

THE HUNTINGTON

Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens
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NEWS

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Return to the Ranch

Sustainable urban agriculture is the focus of a new project that brings The Huntington back to its historic roots

SAN MARINO, Calif.—The Huntington returns to its agricultural roots this fall with the unveiling of a new project called the Huntington Ranch. Part outdoor classroom, part demonstration garden, and part research lab, the 15-acre site will host a broad spectrum of special programs and educational activities focusing on sustainable urban agriculture.

The Ranch makes its official debut during a symposium for academics, educators, and professionals on Nov. 12, followed by a day of public workshops on Nov. 13. (Details below.)

When Henry Huntington purchased the property known as the San Marino Ranch in 1903, hundreds of acres were planted with citrus, stone fruits, walnuts, and other commercial crops. Pushing the boundaries of agriculture in the region, Huntington used the ranch to establish, among other things, what is believed to be the first commercial avocado grove in the state. He also began to develop a botanical collection, which ultimately redefined the landscape of the estate.

“Henry Huntington’s interest in productive horticulture got left behind as the institutional emphasis shifted to ornamentals and rare tropical plants,” says James Folsom, the Telleen/Jorgensen Director of the Botanical Gardens. “With the Ranch project, we’ll be picking up a piece of our past that has been long neglected.”

Located in an undeveloped area of the grounds northwest of the Botanical Center, the Ranch will not be accessible to daily visitors but will host a wide range of programs for adults, children, teachers, horticulturists, and others on a sprawling outdoor station complete with vegetable garden. The site also encompasses the surviving orange groves from Mr. Huntington’s day and a new heritage grove of

avocados (planted by the California Avocado Society) representing the 32 most significant varieties in the state's agricultural history.

Also gracing the Ranch are dozens of fruit trees from the South Central Farm, an urban garden in Los Angeles that was closed down in 2006. Rescued by the Metabolic Studio, a charitable activity of the Annenberg Foundation, the trees were boxed up, trucked to San Marino, and transplanted at The Huntington. A \$1.1 million grant from the Metabolic Studio provided the impetus to embark on the Ranch project.

Scott Kleinrock, project manager for the Ranch, is a master's student in landscape architecture at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, who has designed several urban agricultural gardens. He sees this new venture as more than just a way to educate home gardeners about composting, irrigation, and the joys of eating home-grown food. He envisions the Ranch as a community resource that will help bolster L.A.'s capacity to establish a sustainable and equitable food system through education. In addition to participating in classes and workshops, the public will have access to many online resources made available through The Huntington's website and the Ranch blog. Several college-level and post-graduate internships are already in progress.

"One of our key objectives is to showcase ideas that anyone can do—even busy people with full-time jobs," says Kleinrock. "We want to offer ideas that are relatively inexpensive, that use recycled materials whenever possible, that are not too time-consuming to maintain, and that make harvesting as easy as possible." Kleinrock says he is also exploring ways to adapt certain methods used in commercial food production, such as water management techniques, in ways that can be applied to the home garden.

The Ranch will be a sort of living laboratory, where innovative ideas are tested and demonstrated. One such innovation is food forestry. Kleinrock explains: "By planting the area underneath fruit trees with useful plants such as chicory, alfalfa, mustard greens, yarrow, and daikon radishes, you can create a more self-sustaining ecosystem that enriches soil, attracts beneficial insects, and helps keep pests under control. You also get a larger and more diverse harvest that extends over a wider part of the year."

Other creative ways to incorporate edible plants into the home garden are demonstrated by the landscape of the Ranch itself, which includes features such as raised vegetable beds that double as outdoor seating and closely planted citrus trees pruned to form ornamental, fruit-bearing hedges.

Rachel Vourlas is the botanical programs supervisor for the Ranch, charged with coordinating an ambitious schedule of educational activities that will serve many different audiences, from children learning how to grow their own salad ingredients to teachers receiving training in how to establish gardens at their schools. "We envision the Ranch becoming a hub for youth and family nutrition-based outreach," she says.

