (reed milkweed), and *Apocynum androsaemifolium*

(spreading dogbane). Combined, we now have around 1,000 milkweed plants growing in the nursery and garden areas. The milkweed species we have growing represent much of the milkweed diversity found growing wild in the Southern Californian foothills, deserts, and mountains — we are excited to have Descanso serve as a repository for such local treasures. Of note, *Asclepias albicans*, *Asclepias asperula*, and *Apocynum androsaemifolium* are rarely if ever grown by botanical gardens and will soon be viewable (at least some of the year) to the public at Descanso. The tree-sized *A. albicans* and leafless, cactus-like *A. subulata* account for some of the most extreme evolutionary forms in the entire milkweed family and are sure to capture visitors' eyes once the plants open in full bloom.

As Descanso opens a larger and much more modern nursery facility later in 2022, the future is bright for California native milkweed production on-site. We will begin producing our own seed from various native milkweed species within about six months, and our milkweed propagation and reintroduction efforts will continue to expand within our native gardens and beyond. With a larger growing area and the ability to produce excess quantities of milkweed, we strive to offer milkweeds to other organizations that are in need of replanting and to the public who wish to join in the efforts to conserve the monarchs.

We will continue to grow, plant, monitor, and report success with our "Mission Monarch" endeavors so please, stay tuned. With time and effort, we aim to shape Descanso Gardens into a leader in milkweed conservation and cultivation.



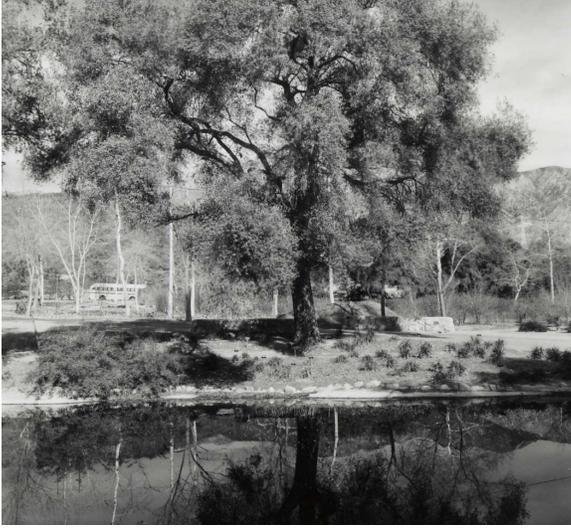
# A Look at the Lakes

by **Autumn Ayers**, Plant Records Coordinator

One of Descanso Gardens' most beloved attractions for children and adults alike is our abundant wildlife. Many of our most popular critters, such as ducks, geese, herons, fish, turtles, and frogs, can all be found around the twin lakes on the west side of the gardens. The lakes at Descanso have a long, rich history and have been important to people, plants, and animals throughout their time.

The known history of the large lake at Descanso starts with Manchester Boddy's purchase of the property in 1937. If you look at the landscape around Descanso, you can see that the gardens sit in a natural bowl formed by the surrounding hills. There may have been a natural

seasonal pond in the lake location, but Boddy had the current lake built for two purposes: to catch the run-off stormwater and prevent flooding and to provide a place to hold the winter rainwater through the long dry season. Water from the lake could be used in addition to the water from Hall Beckley Canyon to provide water to the gardens and the livestock Boddy kept on what is now the Main Lawn. Boddy also had the lake stocked with fish and built the lodge you can still see there today for recreation. It's not certain whether the smaller of the two lakes was built at the same time, or if it is a naturally occurring feature, but it begins to show up in maps and aerial imagery in the early 1960s.



From 1989-1991, Descanso embarked on a mission to combine the two lakes into one larger lake with an island for nesting birds. Working with the county, the Descanso Gardens Guild raised money from private donors and the Audubon Society to renovate both lakebeds and create the infrastructure you see there today. More recently in 2014, the Oak Woodland Project restored the native chaparral landscape around the lake and established the current boardwalks and walking paths. Ecological surveys at the time of that project showed that native riparian plants were found already growing around the lake. This means that even though the Descanso lakes were likely man-made, they support a thriving native ecosystem with plant and animal species that would be found at a natural lake.

