

## TAKE FLIGHT WITH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

*Mark your calendars for Saturday, February 24, 2024 and get ready to soar!*

The Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District will host the Environmental Education Collaborative's 10th annual symposium, and we're inviting all educators, formal and non-formal, to join us for a fun-packed day. There will be two tour options, several choices for two breakout sessions, plus a keynote speaker focused on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Learn about current movements in environmental education (EE), and everyone is invited to join the conversation about how we can better collaborate.

Whether you're an educator, student, or simply interested in EE, come network with those who share your enthusiasm. Formal educators can look forward to hearing about new environmental curriculum and connecting with outdoor education organizations that have resources to enrich their classrooms. Non-formal educators like park rangers, museum docents, and conservation educators will network to build new relationships with colleagues. Register: [http://bit.ly/EEC\\_SYMPOSIUM](http://bit.ly/EEC_SYMPOSIUM)

The \$15 registration includes lunch and free resources. Scholarships are available for classroom educators by contacting Jackie Gardner at [jgardner@sanjacinto.k12.ca.us](mailto:jgardner@sanjacinto.k12.ca.us).

### What is the EEC?

The Environmental Education Collaborative (EEC) of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties is a grassroots organization that works to increase funding, programs, and policies for environmental education (EE) within inland Southern California. EEC is an inclusive network that promotes programs at non-formal sites, including nature centers, parks, museums, and outdoor camps. EEC provides *Environmental Learning Resources*, a guide with listings of non-formal EE providers at <https://enviroedcollaborative.com/resources/>.

Join with EEC to help raise environmental literacy of the inland region:

- Visit the EEC website to sign up for its free, periodic newsletter at <https://enviroedcollaborative.com/>
- Share your events at monthly meetings and at the EEC Facebook Group page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/EECollaborative>.



Environmental  
Education  
Collaborative

### New Quarantine for Local Fruit



This fall the California Department of Food and Agriculture instituted a quarantine in western Riverside and San Bernardino counties to control the spread of the Oriental Fruit Fly. Fruits and vegetables may not be moved from properties in the quarantine zone. For maps, instructions, a list of host plants, and to report a pest, see <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/plant/off/regulation.html>.



Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District

RCRCD provides resource management assistance to private and public landusers and conducts land treatment, education, and volunteer programs to steward natural resources. The District promotes the sustainable use of natural resources for each landuse, including native habitats, urban/suburban areas, and agriculture.



# Become a Certified California Naturalist

RCRCD is planning its next Cal Nat training for Wednesdays from January 24 through March 27, 2024. The course, conducted through University of California's Environmental Stewards program includes more than 40 hours of classroom and field learning. The program introduces students to the wonders of California's unique ecology and engages them in the study and stewardship of natural resources. To find local course information, visit our website at <https://www.rcrcd.org/california-naturalist-climate-steward-programs>, and to hear students describe the local course, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcLm8dnpCj4>.

More information and registration for this University of California training can be found at [https://ucanr.edu/sites/UCCNP/About\\_the\\_program/](https://ucanr.edu/sites/UCCNP/About_the_program/). For additional information, please contact Senior Resource Educator Erin Snyder at [snyder@rcrcd.org](mailto:snyder@rcrcd.org) or (951) 683-7691, ext. 207.



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California Naturalist Graduates, Summer 2023



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**BACK ROW:** Victor Navarro, Ivy Berlin, Morning Wilder, Ebony Burson, Gabriela Rosas, Madison Dennis, Wendy Eads, Jessica Quinonez  
**FRONT ROW:** Heidi Pecoraro, Tyler Inouye, Alison Roeske, Sonny Waldron (in middle of group), Anneke Fischle, Joanne Oliva, Laura Airo



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## Sycamore Creek Interpretive Center Programs

RCRCD's Sycamore Creek Interpretive Center (SCIC) at 11875 Indian Truck Trail, Temescal Valley premiered its new series this past fall: **Guest Speaker Saturdays!**

### Speaker Line-up for Winter 2024

- January 27** *Get Ready for Monarchs* with Tracy Davis who will discuss the Temescal Valley Milkweed to Monarch Project
- February 17** *Fruit Trees: What Not to Plant* and Mini Scion Exchange with the local chapter of the California Rare Fruit Growers

### Story Time at SCIC

*Story Time among the Sycamores* for young children will continue the second week of each month in 2024 at 10 a.m.: January 13, February 9, March 8, April 12, May 10, and June 8.

Keep up on SCIC events:

- Join our site email list by contacting us at [scic@rcrcd.org](mailto:scic@rcrcd.org)
- Follow us on Instagram at [syc\\_creek\\_interpretive\\_center](https://www.instagram.com/syc_creek_interpretive_center) and/or on Facebook at SCICTV
- Sign up for our periodic agency newsletter online at [RCRCD.org](https://www.rcrcd.org).



# First Saturday Programs for Spring 2024

Programs begin at 10 a.m. normally starting in Building F at 4500 Glenwood Dr., Riverside.

