



an interpretive field guide

ranch

HUNTINGTON



notes:

Thank you for visiting The Huntington Ranch Garden. We hope it has inspired you to go out and get your hands dirty!

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THE HUNTINGTON
Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens

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WELCOME TO THE HUNTINGTON RANCH GARDEN!

The Ranch is an urban agriculture demonstration garden, started in 2008, where we explore optimal ways to garden based on our region and climate in the semi-arid landscapes of Southern California. The mission of the Ranch is to reconnect people with their food in a beautiful and livable way. We strive to incorporate edibles into an attractive landscape and to inspire visitors on a home garden level.

We explore the mutually beneficial relationships that exist between diverse communities of plants, insects, soil life, and people. We strive to work with ecological processes to nurture health and balance, beauty and productivity. For example, native plants, herbs, and edibles provide the food and habitat that beneficial insects need, and these insects in turn provide invaluable services for the ecosystem during pollination, pest predation, and mealtime for other wildlife.

HOW WE GARDEN AT THE RANCH

Gardens are built from the soil up. This half-acre lot used to be a gravel parking lot. The soil was heavily compacted, so we broke up the soil and added compost and lots of mulch. The woody debris not only conserves water, but also helps create rich soil when fungus and other important microorganisms break the debris down into plant nutrients. Healthy, fertile soil is alive and supports plants that provide nutrient dense produce for consumption—which in turn are an important part of a healthy (or thriving) local ecosystem.

Our weather in the Los Angeles region is influenced by the proximity of the ocean and our mountain ranges. In Southern California we enjoy hot, dry summers and cooler winters when our rainfall is concentrated, allowing us to grow fruit trees and other edibles from other Mediterranean climates. Parts of Australia, China, Japan, and Mexico have climates similar to ours, thus these countries can supply us with varieties that are ideal for our region.

THE RIGHT PLANTS

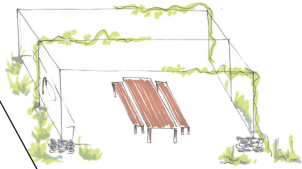
Here at the Ranch, we look for plants that can take a lot of heat. The temperature range can be extreme, from 116 degrees Fahrenheit in summer to below freezing in winter. Our tree selection concentrates on choices that do well here: fig and pomegranate from the Middle East and loquat, citrus, jujube, and goji berry from Asia.

You'll notice we are keeping most of the trees small for easy harvesting. Decisions about tree height, pruning, and design are subjective. Gardening is about experimenting and finding what works for you and your site, though careful research about plants and sites can provide useful clues and possible directions. Always keep in mind that gardening is a site-specific activity and that every garden is always a work in progress.

a liveable space: the shade structure

The shade structure itself is useful for several reasons: It keeps the temperature around 80 degrees Fahrenheit on an average summer day, providing critical relief from the climate's intense sun for people who work in gardens. And the grapes use the shade structure as a trellis and then create additional shade during the hottest times of the year when they are in leaf.

The gathering area also has multiple purposes: It includes a table for eating and meeting, an outdoor classroom space for the Ranch's professional development programs and public workshops, a demonstration area for growing native and pollinator plants in pots, counters for storing young plants, and a gray water produce sink for washing the harvest. This water is then reused on the grapevines and other plants in the swale on the west side of the structure.



reimagining row crops: the rows

The rows are where we apply ecosystem-based gardening techniques to more traditional row crop growing. We rotate our annual vegetables, varieties specifically chosen for this climate, in beds that incorporate fruit trees, herbs, and annual flowers. The deciduous fruit trees and blackberry brambles planted in the rows are used to create seasonal microclimates. In the

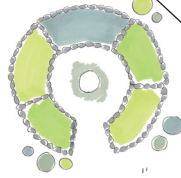


heat and intense sun of our Southern California summer, they offer afternoon shade to the more delicate annual crops. The loss of leaves in the winter provides additional beds for sun-loving winter annuals. Herbs and annual flowers provide yearlong blooms to keep pollinators on the site, a drastic difference from most current commercial agricultural practices.

making the best of a small space: the herb circle and potted plant areas

The herb circle, located to your right as you face the "Tool Booth," is 400 square feet of "condensed edible landscape." This is an example of gardening with limited room: combining a diverse array of plant varieties and sizes into a small but well-designed space. The plot can reflect your personal aesthetic. Here at the Ranch we favor a wild, organic look as opposed to a more structured approach. For instance, you can have small seasonal growing beds, encircled by a bank of taller shrubs to define the space and attract pollinators. Fruit trees planted directly in the ground can be kept small through pruning. A small water feature could become a bird and butterfly destination and provide aural interest, while aromatic ground cover stimulates multiple senses, and self-seeding annuals provide effortless seasonal appeal.

If you have only a balcony or small patio, explore your options with container and raised bed plantings. Container planting is a simple but beautiful way to create the lush garden you desire in a compact space. You can grow a smaller citrus or olive tree in a pot and surround it with herbs, annual crops, perennial flowers, or natives. To see examples of raised bed plantings, visit our "tub garden." For instant gardening success, just add the seeds of lettuces, baby gourmet greens and shallow rooted, low feeding, annual vegetables, some durable, plastic storage tubs, and soil. These "garden beds" can be reused for multiple seasons.



a southern california food forest: the hillside orchard

This orchard was planted in a more traditional grid pattern, which is easier to maintain than irregular plantings when you have a larger number of trees.

We use hardy, perennial herbs throughout the understory as living mulches and pollinator attractors. To control the rampant Bermuda grass growth and other unwanted plants, we experiment using sheet mulching, hand weeding, and dense plantings of soil-building cover crops to compete with the noxious weeds. Sheet mulching is a favorite Ranch technique that involves layering wet cardboard under a thick layer of well-watered mulch. The cardboard breaks down over time, helping suppress weed growth and promote soil health. We further establish a pseudo-cover crop to control weeds, fix nitrogen into the soil, and provide more food for beneficial insects.

By allowing most of our cover crop to follow a natural cycle as it produces flowers and goes to seed, we not only ensure a lush and abundant cover crop for the next season, but also provide a rich source of food for wildlife. Two examples of edible members of this cover crop illustrate the multiple benefits: Daikon radish plants provide edible roots and flowers as well as seed pods; serve as great compost and worm food; and soften the soil. A variety of arugulas with extremely tasty leaves and flowers attract beneficial insects and are easy to establish. Summer finds the hillside radiant, covered in freely reseeded edible flower varieties including cosmos, marigold, borage, and calendula.

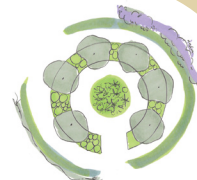


thinking outside the box: the edible landscape

As you pass through the entrance gate, you'll see the edible landscape to your left. It represents what's going on throughout the whole garden. Everything planted here serves multiple purposes, whether the items provide food and beauty directly for us, feed and provide habitat for beneficial insects and wildlife, or benefit both humans and animals.

Take note of the curving hedge of lavender that borders the path that leads you to a circular bed. The circle is a gathering area where visitors can sit on the stacked recycled concrete walls of the planting bed and, once the fig trees have grown in, enjoy the shade. So this practical but lovely piece of hardscape provides a functional space for the human users of the garden, as well as a habitat for beneficial insects.

The figs are interspersed with low-maintenance, drought-tolerant flowering plants and herbs. Among the forest of fruit trees there are small planting beds with annual vegetables. There are also pockets of wildflowers, native plants, perennial herbs, and annual flowers throughout the landscape to ensure year-round blooms, and thus the year-round presence of pollinators.



ENTRANCE