On the horizon, exciting changes are coming to the Descanso lake and Oak Woodland area. Our Master Plan,

approved by the LA County Board of Supervisors in 2020, includes renovations and improvements to the lake and surrounding area.

The Plan includes projects related to sustainable water use and environmental stewardship -- such as a project to capture storm water to use for irrigating the gardens. The captured storm water will be stored in the lake and pumped throughout the garden to decrease our dependence on purchased water. The project includes building wetland shelves and areas for wildlife, and improving visitor access around the lake through a new and improved boardwalk and viewing areas.

In the past, present and future, the lakes at Descanso celebrate the connection between people and the natural world, bringing a bit of the wild into our urban habitat for all to enjoy.





# Make *Carved* and *Enchanted* Forest of Light a Tradition

Every year reviews of Carved and Enchanted Forest of Light roll in: “Amazing,” “We come every year,” “The whole family loved it,” they say. Visitors can’t be wrong. If you haven’t seen Carved or Enchanted, this year is the year to make it one or both of your holiday traditions.

At Descanso, there have been many different fall/Halloween shows over the years. A few years ago a production called “The Rise” came and set up a pumpkin-themed evening in the Rose Garden. It was hugely popular but the garden staff decided they could do it better. Carved was born.

Carved takes a whole team to create. Our horticulture team will be busy decorating the pumpkin house and setting up giant bugs made from natural materials. Lightswitch, the company that produces Carved and Enchanted, takes care of lighting and special effects. Professional artists will be hired to carve unbelievably intricate pumpkins.

If you came last year, you know it is about pumpkins, fall, and lights, but this year Carved will return with more of everything. The Día de los Muertos altar will be bigger and located at the Amphitheater. There will be double

the wicker lights that line the stone bridge and more pumpkins to light up the Camellia Forest. We will also have more food offerings, as well as face painting and other activities.

After a year off in 2020, Enchanted Forest of Light will enter its sixth year. It was originally conceived after “The Rise.” The success of the pumpkin show got current Executive Director Juliann Rooke thinking about a holiday light show. She toured shows around the country but didn’t find one that she thought fit the spirit of Descanso until she found the Morton Arboretum’s Illumination in Illinois. That show highlighted the natural beauty of the garden in a different way. What a great idea for Descanso.

With this inspiration, Enchanted was designed specifically for Descanso and highlighted the natural beauty of Southern California. The canopy of the oaks becomes a painting of light and the ancient forest appears to be filled with “fireflies.” The Flower Power display mimics the tulip planted on the Promenade in spring and the pond of the Japanese Garden reflects the red lights of hundreds of lanterns.



Many of the displays remain the same each year, but Descanso also invites artists to come and add to the event. HYBYCOZO's swirling installations are crowd favorites. They take over the Main Lawn and bring a fantastical environment. Their geometric works are designed to give plants and trees a magical new life. Rather than hanging from trees, they stand independently, spinning and casting patterns on everything around them.

New York City sculptor Tom Fruin builds a "village" in the Rose Garden. Fruin is known for his colorful, stained-glass houses and water towers made from discarded fragments of the street and retail signage, theater props, and other plastics and metals.

There is so much to see and discover this holiday season at Descanso Gardens. Make it part of your celebration this year.

## *Carved and Enchanted*

### *Carved*

Oct. 7–31 | 6–10pm

Member presale: Sept. 1 | General sale: Sept. 15  
Members: \$20-\$26 | Non-members: \$32- \$38

### *Enchanted Forest of Light*

Nov. 20–Jan. 8 | 5:30–10pm

Member presale: Sept. 1 | General sale: Sept. 15  
Members: \$22- \$28 | Non-members: \$34 - \$40

**For more information:** [descansogardens.org](http://descansogardens.org)



# Easy and Interesting The Coastal Woollybush

by **David Bare**, Director of Horticulture

Coastal woollybush walks a thin line between the vegetable and the animal world. The shrub is so soft and fuzzy that, like a friendly family dog, it invites petting every time you walk by it. The combination of its soft, silvery needle-like foliage and an upward branching habit enhances the animate impression. I have my suspicions that after the garden closes it might pull up its roots and go for a stroll through the oak forest.

