President’s Message written by David Berman: South Coast CNPS chapter president.

Monarchs are making a comeback! Find out what native plants you can grow and care for to ensure their population continues to rise.

Garden Spotlight: Native gardens are vital to preserving biodiversity. This Long Beach garden was created so plants and wildlife can reclaim their environment.

Join us for our first meeting of the new year for a presentation on the Bolsa Chica Ecological Preserve.

Join us for a presentation the Native Plant Parkway Project in the city of Long beach.

Join us for a presentation from SeedLA on their work with the Nature Conservancy, featuring the Bowtie Project on the East Bank of Los Angeles.
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

We completed our first full year of online meetings. While we miss getting together in person, online meetings have allowed us to get speakers from all over the state. Some of our talks are recorded and available to view on our YouTube channel.

For now, we will continue our programs online. We will monitor the covid situation and hope to return to the botanic garden in the spring. We will try to do hybrid meetings – in person and simulcast on Zoom.

We are in the process of transitioning our website so please check it to see the progress at chapters.cnps.org

We have an excellent and dedicated board but still need membership and publicity chairpersons. We continue to award money through our Conze Grant program for “native plant garden projects.” We are still accepting applications.

Last month, we had reports from 2 apprentices working at the White Point garden and a program about the “Beautify Lunada Bay” project – all supported by Conze grant funding.

Thank you to our record number of chapter members for being part of CNPS. Our CNPS state organization is strong and doing great work. CNPS is trying hard to become a more diverse organization and we welcome everyone’s participation.

I want to thank Cris Sarabia for his service as president of the state CNPS Board of directors for the past 2 years. Cris led the board through difficult times and CNPS is stronger than ever.

As the holidays approach, I encourage everyone to consider CNPS memberships as gifts. Wishing all of you a great holiday season and a happy new year.
MONARCHS POPULATION SOARS

Monarch butterflies with their distinct black and orange colors are iconic and easily distinguishable. We were once fortunate to host hundreds of thousands of these amazing creatures; however, over the past years it has been harder to spot them as their population has plummeted from over one million in 1997 to less than 30,000 in 2019 according to Xerces Society’s count. This is a tragedy given that Monarch butterflies are amazing insects that perform an astounding two way migration undertaken by no other butterfly according to the U.S. Forest Service.

Monarch butterflies have two general migration patterns. Monarchs east of the Rockies begin their migration around September/October when the weather begins to chill and travel as far south as Mexico were they can overwinter in milder climates. Monarchs west of the Rockies begin their migration around the same time but they migrate to coastal regions of California where climates resemble those found in the overwintering sites in Mexico. This year has been a welcome surprise with a significant increase in monarchs in many overwintering sites.

Monarch sanctuaries like the Pismo Beach Monarch Butterfly Grove have counted over 22,000 overwintering monarchs this year according to the San Luis Obispo Tribune. This is a significant increase compared to the 200 counted in 2020. More locally, Richard Rachman, CSUN grad student, and LA County Volunteer Coordinator for the Xerces Society counted 200 monarchs at a site in Santa Monica. While the rise in numbers provides a fascinating view for spectators, experts aren’t sure why the numbers have increased so much this year or if they will continue to do so. It’s important to note that while this increase is exciting the monarch population is still low.

As residents—in and around their overwintering sites—there’s a lot we can do to help their population soar once again. Milkweed is arguably the most important plant in the effort to increase the monarch population. Monarchs use milkweed exclusively as the host plant for their larval form. Monarchs lay their eggs on milkweed and the emerging larva feed from the plant until they are able to pupate and develop into butterflies. Planting milkweed isn’t all that simple. There are hundreds of milkweed species and planting the wrong one can potentially cause more harm. Tropical milkweed for example can be found at most nurseries because it’s easy to grow and its green foliage and year round blooms are as appealing to gardeners as they are to monarchs. The problem, according to Xerces Society, is that tropical milkweed doesn’t die back in warmer regions allowing the Ophryocystis elektroscirrhla parasite to travel from plant to plant. The parasite is ingested by monarch caterpillars and can lead to reduced body mass and even death.
Native milkweed dies back after blooming and the parasite dies with it. As the milkweed begins to regrow monarchs are able to lay their eggs on new parasite free leaves that caterpillars can safely eat. Where to plant native milkweed has also been debated recently. Organizations like Xerces Society and the Santa Cruz Mountain Bioregional Council, among others, believe that if milkweed is planted within a few miles of the coast, where overwintering sites usually are, monarchs may lay their eggs during winter. While more monarchs are the goal, larva born in the winter may not survive the temperature or they may disrupt the breeding and migration pattern.

