

Ganna  
Walska



LOTUSLAND

NEWSLETTER | SUMMER 2026

## Botanical Gardens

AND THE FUTURE OF PLANT LIFE

THE EVOLUTION OF

## The Cycad Garden

FIRST LOOK: 40 EXCEPTIONAL OFFERINGS

## *Lotusland Celebrates* Auction

YOUR BID SUPPORTS  
THE GARDEN

Image still from the  
film *Botanical Beauty*  
by Louie Schwartzberg

Letter from Leadership

DEAR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS,

As summer unfolds, the Garden comes alive with lotus blooms, seasonal color, and gatherings that bring people together in meaningful ways. While our local community and regional visitors are our most loyal supporters, we are exhilarated to see Lotusland gaining continued national recognition with recent features in *Town & Country*, *Vogue.com*, *NYTimes TMagazine*, among many other publications—each highlighting Lotusland as one of the most extraordinary gardens to visit, celebrated for its 37 acres of immersive design, rich history, and remarkable diversity of more than 35,000 plant specimens.

While Lotusland is among the most intimate and enchanting gardens across the nation, we are not alone. Public gardens in the United States collectively welcome more than 132 million visitors each year, including over 13 million non-local and 1.6 million international guests. Together we support more than 15,000 jobs nationally, offer 5,000 internships, and engage 92,000 volunteers contributing over 3.6 million hours. Educational programs reach 3.3 million K-12 students annually, alongside thousands of health and wellness initiatives.

While our numbers are more modest, our impact in the world of public gardens is significant. We proudly produce these same economic and educational drivers at Lotusland and are continuously cited as one of the jewels in our national network of more than 600 public gardens and arboreta.

Thank you for your support, attendance, membership, and for being part of this extraordinary community of caretakers helping Lotusland thrive.

With gratitude,

*Rebecca*

**Rebecca Anderson, MA**  
Chief Executive Officer

P.S. We are pleased to announce that strong financial stewardship—guided by our Finance, Investment, and Audit Committees—has earned Lotusland the highest rating, a Platinum Seal of Transparency from Candid, an independent evaluator of charities.



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Letter from the Board

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE GARDEN,

In California, our seasons arrive softly, and summer is marked by birdsong, glowing sunsets, and cool marine mornings. Nowhere are these transitions more enchanting than at Lotusland, where our unique climate sustains a remarkable living collection.



You may notice the garden is in motion. Beneath the surface, we have completed a transformative infrastructure project—a 200,000-gallon underground water reservoir designed to capture water runoff and strengthen long-term stewardship in a drought-prone region. This fall, we will plant an oak woodland, create a new outdoor classroom, improve accessibility to the Tropical Garden, and expand habitat corridors on the property’s perimeter.

These early steps are part of Lotusland’s 20-year Master Plan, Shaped by years of thoughtful study and community dialogue. The plan will help steward the Garden responsibly and within our financial means while improving access, education, and horticultural care.

Property restoration and maintenance projects alongside facility improvements to support plant propagation, curatorial work, and visitor access are projected over the next five, ten and twenty years through fundraising and community support. These efforts will help further our mission to promote horticultural excellence, provide education, and instill awe and wonder.

We are also moving forward with our County planning application which proposes a carefully managed visitation model based on timed advance reservations. The application would allow a modest increase in daily visitors from 200 to 250 and provide flexibility for year round visitation, while preserving the neighborhood’s peaceful character.

Lotusland has been part of our community since 1993 and continues to thrive because of you. We invite you to lend your name or a brief letter of support by becoming a Lotusland Ambassador and helping ensure that this extraordinary Garden continues to inspire for generations.

With deep appreciation,

*Mari*

**Mari Mitchel**  
President, Board of Trustees



Lend your name to become  
an Ambassador for Lotusland  
Scan the QR code

LOTUSLAND’S MISSION IS TO PRESERVE AND ENHANCE THE DISTINCTIVE BOTANICAL GARDENS AND ESTATE OF MADAME GANNA WALSKA. LOTUSLAND EDUCATES AND INSPIRES VISITORS WITH ITS COLLECTIONS, SUSTAINABLE HORTICULTURE PRACTICES, AND PLANT CONSERVATION.

# Botanical Gardens and the Future of Plant Life

By Dr. Bruce Tiffney, Ph.D.  
Paleobotanist and Professor Emeritus,  
University of California, Santa Barbara

In the current moment, many are focused on petroleum and its trickle-down effect on our culture, economy and daily activities. But we lose sight of something more important—where this captured energy comes from. Albeit entombed for geologic ages in the Earth, the energy trapped in oil, coal and gas comes from the sun, through the mediating process of photosynthesis. In other words, plants power our world. Perhaps more importantly, they make our very aerobic existence possible because they generate oxygen in the process of trapping the atmospheric carbon that represents the sun’s energy of the past. Understanding the complex history that is behind our very ability to exist, work and create, is the work of generations of botanists, ecologists, paleontologists and evolutionary biologists.

Our spherical home, with its latitudinal distributions of climate and seasonal changes in weather, harbors a range of environments. Each of these calls forth a different set of solutions to plant life on land. Much botanical research



Among the oldest lineages of living seed plants on Earth, cycads have survived for millions of years and are now the world’s most threatened plant group.



*Understanding the complex history that is behind our very ability to exist, work and create, is the work of generations of botanists, ecologists, paleontologists and evolutionary biologists.*

remains to be done in the wilds of the past and the present. However, it is not always possible for scientists, much less the general public, to study terrestrial plants in their native environments. Furthermore, in the present day, many of these habitats are increasingly challenged and individual plant populations have become fragmented.

Into this complex situation, enters Lotusland in its role as a botanic garden. While perhaps visualized by some as an eccentric form of entertainment, botanic gardens have long been a

source of data and drivers of research. The earliest botanic gardens focused upon medicinal plants, providing an educational tool and reference resource for the medical profession that was in its infancy. With time and exploration, gardens added medical and economic plants from an increasingly wide span of the planet and began to accumulate botanical curiosities.