A native of the coast of Western Australia, coastal woollybush grows at least 10 feet high. Ours was planted from a 3-gallon pot and has grown to 9 feet high by 8 feet wide in 7 years. It starts out a bit gawky, but gains more of its “where the wild things are” character as the years go by. At Descanso, you can find it in the plant bed next to Mulberry Pond.

Plant *Adenanthos* in well-drained, gravelly soil. Away from the coast, it appreciates some light afternoon shade. This is a very drought-tolerant plant. Nurse it along with bi-weekly watering for a few months until it gets established but after that, once a month or so will do it.

Coastal woollybush is one of those plants that thrive on neglect but can easily be loved to death. Like many other Australian plants, it has an aversion to phosphorus-based fertilizers. We avoid fertilizer altogether on these plants, with the exception of an occasional shot of iron. A light top dressing of compost is usually sufficient in the spring.

This plant's fine foliage is lovely when backlit, taking on a fine silvery sheen. We have planted it near the dark maroon foliage of *Leucadendron* 'Ebony,' in an attempt to contrast the dark foliage of the conebush with the airy, filamentous foliage of the *Adenanthos*. A similar contrast could be had by using one of the dark-toned succulent *Aeoniums* like 'Cyclops' or 'Firecracker' to form a contrasting base for the woollybush.

Though not the main attraction, the flowers of coastal woollybush betray the plant's relation to other members of the protea family, particularly *Grevilleas*. They are not nearly as showy as some of the *Grevilleas* we have planted nearby, but the spidery red flowers are interesting. The botanical name *Adenanthos* refers to a gland and a flower, a reference to the prominent nectaries. As such, these flowers are attractive to hummingbirds. The specific name *sericeus*, means silky.

Coastal woollybush makes a wonderful silvery centerpiece to the drought-tolerant garden, an irresistibly soft textural element. Now, if I could just get it to wag its tail.



## Celebrating *Your (Un)natural Garden*

The Your (Un)natural Garden opening party on May 14 was full of surprises. Guests were enjoying drinks and hors d'oeuvres in the Courtyard when suddenly, several people started singing *La Traviata*. Were they suddenly professional opera singers? Hardly. It was a flash-mob performance by Pacific Opera Project that surprised and delighted partygoers and set the tone for the evening. As the party moved up the hill to the Boddy House and Sturt Haaga Gallery, Bollywood-style dancers from Blue13 Dance Company emerged from the forest to treat guests to an impromptu performance under the exhibition's big arch.

"We know how to have fun here at Descanso," said Director of Advancement Somer Sherwood-White. "The party was a great way to celebrate Your (Un)natural Garden and to show appreciation to our donors."

Once at the the Sturt Haaga Gallery and Boddy House, donors sipped drinks and wandered through the exhibition enjoying the bell and boa rooms, and trying out the funky chairs in the house. Food stations were set up and The Flashdance DJs kept the music going the rest of the night.

"Our donors and sponsors are the reason Descanso Gardens continues to grow," Sherwood-White said. "We are so thankful for them and their investment in our mission to connect people to nature. We would love to see even more people connecting at these events. It's a great way to introduce new people to Descanso and everything we're doing here – we love that our event sponsors bring enthusiastic future donors to these events."

To find out about all the ways you can support Descanso Gardens, please contact the Development Office at (818) 952-4391 or [development@descansogardens.org](mailto:development@descansogardens.org)

**Save the Date**  
***Enchanted Forest of Light Preview Party***  
**November 19, 2022**  
For sponsorship and ticketing information visit  
[descansogardens.org/enchanted](http://descansogardens.org/enchanted)

Images: Everyone enjoyed the opening party.

Descanso Gardens

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# You make the gardens GROW

Descanso Gardens continues to be a place of discovery, connection, and reflection. **You can help.**

Renew your membership, give the gift of membership, or make a donation at [descansogardens.org](http://descansogardens.org).