

## HORTICULTURAL HAPPENINGS

# The Insectary Garden

DESIGNING A GARDEN to attract beneficial insects may seem simple, but the process is much more intricate than most people think. Even accomplished gardeners who consider their work completely sustainable and organic can miss the mark. It is necessary to choose the right plants, plant them at the right time and have them flower in succession throughout the entire year. Fortunately, it is possible to make the garden aesthetically pleasing while creating an ecologically beneficial environment.

Insects depend on pollen, nectar and other food sources, so the plants chosen for the garden must provide these basic needs. The plants that evolved right here in California are usually the best choices for the insects we want to attract. Our local insects endured a co-evolution with the plants of California, so a good insectary design will incorporate at least fifty percent native California plants. Consider planting *Ceanothus* 'Joyce Cutler,' which will attract hoverflies, native bees and butterflies. Another excellent choice is California buckwheat (*Erigonum fasciculatum*). Entomologists, botanists and horticulturists must screen non-

native plants carefully to make sure they truly feed and house the beneficial insects needed in the garden at large. Species and cultivars of lavender (*Lavendula*) are excellent non-native plant selections.

Lotusland's insectary garden renovation project set out to accomplish three key goals:

1. **Make the garden ADA compliant.** We are altering a few of the paths to accommodate wheelchairs and at the same time creating appropriate gathering places for tour groups.

2. **Incorporate the garden with the surrounding features.** The design aesthetic is being altered to more effectively work with the lemon arbor, the olive allée and the citrus orchards while creating natural entry and exit points.

3. **Select plants for optimum effectiveness.** Plantings in the garden will include the plant species we use in our current insectaries, along with others that new research has shown to be most effective in attracting beneficial insects.

This garden is integral to our sustainable horticulture program. It was our first insectary where we raised early populations of beneficial insects that eventually spread across the garden.



*California buckwheat has attracted this beneficial big headed fly.*



*The beneficial Mining Bee on a Ceanothus 'Joyce Cutler.'*

With this renovation, the garden will once again be a true insectary garden—not just a garden for butterflies (also pollinators)—but to attract other kinds of beneficials that we depend upon for our sustainable horticulture program to be successful.

Because Lotusland's current insectaries are located on the outside edges and behind the historic gardens, and are not accessible to the public, this garden will demonstrate how we create and use insectaries as part of our sustainable horticulture practices and hopefully will inspire home gardeners to do the same.

We are fortunate to have Eric Nagelmann's artistic talents to put a contemporary spin on our garden so that it is keeping with Ganna Walska's aesthetic and is much more than a stereotypical habitat garden. In addition, many new plants will be tested along with the tried and true hedgerow plants that make up our current insectaries. We are sure that visitors will be happily surprised at the beautiful flowers, massive blooms of the native plants and the amount of other wildlife that will find a home in this garden.

—Corey Welles



*Lotusland Plant Health Coordinator Corey Welles discusses plant selection with insectary garden designer Eric Nagelmann.*