The concentration of plants in these gardens permitted comparisons of living plants from widely separated areas. This led to the recognition of patterns, in turn allowing the establishment of an ever (even in the present day) more sophisticated understanding of the diversity of plants and their evolutionary relationships. While many great botanic gardens were established in the 1700s and 1800s (e.g. the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the Jardin des Plantes, Bogor Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya Royal Botanic Gardens, Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens), and multitudes more have been established since then, no single garden can encompass all of the



With their extraordinary resilience and water-wise adaptations, aloes offer insight into how plants may thrive in a changing climate.

planet’s diversity of plants, either due to the limitations of its local climate, or simply the massive nature of the task to hand. Each garden brings its own special contribution to research, conservation, and public education and enjoyment (Chen & Sun, 2018).

And thus Lotusland. Driven by her phenomenal aesthetic vision, Madame Ganna Walska created instinctive groupings of plants. Some were allied by their adaptive shapes, of which the most stunning example are the cacti and their Old World ecological parallels in the Euphorbiaceae. But her attention was also drawn to the architecture and morphological solutions of individual groups, for example, the collections of aloes, bromeliads and cycads. Each is pleasing and interesting to look upon in its own right, but each also represents a microcosm of ecological solutions to particular habitats. The bromeliads share features adapted to an epiphytic habitat in New World forests, often high in the canopy, which is a remarkably desiccating environment (water, responding to gravity, rapidly draining to the forest floor). Or aloes, adapted to a range of desert or near desert environments in Africa, and reflecting another morphological and structural response (beyond that of cacti and euphorbs) to growing in a drought-dominated environment. The cycads represent a different consideration—they currently survive in a range of environmental situations but reflect an ancient lineage with widely dispersed occurrences and often

small populations. Between the threat of avaricious collections (a danger to other plants as well) and climate change, many cycads are threatened and indeed some may be extinct in the wild.

From the perspective of a biologist, each of these Lotusland collections brings plants from a wide geographic range into a common place for observation. In some cases, they preserve assemblages that were used actively in research, for example the collection of walking stick or bamboo palms (*Chamaedorea*) of Dr. Donald Hodel. In others, it preserves the passion of an individual for a group



Cacti from the Americas and euphorbias from Africa showcase convergent evolution—the development of similar forms and adaptations in unrelated plants responding to the same environmental conditions.

of plants resulting in a remarkable grouping of organisms, e.g., the Dunlap cactus collections.

Perhaps our most significant collection is that of the cycads, which is a dynamic locus for the preservation, propagation, and research on this fascinating relict group from the age of dinosaurs. With this collection, Lotusland has attained stature far beyond its physical size or age, as an active member of a global consortium of gardens and governmental entities.

While the preservation and research importance of these individual collections is indisputable, from a separate perspective, they are also an invaluable educational tool. Visitors to Lotusland can sample the diversity of adaptations of the plant kingdom from six continents and a range of latitudes (excepting the Arctic and full tropics) in a compact and glorious space. Indeed, I take personal pleasure in introducing students to the myriads of morphological solutions that plants have evolved, using Lotusland’s diverse outdoor classroom. Further, from a horticultural perspective, the garden also showcases how the plants and landscapes of Santa Barbara can be cared for in a proactive and environmentally responsible manner, including integrated pest management and compost-derived nutrients, both of which may be observed in the horticultural practices at Lotusland.

In summary, while most visitors enjoy the beauty of Lotusland, Madame’s garden joins a long tradition of preservation, research, education and demonstration of stewardship, swinging well above the weight of its relatively small size. In parallel with our other local treasure focused on native plants, the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, how lucky we are to have Lotusland in Santa Barbara.

Chen, G., and W. Sun. 2018. The role of botanical gardens in scientific research, conservation and citizen science. *Plant Diversity* 40: 181-188.



**Dr. Bruce Tiffney** is an emeritus professor of Earth Science (College of Letters and Science) and Biology (College of Creative Studies) at UCSB. As a paleobotanist, he is the author of almost 100 papers on the fossil record of fruits and seeds, the paleobiogeography of the Northern Hemisphere, the patterns and mechanisms influencing the diversification of land plants, and the interaction of land plants and vertebrate herbivores and dispersal agents through time. He was a professor of biology at Yale from 1977-1986, and has been a UCSB Faculty member since 1986. He served as the Dean of the College of Creative Studies from 2006-2016 and 2018-2020.

Dr. Bruce Tiffney is a long-tenured member of Lotusland’s Plant Collections Committee.



Mexican cycads being planted along a new pathway.

## The Evolution of the Cycad Garden:

### COMPLETING A MULTI-YEAR REMEDIATION AND CONSERVATION EFFORT WITHIN ONE OF LOTUSLAND'S MOST SIGNIFICANT LIVING COLLECTIONS

By Paul Mills, Director of Conservation and Curator of the Living Collection

The final phase of Lotusland's multi-year Cycad Garden renewal has been successfully completed, marking a significant step forward in the preservation, accessibility, and long-term stewardship of one of the Garden's most important living collections. The project addressed longstanding issues related to oak root fungus (*Armillaria*) while substantially improving garden design, drainage, accessibility, and the breadth of the cycad collection.

Extensive excavation throughout the Garden removed fungal host material in the form of buried tree stumps, followed by the installation of an intricate network of subterranean and surface drainage systems. Planting beds were then rebuilt with a sandy, fast-draining soil mix and updated irrigation infrastructure.

A historically significant pathway, begun in the late 1970's when Charlie Glass was designing and installing the Cycad Garden, was renewed and completed during this phase. The path is flanked on one side by Mexican cycads and on the other by Asian cycads in the genus



A buried tree stump is removed from the Asian section of the Cycad Garden.

*Cycas*. Along this path stands a large, old plant of *Dioon spinulosum* that, according to Charlie's detailed notes, was Madame Ganna Walska's "favorite" cycad. This pathway ultimately leads to the new gathering area, generously sponsored by the Wyatt Family, which is surrounded by stately Australian cycads in the genus *Macrozamia* and panoramic Garden views.

A second, entirely new path at the north end of the Cycad Garden now provides access to another, previously inaccessible part of the Garden. This newly accessible area includes several notable plants and space for additional cycads in the future.

