

Summer in My Favorite Gardens

by Stephen Parry
Santa Barbara, California

As the summer solstice passes, it is time to enjoy our modest garden at its fullest. Everything is in bloom: the roses are on their third cycle, the agapanthus is in full glory, the various bulbs have sprung, including those amazing pink ladies. And all of our potted plants appear to be happy with the mixture of heat and the cool moisture of the nightly fog.

The flora has attracted the fauna as well. With a bit of encouragement with bird seed, we get several regulars in a certain pecking order. First are the crows. Apparently a pair has adopted our yard from what must be over 100 that fly through each dawn and return noisily to whence they came at dusk. Once they leave, they are replaced almost immediately by the blue jays - usually the young ones that are haughty and raucous. These are pushed out in sheer number by the pairs of mourning doves and quail - the state bird of California. This year we started with about four dozen quail during the dating season in March. One by one, they paired off, and we were eagerly awaiting the time when they would come in with their new chicks. Well - the first group of youth did not arrive until July 20 this year. There are eight chicks, one mother and two adult males. The males take turns watching over this brood and are quite aggressive, bumping the jays and even the crows.

A surprise visit came to the yard yesterday morning. It was a roadrunner - a variety we had always thought was alive and well in the desert. This one returned this morning and appeared to be interested in the quail brood. I thought they liked snakes!

The backyard pageant expands as the cottontail rabbits appear. We have the good fortune to have two little ones and perhaps their mother this year. They like to join the doves and quail as they trim all of the fresh growth off of our plants. The rabbits quickly get used to our terrier that tries bravura, but since he is on a leash, cannot reach them during their meals.

But our yard is far too small. While we continue to slave over it and nurture it to get as much as we can, enjoying every element of it, we crave to see more. Greater spaces, more expansive scales. So - there is time to make a list of wonderful spaces to visit within the next several months. All are open to the public, although some are harder to gain access due to local conditional use permits. Here is our list of our 10 favorite Southern California outdoor spaces that are wonderful at this time of year. There are others that are best seen in the fall and spring. Perhaps for another list in the future?

Most of these locations have a website so that one can get more information regarding directions, days and hours of operation, restrictions, facilities and any fees or reservation policies.

LOCAL FIVE

1. Santa Barbara Botanical Gardens: up Mission Canyon, well above the Mission. Well worth the trip - this beautiful location continues to get better and better. Good walking trails and special exhibits. Entrance fee required.
2. Lotusland: this treasure of over 40 incredible acres of specimen plants from around the world is limited to a specific number of guests per day. If you can plan your visit in advance, get reservations. Otherwise, call to see if there are any last minute cancellations. Fee or membership required.
3. Casa del Herrero: a gem of what Santa Barbara was like in the '20s. Imagine a family going away on vacation in 1927 and never returning. Perhaps the quintessential Spanish Colonial Revival home designed by George Washington Smith - the house is equaled by the gardens that include bubbling waterways and incredible plantings, orchards and vistas of the ocean. Open to visitors for \$15 on Wednesdays and Saturdays.
4. Andre Clark Bird Refuge & SB Zoo: some wonderful people in a nearby estate gave several acres to the city to expand the estuary and tidal pools and preserve the area for the many flying and floating creatures within. The zoo, which started as a children's petting event, has expanded over the years to include some new spaces for larger animals. A great place to enjoy the views, even from a cage. The refuge has a path for walking and bike riders. The zoo has a modest admission charge.
5. Flower farms of Lompoc: Have you ever wondered where all the cut flowers come from? Tulips from Holland. Roses from San Lorenzo. Dozens of other varieties come from the fields of Lompoc. Despite the moniker left by W. C. Fields, Lompoc has a reputation of being one of the largest fresh flower growers in the United States. And - when the fields are in bloom - offers a spectacular array of color.

And - a good day trip into Los Angeles County gets you:

SO CAL TOP TEN

6. Los Angeles County Arboretum (Arcadia): The estate of Lucky Baldwin includes a wide variety of flora from all over the world in an attractive setting - includes the Lucky Baldwin house made famous as the residence of Mr. Rourke, in the television series Fantasy Island. There is a spectacular jungle and lagoon that was used as the backdrop for several jungle movies including Tarzan. Entrance fee.

7. Los Angeles County Natural History Museum Rose Gardens - south of downtown (Exposition Park) Free.
8. Rancho San Antonio Botanic Gardens (Claremont): Fee required. This is one of the older botanic gardens in Southern California. As it is truly a natural site, the specimen plants vary due to rainfall and summer heat.
9. Huntington Library and Botanic Gardens (San Marino): Donation requested which opens the gardens, the library, the museum and several special displays. Their exhibit of Greene and Greene craftsman artifacts is well worth the visit if you are interested in the Southern California Arts & Crafts movement of the early 20th century. Wonderful Japanese Tea Gardens, gift shop and restaurant.
10. Wattles Gardens (Hollywood): incredible healthy gardens featuring all varieties of tropical and traditional plantings. Off of Hollywood Blvd at Curson Ave, west of Hollywood. Operated by the County of Los Angeles.
11. Griffith Park - fern dell (Los Feliz District): Enter from the south side off of the northern end of Western Avenue. This entire park can take over a month to fully explore. All of the areas are open to the public at no charge, except for the LA Zoo, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum, the carousel and Traveltown, which require admission fees.
12. Wrigley Estate and Ambassador College (Pasadena): these are very close to each other. The first houses the Pasadena Tournament of Roses and has a wonderful, well-kept rose garden. The grounds of Ambassador, up Orange Grove Blvd two blocks, has well-kept gardens that include a variety of perennials and annuals. Open to the public.
13. Brand Library (Glendale): An interesting mixture of grounds surrounding a spectacular mosque-like residence of one of Los Angeles' early families.
14. South Coast Botanic Gardens (Walteria) in the South Bay: The coastal breezes on the northern slope of the Palos Verdes Peninsula have maintained a semi-tropical garden in good health.
15. La Brea Tar Pits (Wilshire Center) at Wilshire just east of Fairfax: This special location houses not only the famous La Brea Tar Pits, the Page Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, but the grounds are really lovely. Located amidst the hustle and bustle of urban Los Angeles, this compound offers a peaceful and tranquil spot that combines modern urban gardens with ancient tar pits, which continue to seep and bubble below the city. Combine this location with a trip to one of the nearby museums, the Farmer's Market and The Grove for a wonderful Southern California experience!