If you live close to the coast it may be best to avoid milkweed and plant nectar rich plants instead.

Richard advocates for the care and planting of native trees and nectar producing plants around overwintering sites. Monarchs cluster on trees in temperate and low wind areas such as native cypress and pines as well as non-native trees like eucalyptus to rest. Once temperatures warm up above 55F they leave in search of nectar to feed on. If you live by the coast you can help by planting native coastal sage scrub plants that provide nectar to monarchs during the day. All nectar providing plants are helpful but natives are best as they are what monarchs and other wildlife are adapted to feeding on and typically use less pesticides than non-native gardens.

If you aren’t sure what plants are good for pollinators, CNPS has many resources to help! Calscape Garden Planner will give you an array of pollinator friendly plants that are ideal for your garden style and lighting. Clicking on the suggested plants will give you in-depth information such as bloom times to ensure you have blooms during the overwintering period. Richard recommends plants such as eriogonum ssp, asters like heterotheca grandiflora, isocoma menziesii and epilobium canum that are still producing late season nectar blooms.

He also suggests early germinating plants like ribes ssp or lupinus succulentus.

If you’d like to become even more involved you can contribute to community science projects like the Thanksgiving and New Year’s Count hosted by Xerces Society. You can train to become a monitor at an overwintering site near you and help keep track of the population over time. The data you’d collect would be extremely useful to scientists and land managers working to conserve monarch habitats and boost their population. Richard also recommends using iNaturalist to take pictures of monarchs and milkweed plants that can be posted on the Monarch Milkweed Mapper Project. There is no singular reason for their population’s decline and there is no singular solution but by planting natives and engaging in community science we can all contribute to the upward tick in their recovery!
TINA’S GARDEN

You don’t need a horticultural degree or gardening expertise to begin your own native garden. A vision and desire to give native plants and animals a chance to reclaim their environment is what inspired 34 year old Tina to transform her yard into a native garden. After moving into her own house, Tina took advantage of the opportunity to enrich and strengthen her environment in a way that was uniquely hers.

As a licensed clinical worker for a school district she was not an expert on native landscaping before beginning her project but she did have some knowledge and took the time to research what she didn’t know. In addition to asking friends, who were knowledgeable on the subject, Tina used the California Native Plant Society’s website and other resources to find out what plants would work best in her area. With her newfound knowledge in hand she felt confident she could take on this project alone.

After researching appropriate plants for her area Tina began to materialize her vision by sketching what she wanted her garden to look like. She decided on a native garden with a path that winded around her house with natural curves and a seating area from which she could enjoy the fruits of her labor. In Tina’s experience the hardscaping was the most difficult and expensive part of her project. She had decomposed granite delivered that blocked her entire driveway so wheelbarrowing it around to where it needed to be set was a time and labor sensitive step. If you are considering adding some type of pathway like this be sure to have your edging in place and consider having assistance with the process, like Tina did.

With hardscaping out of the way the arguably fun part of a gardening project remained: planting! Tina wanted her plants to be representative of the area around her so she chose native plants that, once established, could endure with or without her. Although native plants are not completely maintenance free they generally require less upkeep than traditional non-native landscapes. This is great for someone who doesn’t have the time or money to maintain a needy garden but it is also great for those who would like to give wildlife the opportunity to take back their environment.