Planting efforts to date in the renovated areas include 35 cycads from the Lotusland nursery, largely grown from seed. This includes important Mexican taxa that were collected as seed in 2004 as part of a joint expedition between Lotusland, Montgomery Botanical Center and Francisco Clavijero Botanic Garden in Mexico. An additional nine plants of *Encephalartos ituriensis* from the Democratic Republic of the Congo were planted, having been sent to Lotusland by the government as confiscated seed that had entered the country without the necessary permits. Lotusland is an official Plant Rescue Center registered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The renovated Australian section will be further enhanced by 38 *Macrozamia* plants received from Montgomery Botanical Center as part of an APGA Plant Collections Network multi-site accredited cycad meta collection, strengthening collaborative conservation and genetic diversity within public gardens. These plants were grown from seed collected in 2023 and represent the *Parazamia* group which consists of smaller species with mostly subterranean stems.

This multi-year effort was made possible through the skilled work of Esau's Landscapes, the design and construction plans of Arcadia Studio, generous support from the Wyatt Family, and the ongoing commitment of Lotusland staff. Beyond the physical renewal of the Garden, the project marks an important milestone in the long-term preservation, study, accessibility, and continued growth of one of Lotusland's most significant living collections—one that will continue to be enjoyed by visitors and conversationalists from across the globe.

## Hidden Collections Revealed:

### NEW PATHWAYS THROUGH THE CYCAD GARDEN UNCOVER UNUSUAL ACCESSIONS, BOTANICAL HISTORIES, AND RARELY SEEN PLANTS FROM LOTUSLAND'S LIVING COLLECTIONS

By Anna Bower, Associate Curator of Living Collections and Nursery Manager

New pathways through the Cycad Garden now reveal a remarkable group of unusual and historically significant plants that have quietly grown within Lotusland's living collections for decades. Drawn from years of botanical partnerships, field collections, institutional exchanges, and nursery cultivation, these accessions reflect the deep history of Lotusland's plant collections and relationships with local plantspeople. Many were originally acquired and placed by former Curator of Living Collections Virginia Hayes and are now accessible to visitors for the first time.

#### The Elephant in the Garden

Lotusland is home to one *Phytolacca dioica*, which originated as a seed sown by Mary Bleck of Abbey Garden (AbG 69-118). The resulting seedling was planted in the late 1970's by Charlie Glass during the development of the Cycad Garden. This same area previously housed a detrimentally vigorous hybrid *Phytolacca dioica* × *weberbaueri*, which was removed in January 2025 after its structural integrity was compromised.

*Phytolacca dioica*, or ombú, is a member of the pokeweed family or



*These accessions reflect the deep history of Lotusland's plant collections and years of botanical partnerships, field collections, institutional exchanges, and relationships with local plantspeople.*

Phytolaccaceae. Most species in the genus *Phytolacca* are shrubby or vining herbaceous perennials. However, there are two species from South America that reach tree-like proportions: *Phytolacca dioica* and *Phytolacca weberbaueri*.

*P. dioica*, as the specific epithet suggests, is dioecious, meaning it exists as either a male or female plant. Lotusland's plant is pistillate, producing female flowers and yellow berry-like fruits. Its native range stretches from Bolivia to Brazil and northern Argentina in the Pampas region. *Phytolacca dioica* is one of the few trees that grow in this open grassland area. Because of its weak, papery nature, the interior of the tree

tends to rot away, leaving a cavity inside. This hollow area makes perfect shelter for traveling gauchos.

Despite its tree-like proportions, the ombú tree does not make true wood. Instead, the trunk and branches undergo anomalous secondary thickening, producing papery layers that are soft and spongy. The cambial areas, where xylem and phloem are produced, can arise in new locations, external to previously formed cambia. The rings seen in a branch cross section are not annual rings like on a woody dicotyledon, in fact, a young *Phytolacca dioica* branch may produce four or more vascular rings in a year.

#### Acquisitions from Kirstenbosch

In the 1990's, Lotusland became an institutional member of the Botanical Society of South Africa and received seed distributed by Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden in Cape Town. Many of these accessions reside in the Aloe Garden, Cycad Garden, Fern Garden, and Succulent Garden. The new path in the Cycad Garden features a backdrop of shrubby *Combretum erythrophyllum* (river bushwillow), acquired as seed in 1995. The specific epithet refers to the red leaves seen on this species in the fall. A few other interesting tree species are found here: *Rauvolfia afra* (quinine tree), a tree in the milkweed or dogbane family with quinine properties to its bark; *Croton sylvaticus* (forest feverberry), a medicinal plant in the euphorbia family; and *Vachellia sieberiana* var. *woodii*

*Continued*



*Phytolacca dioica*



*Combretum erythrophyllum*



*Rauvolfia afra*

## Horticulture Happenings



*Otholobium fruticans*



*Khaya nyasica*



*Schotia afra v. afra*

(paperbark acacia) with its peeling, papery bark and impressive paired thorns.

Lotusland also acquired three additional members of the Fabaceae (pea family): *Otholobium fruticans* (Cape pea), a small trailing shrub with clusters of purple pea-flowers. It is considered rare but not threatened because most of the population is protected in the Table Mountain National Park. Also in this category are *Crotalaria capensis* (Cape rattle-pod), a shrub with velvety trifoliate leaves and bright yellow pea flowers, and *Calpurnia aurea* ssp. *aurea* (Natal laburnum), with golden racemes and pinnate leaves.

One of the taller shrubs in this area is *Halleria lucida* (tree fuchsia), which produces masses of red to orange bilabiate (two-lipped) flowers borne cauliflorously on the trunk and in the leaf axils of younger branches. The fruits are green, marble-sized, and mature to a purple-black color. The genus *Halleria* belongs in the *Stilbaceae* family and contains five accepted species, with two being endemic to Madagascar. The range of *H. lucida* extends from South Africa to Ethiopia and into Yemen. In habitat, it is pollinated by sunbirds, other nectar-feeding birds, and insects.