“This is a space where people will really be able to get their hands dirty,” adds Vourlas, “where they can experience the excitement of learning how to grow food in a natural and sustainable way.”

Additional funding for the Huntington Ranch was provided by the Otis Booth Foundation.

Upcoming Events:

Symposium:

Bringing Home the Ranch

Nov. 12 (Friday) 8:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m.

Ethnobotanist Gary Paul Nabhan, a research social scientist at the Southwest Center, University of Arizona, is the keynote speaker at this scholarly symposium exploring the challenges facing urban farmers in an area once renowned for its agricultural output. Nabhan will speak on “Adapting Food Production to a Hotter, Drier World: Using Urban Agricultural Stations to Train Future Farmers.” Other presenters and their topics include Rose Hayden-Smith, director of the University of California Cooperative Extension, Ventura County (“Join the Revolution: From Victory Gardens to Urban Agriculture”); Susan Mulley, assistant professor of landscape architecture at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (“Are Vegetables Private? Belief and Perception and Their Impact on Urban Agriculture”); Mark Vallianatos, policy director of the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College (“Food Justice in Los Angeles”); and Garn Wallace, general manager of Wallace Laboratories (“Soil Science and Plant Nutrition in Sustainable Urban Environments”). Registration: \$25 (\$15 students). Optional dinner at an additional cost. Registration: 800-838-3006 or www.brownpapertickets.com

Public Seminar:

Growing Home: Agriculture in the City

Nov. 13 (Saturday) 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

Celebrate all that’s homegrown during a day of talks, tours, and demonstrations geared to the home gardener. Local experts will cover topics ranging from chicken-keeping to growing organic produce and flowers. Edible landscape pioneer and author Rosalind Creasy is the keynote speaker. Other participants and topics include Tara Kolla of Silver Lake Farms (growing organic flowers; composting), Homegrown Evolution (urban homesteading), Food Not Lawns (turning yards into gardens), Ecoworkshops.com (food forestry), Farmlab (the trees from South Central Garden), Full Circle Gardens (chicken keeping; garden tool maintenance), Backwards Beekeepers (bee keeping), Sustainable Habitats (growing mushrooms), Little Flower Candy Co. (cooking with fresh, local, and seasonal produce), and UC Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners (the Master Gardeners program). \$25 (includes lunch). Registration: 800-838-3006 or www.brownpapertickets.com

Workshop:

Winter Fruit Tree Pruning

Jan. 22 (Saturday) 9:30–11:30 a.m.

Pruning is essential for good fruit production and for ensuring that a tree is healthy, attractive, and an appropriate size. Winter is an important time to make pruning cuts. Join Lora Hall of Full Circle Gardening as she covers basic tree physiology, types of pruning cuts, the effect of different pruning cuts, the appropriate tools for the job, and how to correctively prune a neglected or damaged tree. Participants

will practice pruning techniques on fruit trees on the Huntington Ranch site. Members: \$35. Non-Members: \$45. Registration: 626-405-2128.

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[EDITOR'S NOTE: High-resolution digital images available on request for publicity use.]

About The Huntington

The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens is a collections-based research and educational institution serving scholars and the general public. More information can be found on the Web at www.huntington.org.

Visitor information

The Huntington is located at 1151 Oxford Rd., San Marino, Calif., and is open to the public Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from noon to 4:30 p.m.; and Saturday, Sunday, and Monday holidays from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day through Labor Day) are 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Closed Tuesdays and major holidays. Admission on weekdays: \$15 adults, \$12 seniors (65+), \$10 students (ages 12–18 or with full-time student I.D.), \$6 youth (ages 5–11), free for children under 5. Group rate \$11 per person for groups of 15 or more. Members are admitted free. Admission on weekends and Monday holidays: \$20 adults, \$15 seniors, \$10 students, \$6 youth, free for children under 5. Group rate \$14 per person for groups of 15 or more. Members are admitted free. Admission is free to all visitors on the first Thursday of each month with advance tickets. Information: 626-405-2100 or www.huntington.org.