Native plants have evolved and adapted to their local environment and can be self-sufficient while sustaining wildlife throughout their full life cycle. Because native landscapes require less pruning and cleaning it provides birds and insects year round shelter to rest and breed. Local wildlife has also adapted to feeding from native plants that can provide adequate nourishment. In addition, native gardens generally see an increase in wildlife because they tend to use less pesticides and herbicides that can hurt wildlife.
Tina’s “biggest tip to anyone thinking of starting a native garden is not to overcrowd!” She initially planted too many narrow leaf willows on the side of her house not realizing how quickly they grow nor that they reproduce through basal shoots. The end result of this, in Tina’s case was having to deal with plants coming through her pathway and other unintended spots. Tina mentioned that the hardscaping was the most expensive portion of her project so avoiding this problem could save others time and money. Aside from the aesthetics problems, overcrowding can cause some serious problems. Overcrowded plants have to compete for nutrients, moisture, and sunlight and are more susceptible to pests and disease because of poor circulation. However, a study by Rehling, Finn, et al. demonstrated that competition among plants was mostly for below ground resources. Given that a benefit of native plants is less fertilization, overcrowded native plants are competing over very few nutrients in many cases. Research by Lentz (1999) backs the conclusion that below ground competition is most responsible for decreased height, mass, and survivability.

Overcrowding is a common mistake. Most new gardeners want to create an instant garden that looks full now. As you can see in the photo above, part of Tina’s garden looked empty and maybe unfinished to some but it filled in to lush green oasis with time. Because she left room between these plants to fill in, Tina avoided having remove plants of prune them to fit and they can thrive in their natural form. Emily Green’s blog post in the LA Times has some great tips for avoiding overcrowding. She recommends going to the nursery with your gardens measurements and reading the plant tags to ensure they have room to fill in.

**Calscape** provides lots of information on specific plants including height, width, and growth rate so you can plan out your garden with your plants’ mature size in mind. If you’re planting slow growing plants and are not content with waiting for your garden to fill in, Green recommends using wildflowers as temporary fillers. There are plenty of annual wildflowers you can sow to give your garden a splash of color and beauty while your garden establishes and fills in naturally.

All in all Tina’s project was long, extending from fall through January, but she feels like it was completely worth it. Since her garden transformation she has seen a huge increase in wildlife from bees and butterflies to birds. Tina says that “one of [her] favorite things is waking up to a bunch of finches in the morning drinking and playing around one the fountains just chatting away.” While our gardens’ aren’t enough to completely restore our environment they can certainly mitigate some of the problems our environment is facing and they can bring us joy. On behalf of South Coast CNPS we would like to thank Tina for her efforts in helping our native plants and wildlife.

If you’d like to have your garden featured or know someone whose native garden deserves a spotlight you can contact Angel Garcia, newsletter editor, to have your story featured in an upcoming issue of Artemisia or on our social media accounts.

We sold over 1900 plants during our annual fall native plant sale! If you missed it or need more plants to take on your own garden transformation the [Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy nursery](https://www.palosverdespeninsulalandconservancy.org) still has plants for online purchase with contact-free pick-up.
Artemisia

Artemisia is the membership newsletter of the South Coast Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, a nonprofit organization.

South Coast Chapter CNPS, 23600 Telo Ave, Suite 130, Torrance CA 90505. Website www.sccnps.org Our chapter encompasses South Los Angeles County, ranging from LAX in the north, Long Beach in the south, and to Whittier in the east. We have members in more than 30 cities.

If you wish to be removed from our mailing list, please email membership@sccnps.org

The mission of CNPS is to conserve California native plants and their natural habitats and increase understanding, appreciation, and horticultural use of native plants.

California Native Plant Society, 2701 K St., Suite 1, Sacramento CA 95816-5113. Phone 916-447-2677

Email cnps@cnps.org Website www.cnps.org

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cnps.preseident@yahoo.com

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Artemisia Newsletter
Angel Garcia

Have something to share?

If you have questions, comments, or would like to submit an article, announcement, or event to the newsletter please email Angel Garcia at angel.garcia.144@my.csun.edu

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