### Accessions from UCSB Greenhouses

The newly opened area in the Cycad Garden also houses several plants donated by the UC Santa Barbara Biology Greenhouses. One of the more striking specimens is *Schotia afra* var. *afra* (Karoo boer-bean), a spring-blooming evergreen tree with

fuchsia-red flowers dripping with nectar, a popular stopover for bees and birds. *Schotia afra* is a member of the legume family (Fabaceae) and produces beaked pods with large, rounded seeds inside. The seeds are edible and are called *boerboon* in Afrikaans, which translates to “farmer’s bean.” Another common name, Karoohuilboerboon, references the Karoo region. *Huil* translates to crying or weeping, describing the copious nectar. Lotusland’s specimen was planted on July 15, 1992. *S. afra* var. *angustifolia* can be viewed in Santa Barbara at both Orpet Park and Franceschi Park. Italian horticulturist and botanist Francesco Franceschi is credited with introducing this species into cultivation in the United States in the early 1900s.

Rooted cuttings of *Olea exasperata* (dune or coast olive) have been added as future screening between the nursery and the Cycad Garden. The original plant from 1995 was removed due to renovations in 2021. This species is shrubby and the specific epithet, *exasperata*, refers to the roughened texture of the branches. It is endemic to South Africa, where it inhabits coastal sand dunes, limestone hills, and open grassland. Another dune plant in this area is *Euclea racemosa* (sea or dune guarrie), which makes an excellent hedge because of its dense, even foliage. Female plants produce edible, black-purple fruits which are used to make vinegar.

### Additional Plants of Interest

This area also contains three mature *Khaya nyasica* (red mahogany), originally collected by plant enthusiast

and Lotusland neighbor Tom Cole in Mucombeze, Manica Province, Mozambique. They were started from seed in 1995 and planted in the Cycad Garden in 1998. This species displays striking bright red new foliage spirally arranged on the stem. Lotusland’s specimens are smooth barked, but there is a curious individual at Alameda Park with retained bark on the trunk and mature branches. *Pittosporum viridiflorum* (Cape cheesewood) can also be found near the new path. It displays creamy green flowers early in summer and has a resinous/licorice smell to the bark.

A few additional plants were pulled out of Lotusland’s nursery for additional screening. Look for the brightly flowering Dombeya ‘Seminole’, a donation from The Huntington in the mallow family. It is a hybrid out of the USDA Plant Introduction Station in Miami, FL. *Greyia sutherlandii*, Natal bottlebrush, has also been added to this new area. This deciduous South African shrub blooms in the late winter/early spring with bright scarlet “bottlebrushes” of flowers with protruding stamens. A small *Ruellia insignis* (Socotran ruellia), recently acquired from San Marcos Growers, has also been planted near the *Schotia afra* v. *afra*. This purple-flowered shrub is endemic to north-central Socotra off the coast of Yemen.

Together, these accessions reflect the extraordinary botanical diversity now accessible through the expanded pathways of the Cycad Garden and the continued evolution of Lotusland’s living collections.

## LOTUSLAND PARTNERS ON NEW MONTECITO WATER DISTRICT

# Demonstration Garden

Montecito Water District San Ysidro Road’s new Demonstration Garden is a collaborative community project to inspire residents with approaches to landscaping that are both sustainable and beautiful. Developed in partnership with Lotusland and with support from the Montecito Community Foundation, the project reflects a shared belief that water-efficient landscapes can also be ornamental, immersive, habitat-supporting, and design-forward.

“Lotusland has generously shared time and expertise to contribute to a public garden designed to benefit the entire community. We are fortunate to have a world-class garden right here in the District, and even more fortunate to have them lend an experienced hand.”—Nick Turner, General Manager, Montecito Water District

Located in front of the District office, the garden was created as a community resource, demonstrating how

Steven Cognac, Ruth Green, Chana Jackson, Ken Coates, Mari Mitchel, Rebecca Anderson, Laura Camp, Nicholas Turner at the Groundbreaking last October.

thoughtful landscape design, climate-appropriate planting, and efficient irrigation practices can support long-term water conservation without sacrificing beauty or creativity.



Eric Nagelmann

whose work has helped define several beloved spaces at Lotusland, brought his signature approach to creating gardens that balance sculptural form, biodiversity, and regional character.

The partnership with Montecito Water District also reflects Lotusland’s commitment to sustainability and water stewardship. For three decades,

Lotusland enlisted renowned landscape designer Eric Nagelmann to contribute to the garden’s design.

Nagelmann,

## Sustainability & Plant Health Care

Lotusland has served as a model for sustainable horticulture and environmentally responsible garden practices. More recent initiatives significantly advance water resilience initiatives, including the implementation of a major catchment system designed to support long-term sustainability and responsible water management.

### Public Programming at the Demonstration Garden

Beginning this fall, Lotusland looks forward to participating in educational programs for the public hosted at the District’s new Demonstration Garden. Topics will include sustainable landscape practices, water-wise gardening, and climate-appropriate planting strategies. Programming details will be announced online.

To learn more and participate, visit: [www.montecitowater.com/conservation/demonstration-garden/](http://www.montecitowater.com/conservation/demonstration-garden/)

“The new demonstration garden reflects a water-wise Lotusland-inspired design by our Cactus, Palmetum, and Insectary Garden designer extraordinaire, Eric Nagelmann, who generously contributed his talent and artistry to this community collaboration.” —Rebecca Anderson, CEO



# Giant Kelp in the Garden

By Chris Ziliotto, Sustainability Program Manager

In Lotusland’s quest to bring our supply chain closer to home, we have begun using a new giant kelp (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) product in place of *Ascophyllum nodulosum*, the most widely used kelp in commercial agriculture. Harvested from the Pacific coastline, giant kelp is one of the world’s fastest-growing plants and highly renewable. As a fertilizer and biostimulant, *Macrocystis* delivers natural micronutrients and organic compounds that strengthen root systems, improve soil health, and enhance plant resilience, making a great addition to our compost tea mixes.

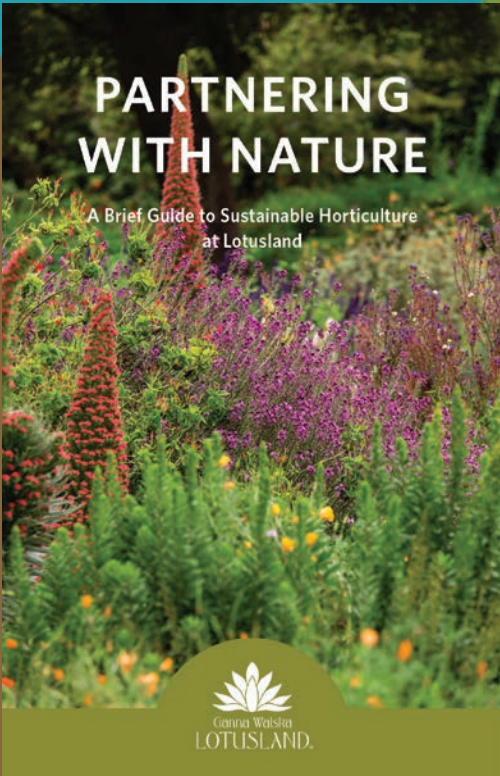
This shift to more local inputs significantly reduces our carbon footprint by slashing the distance our kelp products travel to the Garden. Unlike *Ascophyllum*, which is typically harvested and shipped from North Atlantic waters, Pacific kelp is sourced much closer to home, minimizing transportation emissions while supporting local coastal economies.

With future kelp cultivation planned as close as Ventura, Lotusland is excited to deepen its connection between thriving gardens and a healthy ocean.

A Lessons from Lotusland on Pacific Kelp in the Garden will be announced in the fall.



Compost tea being applied by longtime Gardener Mike Furner.



## Partnering with Nature

*Partnering with Nature* is Lotusland’s public guide to sustainable horticulture, offering an introduction to the environmentally conscious gardening practices that have shaped the Garden for more than 30 years. The guide shares practical insights for home gardeners, landscape professionals, and plant enthusiasts interested in building healthier soils, supporting biodiversity, conserving water, while working in harmony with natural systems. Drawing from Lotusland’s nationally recognized sustainable horticulture program, *Partnering with Nature* reflects decades of research, experimentation, and collaboration with horticultural experts and environmental leaders.

Now available for preorder in our online shop at [lotusland.org](https://lotusland.org)

This new edition was made possible through the generous support of Leslie S. Thomas.

# Safeguarding Madame’s Legacy:

## PRESERVING THE PAST, PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

By Phylene Wiggins, Grants & Strategic Partnerships Officer

Madame Ganna Walska’s vision for Lotusland was expansive and deeply personal. Her drawings, plans, photographs, and personal effects remain vital to understanding the Garden today. More than historical records, these materials actively inform how Lotusland is maintained, restored, and interpreted. Preserving them is essential to honoring Madame’s intentions amid environmental risk.

Guided by a deep commitment to stewardship, Lotusland has strengthened the care of its non-living collections with support from two preservation grants\*. This funding enabled acquisition of critical archival infrastructure, including a ten-drawer, museum-quality steel flat file designed for long-term preservation. This nonflammable system safeguards historic renderings, landscape plans, and architectural drawings documenting Lotusland’s evolution. New archival shelving further improved organization, access, and workflow.

The grants also supported environmental monitors that track temperature and humidity in key storage areas, helping prevent damage before it occurs. Emergency and disaster-recovery supplies are now in place, strengthening readiness for fire, water intrusion, or other threats. These investments have been reinforced by staff training focused on emergency response, preventive care, and risk-based collections security.

Lotusland recently hosted nearby grantees to exchange perspectives on shared preservation concerns and practical strategies for protecting collections. At the same time, the Garden is expanding its preservation capacity through education and partnership, with interns providing hands-on organization and care of Madame Walska’s archives while cultivating emerging museum and conservation professionals. Together, these grant-supported efforts mark a meaningful advance in the stewardship of Madame Ganna Walska’s legacy—strengthening infrastructure and knowledge, ensuring long-term access to the collections, and translating funding into durable systems, skilled staff, and shared expertise that deliver broad public benefit.

\* *The Groundwork Grants program is administered by the California State Library in partnership with Myriad Consulting and Training and is part of the library’s “Ready or Not: California Cultural Heritage Disaster Preparedness Project,” funded by the State of California.*



Image from Madame Walska's archives.

## Growing Futures:

### WELCOMING OUR FIRST PARTNERS IN EDUCATION INTERN

Lotusland proudly joins the Santa Barbara County Education Office’s Partners in Education program—supporting local students ages 15-18 with hands-on learning, career coaching, and an 8-week job readiness experience that opens the door to paid internships and bright futures.

By Mateo Gallegos, San Marcos High School, Partners in Education 2026 Intern

In fourth grade, I stepped into the breathtaking gardens of Lotusland for the first time. It would have never occurred to me that almost a decade later, I would have the opportunity to intern for such a meaningful organization. I soon learned that Lotusland is a horticultural masterpiece, a landscape with delicate splashes of color and a diverse and impactful history, which I discovered through my work indexing over 2,000 unique subjects across 34 years of newsletters.

My indexing work has not only preserved Lotusland’s accessibility for future docents, volunteers, and visitors but has also ensured its legacy, one that I am proud to be a part of. Additionally, my internship expanded beyond indexing newsletters into event support, where I developed skills in communication and collaboration by speaking to Lotusland’s dedicated community and supporting its staff. My internship at Lotusland has truly been a transformative experience and I am thankful to have had this amazing opportunity.



Mateo Gallegos, San Marcos High School

PRESENTING SPONSOR



NORA MCNEELY HURLEY  
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EVENTS

SPECIAL RECOGNITION



THE ONI  
LIFESTYLE EVENT RENTALS

LOTUSLAND

CELEBRATES

# BOTANICAL SPLENDOR

Hosted by  
**JANE LYNCH**

Special Guest  
**MARTHA STEWART**

Honorary Chair  
**WENDY SCHMIDT**

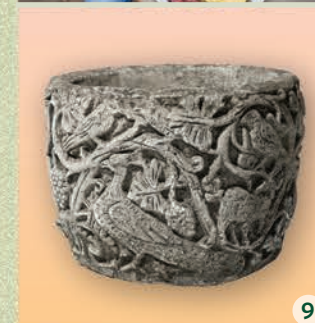
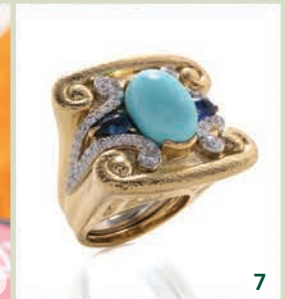
Co-Chairs  
**JEANNE ANDERSON & JULIE MORLEY**

## LIVE AUCTION

At Home with Martha Stewart: Garden Tour & Lunch  
Bordeaux Grand Cru Living at Château Troplong Mondot  
Jewelry. Legacy. New York: A David Webb Experience  
A Custom-Designed Rose Garden by Rose Story Farm  
Tuscany on the Table: Private Dinner with Podere Le Ripi at Lotusland

**Register for advance bidding for the Live Auction before  
Friday, July 17, at 12:00 pm**

*Thank you for your overwhelming support!  
Lotusland Celebrates: Botanical Splendor is fully subscribed.*



## LOTUSLAND CELEBRATES AUCTION

*Every bid supports the Garden*

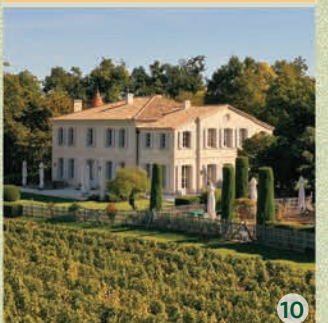
**LIVE AUCTION**  
Saturday, July 18, 2026  
7:00 pm

**ONLINE AUCTION**  
Monday, July 13 through  
Sunday, July 19, 2026  
3:00 pm

Bid on more than 30 exceptional lots including  
exclusive getaways, opulent jewelry, bespoke creations,  
and unique experiences inspired by the Garden  
and beyond.

Registration is now open.  
[lotuslandcelebrates.org](https://lotuslandcelebrates.org)

1. At Home with Martha Stewart 2. Splendor at Sea 3. Kona Village, A Rosewood Resort  
4. Ranch to Table with Elizabeth Poett 5. Eriness Jewelry 6. Validation Ale Signature Brew  
7. David Webb Jewelry 8. Dragon Light, Santa Barbara Lighting Co. 9. Pennoyer Newman  
10. Château Troplong Mondot 11. Carolina Buccini 12. Booth Ranches 13. Rose Story Farm  
14. The Inn at Mattei's Tavern 15. Frontenore—Rosewood Miramar Beach Private Dining  
16. Curated Botanical Collection by Randy Baldwin



# Upcoming Events

**TWILIGHT GARDEN WALK**

Enjoy a self-guided stroll as the sun begins to set and a golden hue envelope the Garden.

**Friday, July 3, 4:30–6:30 pm**  
**Saturday, September 5, 4:30–6:30 pm**

*Complimentary for Patron Circle Members*  
Members \$40 / Non-Members and Members’ guests \$80

**SUMMER PICNIC**

Enjoy live music by David Segall and celebrate the beauty of summer with a delightful family picnic on the Great Lawn!

**Saturday, August 1, 2:00–4:30 pm**

*Complimentary for Patron Circle Members*  
Members \$45 / Members’ children free  
Non-Members \$95 / Non-Members’ children 3-12 \$35

To purchase tickets and reserve your space, visit: [lotusland.org/events](https://lotusland.org/events)



**WELL-BEING WEDNESDAY SERIES**

Benefit from the restorative power of nature and enjoy the Garden with a fresh perspective. Each session explores a different practice and connects you to the natural environment.

**Forest Bathing with Elena Ríos**  
**July 29, 11:30–12:30 pm**

**Tai Chi with Chao Pang**  
**August 26, 11:30–12:30 pm**

Extend your experience by reserving an afternoon tour at the time of booking.

Members \$50 / Non-Members \$90



For more information and to reserve, visit: [lotusland.org/events](https://lotusland.org/events)



**MEMBERS EVENTS**

**LOTUSLAND CELEBRATES: BOTANICAL SPLENDOR**  
**July 18—SOLD OUT**  
**LIVE AUCTION**  
**Saturday, July 18**  
(Register for advance bidding by July 17)  
**ONLINE AUCTION**  
**July 13–19, 3:00 pm PST**  
Learn more  
[lotuslandcelebrates.org](https://lotuslandcelebrates.org)

**EXCEPTIONAL PLANTS AUCTION**  
**SAVE THE DATE**  
**Saturday, October 3, 2026**  

Lotusland’s *Exceptional Plants Auction* brings together plant enthusiasts, collectors, and garden lovers for a lively afternoon surrounded by extraordinary plants and set in one of the country’s most beautiful gardens. Guests can explore and bid on hundreds of rare, climate-resilient, and hard-to-find plants at a wide range of price points while enjoying refreshments, light bites, and conversations with growers and horticultural experts. Drawing visitors from the West Coast and beyond, the event has become a favorite gathering for the gardening community and directly supports the care of Lotusland and its living collections.

Sponsorship opportunities are now available.

To learn more, contact Patricia Sadeghian at [psadeghian@lotusland.org](mailto:psadeghian@lotusland.org) or call (805) 324-8426

**GARDEN CONVERSATIONS**  

This is a special opportunity to explore specific gardens “in conversation” alongside the key Garden staff who maintain them. Gain a deeper understanding of how this Garden is maintained, notable species, and a rare opportunity to ask questions directly to the staff who know it best.

**Bromeliad Garden**  
**Thursday, August 13, 10:00–11:30 am**

This cohesive tour offers a chance to walk the Bromeliads with Lotusland’s longest-running horticultural staff member, Michael Furner, alongside Associate Curator of the Living Collections and Nursery Manager, Anna Bower.

*Complimentary for Patron Circle members.*  
Members \$40 / Members’ children 3-12 \$35

**LOTUS APPRECIATION DAY**  

Don’t miss the chance to see the lotuses in bloom! Take advantage of this member-only special Sunday event to connect with the Garden that your support helps bring to life. Explore at your own pace on a self-guided walk and immerse yourself in the magic of lotus season before the summer season ends.

**Sunday, August 16, 2026**  
**9:30–11:30 am | 4:30–6:30 pm**

Members \$35 / Members’ children free  
Non-Members \$70 / Non-Members’ children 3-12 \$35  
*Complimentary visit codes and guest passes are welcomed*

**LOTUS SOCIETY LOTUS VIEWING DAY**  

Lotus Society members are invited to enjoy a self-guided Garden walk, view the lotus during their peak blooming season, and stop by the Garden Shop while Lotusland is closed to the public. No formal programming is scheduled.

**Sunday, August 16, 2026**  
**1:30–3:30 pm**

*Kindly note that capacity is limited and reservations are required. To register early, please email [thelotussociety@lotusland.org](mailto:thelotussociety@lotusland.org) or call 805.324.8430.*

**MEMBER APPRECIATION DAY**  

Join us for a relaxed and festive afternoon in the Garden as we honor the incredible support of our Lotusland membership community. Come for the food, stay for the fun, and connect with fellow members in the beauty of the Garden.

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**Saturday, September 12, 3:30–6:30 pm**

Members \$75 / Non-Member guests \$95  
Members’ children 3-12 \$35

14 SUMMER 2026

LOTUSLAND.ORG 15

# Reawakening a Lost Lantern

## AT LOTUSLAND, PRESERVATION OFTEN BEGINS WITH A QUESTION

Sometimes it emerges from a fragment of correspondence, a hidden architectural detail, or, in this case, a nearly forgotten photograph dating back to the 1920s. While researching archival images of the estate, Lotusland and members of the Buildings & Grounds Committee and Architectural Advisory Ad Hoc Committee uncovered a grainy historic photograph showing an ornate hanging lantern suspended within one of the property's courtyards. Though the image revealed only partial details, the fixture's dramatic silhouette and whimsical dragon motif immediately stood out.

Originally shaped by the architectural vision of George Washington Smith and Reginald Johnson, Lotusland's Main House and Bath House remain some of Santa Barbara's most significant examples of Spanish Colonial Revival design. The rediscovered lantern offered another glimpse into the layered architectural history of the estate during the years of both the Gavit family and later Madame Ganna Walska, whose theatrical imagination and romantic



Preliminary sketch of the Dragon light fixture by Harrison Design.

sensibility helped shape the character of the property. Remarkably, the archival image appeared to be the only surviving visual reference of the original fixture, making its recreation both an act of research and interpretation.

What followed became an extraordinary collaboration in architectural preservation, bringing together



Santa Barbara Lighting Company at work in the atelier, bringing the lantern to life.

historians, architects, designers, and master artisans to reawaken a lost element of Lotusland's historic character. The project also reflects the interdisciplinary approach that increasingly defines preservation work at Lotusland, where architecture, landscape, craftsmanship, and historical research intersect.

For the past eight years, Harrison Design has worked alongside Lotusland in researching the history of the estate's architecture and contributing to preservation-minded initiatives through both the Buildings & Grounds Committee and Architectural Advisory Ad Hoc Committee. According to Harrison's senior principal architect Anthony Grumbine, the rediscovery of the lantern offered "exciting visions about life at Lotusland," adding another layer of personality and imagination to the estate's evolving story.

Because the original photograph was heavily pixelated and lacked clear detail, interpretation became an essential part of the process. Harrison Design studied period ironwork

motifs from the 1920s, researching how artisans of the era shaped and wrought iron by hand. The team also looked to other dragon lanterns found at residences designed by George Washington Smith, as well as details from the Santa Barbara Courthouse, for inspiration rooted in the architectural language of Spanish Colonial Revival Santa Barbara.

Rather than simply replicating the historic image, the team sought to create something faithful to the spirit of the original while allowing room for artistic interpretation. Lotus petals were incorporated into the lantern's upper and lower elements, softening the strength of the dragon motif while subtly tying the fixture to Lotusland itself. Fine wrought-iron details, including acanthus-shaped leaves reminiscent of dragon claws and delicate inner layers that cast imaginative shadows when illuminated, became defining features of the final design.

To fabricate the piece, Lotusland partnered with Santa Barbara Lighting Company, whose artisans handcrafted

the lantern using traditional metalworking techniques practiced long before the introduction of modern machinery. Solid steel was forged and shaped entirely by hand, preserving the artistry and integrity of old-world blacksmithing traditions.

The fabrication process itself became an exercise in historical interpretation and craftsmanship. Working from Harrison Design's sketches and the original archival photograph, artisans carefully reconstructed ornamental details while considering how the fixture would have been fabricated nearly a century ago. The resulting lantern is not only functional lighting, but a sculptural work of art rooted in the traditions of historic craftsmanship.

"Every piece we create is held to the highest standards—not only in construction, but also in finish and longevity," Santa Barbara Lighting Company shared. "This piece became a labor of love for everyone involved, as we worked together to ensure the quality, authenticity, and longevity of these iconic fixtures."

The project reflects a broader philosophy guiding Lotusland's ongoing preservation efforts—that architectural conservation is not solely about restoring buildings, but about safeguarding the layers of artistry, imagination, and cultural memory embedded throughout the estate. As Harrison Design noted, working at Lotusland often involves "studying and re-studying historic photographs, and finding layers in the walls that tell a story about the history of the estate."

Today, the recreated Dragon Lantern stands as both a tribute to Lotusland's architectural heritage and the first step in a broader restoration effort.

One handcrafted lantern will be auctioned as part of this year's *Lotusland Celebrates* online offerings.

**You have an opportunity to take home your own limited edition bespoke dragon lantern. Visit [lotuslandcelebrates.org](https://lotuslandcelebrates.org) to bid!**



The recreated Dragon lantern

### LOTUSLAND DRAGON LANTERNS

\$50,000  
Bring light, artistry, and enduring beauty to the Pavilion Patio by supporting the fabrication and installation of two replica Dragon Lanterns. Your gift will underwrite these striking features as a lasting part of Lotusland's non-living collections.

### PLANT IDENTIFICATION SIGNAGE

\$2,500 to purchase durable plant signs identifying prominent and rare plants and trees by family, botanical and common names, and—when appropriate—native origin. Placed throughout the landscape, these signs turn the Garden into a living classroom, offering accessible education for visitors. Help Lotusland build botanical literacy, foster stewardship, and inspire future plant professionals.

### ARCHIVAL STORAGE

\$2,000 for archival shelving and storage to organize and preserve the irreplaceable archives and artifacts of Madame Ganna Walska and the history of Lotusland. This will enable their active use for exhibitions, research, education, and interpretation, illuminating Madame's extraordinary life and Lotusland's cultural and horticultural legacy.

**Wish List gifts in any amount are gratefully received. For more information or to make a donation to our Wish List, contact Patricia Sadeghian at [development@lotusland.org](mailto:development@lotusland.org).**



Archival photo of the historic lantern located in Lotusland's Pavilion arcade.

Spotlight

VOLUNTEER & LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT:  
Connie Flowers Percy



MICHAEL HABER

Lotusland is incredibly proud to shine a spotlight on Connie Flowers Percy, a devoted leader and trustee whose impact continues to shape the Garden’s future. As Chairwoman of the *Lotusland Forever* Campaign, Connie helped guide an ambitious effort with extraordinary dedication and positivity. Thanks to her time, talent, and tenacity, the campaign not only reached but exceeded its remarkable \$30 million goal, securing vital resources to support both the endowment and essential capital improvements.

Connie’s leadership is rooted in a deep and enduring love for the Garden. Over many years of service on the Lotusland Board of Trustees, including her tenure as past president, she has brought wisdom, generosity, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. Her influence extends beyond governance—she is a constant and enthusiastic supporter of Lotusland’s cherished events, including *Lotusland Celebrates*, *Exceptional Plants* and *Gardens in Paradise*.

Those who work alongside Connie know her for her kindness, and genuine passion for Lotusland’s mission. She inspires others through her leadership, fostering a spirit of collaboration and community that strengthens the Garden.

Lotusland is truly fortunate to benefit from Connie’s remarkable dedication. Her contributions—both seen and unseen—have left an enduring legacy, ensuring that the Garden continues to thrive as a place of beauty, discovery, and inspiration for all.

Rebecca Anderson

ELECTED HONORARY MEMBER OF THE GARDEN CLUB OF SANTA BARBARA

Lotusland is pleased to share that Chief Executive Officer Rebecca Anderson has been elected an Honorary Member of the Garden Club of Santa Barbara—an honor recognizing her distinguished contributions to and commitment to horticulture, conservation, and environmental stewardship.

Founded in 1916 and affiliated with The Garden Club of America, the organization has long advanced gardening, preservation, and community projects across the region, including ongoing partnerships with Lotusland.

This recognition reflects Rebecca’s leadership in strengthening Lotusland’s mission through expanded education, community engagement, and sustainable horticulture, as well as the shared values between the two organizations.



*“I am grateful to be associated with an organization whose commitment to conservation, education, and community stewardship aligns so closely with Lotusland’s mission.” —Rebecca Anderson, CEO*

FIND YOUR CALLING AS A  
Lotusland Volunteer!

Are you ready to make a meaningful difference while immersing yourself in the beauty of nature?

Join us for our **Volunteer Fundamentals Workshop**—a welcoming, informative meet-and-greet where you will learn what it means to volunteer at Lotusland while exploring a variety of rewarding roles, and connecting with a passionate, like-minded community.

Discover the calming, restorative power of gardens while sharing your time and talents in service of something truly special. Join us and take the first step toward becoming part of the Lotusland volunteer community.

For more information, reach out to Sarah Desmarais, Visitor Services & Volunteer Coordinator, at 805-324-2953 or [sdesmarais@lotusland.org](mailto:sdesmarais@lotusland.org)



**Volunteer Fundamentals Workshop**  
Tuesday, August 25 | 9:30–11:00 am

Following this session, you’ll be invited to begin our volunteer training.

**Save the Dates—Garden Guide Training:**

- Thursday, September 10 | 10:00 am–12:00 pm
- Tuesday, September 15 | 1:30–3:30 pm

We look forward to welcoming you to the Lotusland team!

2025 DONOR & VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION  
*Rooted in Stewardship*  
A NEW PUBLICATION CELEBRATING THE  
COMMUNITY WHOSE SUPPORT KEEPS  
THIS GARDEN THRIVING!

Enclosed with this issue is *Rooted in Stewardship: A Year of Giving at Lotusland*, our new annual recognition publication celebrating the generosity that sustains the Garden. Within its pages, we honor the donors, members, volunteers, and community partners whose support advances Lotusland’s mission and helps ensure its future.

The publication also highlights accomplishments from the past year, celebrates the successful completion of the Lotusland Forever campaign, and demonstrates how philanthropy strengthens our gardens, collections, educational programs, and conservation efforts.

We hope you enjoy this special reflection on a remarkable year of stewardship, generosity, and shared commitment to Lotusland.





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## Calendar: July–September

For more detailed information about upcoming events, visit [lotusland.org/events](https://lotusland.org/events)

**Twilight Garden Walk**  
Friday, July 3

**Lotusland Celebrates Garden Gala**  
Saturday, July 18

**Lotusland Celebrates Online Auction**  
Monday, July 13–Sunday, July 19

**Forest Bathing**  
Wednesday, July 29

**Summer Picnic on the Great Lawn**  
Saturday, August 1

**Garden Conversations**  
Thursday, August 13

**Members Lotus Appreciation Day**  
Sunday, August 16

**Lotus Society Lotus Viewing Day**  
Sunday, August 16

**Tai Chi**  
Wednesday, August 26

**Twilight Garden Walk**  
Saturday, September 5

**Members Appreciation Day**  
Saturday, September 12

### 2026 TICKET RELEASE SCHEDULE:

Members receive access to reservations two weeks prior to the public.

SEPTEMBER—NOVEMBER  
**Member Pre-Release: July 21**  
**Public Release: August 4**

WINTER CLOSURE  
**November 14, 2026–February 17, 2027**

***Event and ticket release dates are subject to change.***

Lotusland is open for public visitation, Wednesdays through Saturdays for self-guided tours or docent-led tours.

Explore [lotusland.org/visit](https://lotusland.org/visit) to check availability and reserve your space; advance reservations are required.

We recommend booking one month in advance for best reliability.

Due to ongoing construction in the Garden, the Tropical Garden remains closed until 2027.