<b>February 3</b>	<i>Scion Exchange and Backyard Fruit Growing</i> by the California Rare Fruit Growers
<b>March 2</b>	<i>Lawn Alternatives</i> by Audrey Pongs of Greenbelt Growers
<b>April 6</b>	<i>Integrated Pest Management and Controlling the Asian Citrus Psyllid</i> with Dr. David Morgan, CA Department of Food and Agriculture
<b>May 4</b>	<i>Aquaponics</i> with Master Gardeners Steve Orr and Kathy Swanson
<b>June 1</b>	<i>Easy Techniques for Identifying Common Native Plants</i> by Jennifer Iyer

The Ask a Master Gardener booth will be open from 9 a.m. to noon.

For more information, contact us at [llc@rrcd.org](mailto:llc@rrcd.org) or (951) 683-7691 ext. 207.

Find events at: <https://www.rrcd.org/events>.



Dr. Hung Doan spoke about the control of tree infestations.



Dr. Fred Roth and Raquel Falco demonstrated pruning techniques at the tree care workshop.

## Thank You to our Presenters

We thank our Fall, 2023 speakers who took time out of their busy schedules to share their knowledge with the community.

### First Saturdays at the LandUse Learning Center (LLC)

- Christine and Michael Lampe spoke about installing rain barrels.
- Denneigh Denton and Lisa Wright demonstrated food saving techniques for the Master Food Preservers.
- Tom Spellman of Dave Wilson Nursery demonstrated fruit tree pruning and care.
- Dr. Chris McDonald presented about native landscaping.
- Master Gardener Michael Fisher spoke about hydroponics.

### Guest Speaker Saturdays at Sycamore Creek Interpretive Center (SCIC)

- Audrey Pongs of Greenbelt Growers spoke about *Lawn Alternatives*.
- Lisa Wright presented about *Fall Gardening Strategies*.
- Raquel Falco, Dr. Fred Roth, and Dr. Hung Doan covered *Climate Adapted Trees and Care*.

Many thanks to our speakers for enriching our programs with your knowledge and expertise.

## Four ways to learn more about the LandUse Learning Center (LLC)



Storymap QR

1. Request a tour on weekends or in advance by emailing our education staff at [LLC@rrcd.org](mailto:LLC@rrcd.org).
2. Watch the video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyT\\_Lfbkuh8&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyT_Lfbkuh8&t=2s).
3. See our storymap: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/a88a54e1e0fb4bddb6bc82cb18926771>
4. Follow the LLC at our Facebook group: Friends of the LandUse Learning Center.

## Fun Learning for High Schoolers!

The Envirothon is a natural resource education program for high school students in grades 9-12. Students study about the environment, then as part of a team representing their school, they compete in five disciplines: forestry, wildlife, aquatics, soils, and a current topic. For example, during the outdoor portion of the event, students analyze a soil profile, identify wildlife, and measure trees. The teams develop a presentation about a current environmental topic, which for 2024 is Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future. Preliminary oral presentations will be held on April 13 via Zoom.

This April 20, 2024, the California Envirothon will be held at RCRCD's LandUse Learning Center, and there is still time to register a team here: <https://caenvirothon.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Cal-Envirothon-pre-reg-form.pdf>.

Winners of the state go on to compete nationally. Also, interested middle and high school educators are invited to attend on April 20 to learn more.

For more information, please visit the website at <https://caenvirothon.com/2024-event/>.

For RCRCD team sponsorship, contact Erin Snyder at [snyder@rcrcd.org](mailto:snyder@rcrcd.org) or (951) 683-7691, ext. 207.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CALIFORNIA ENVROTHON

Students evaluated soil for a variety of criteria including color, texture, and structure.

## Looking for Water Education?

Are you a schoolteacher or youth group leader in Corona? Are you looking for engaging ways to teach your students about water? The City of Corona's Utilities Department will sponsor a free presentation by RCRCD's resource educator about water conservation and stewardship. The water education program explains:

- simple ways to conserve water and why it is important
- where the City of Corona gets its water
- storm water pollutants and how we can reduce them.



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Students learn to reduce the amount of pollutants that enter our storm drain system that flows through waterways (washes, creeks, arroyos) to the Santa Ana River and ultimately to the ocean. Since people unknowingly generate the largest amount of storm water pollution, we can be the largest part of the solution. Educating students about these concepts helps to ensure that future generations will understand the importance of water as an essential resource.

Resource Educator Roxanne Robbins is available to visit Corona elementary schools and youth groups to conduct a hands-on program and provide free educational materials about water conservation.

To schedule a program, please contact Roxanne at [robbins@rcrcd.org](mailto:robbins@rcrcd.org) or (951) 683-7691, Ext. 216.

For teachers outside of Corona, you can request a link to our online video and resources from Erin Synder at [snyder@rcrcd.org](mailto:snyder@rcrcd.org) or (951) 683-7691, ext. 207.



# Help Bring Back the Bluebirds

Of about 900 species of birds in North America, bluebirds are among 84 species that nest in holes in dead trees, commonly called “cavities.” All woodpeckers (about 20 species) have highly specialized anatomy for excavating their own cavities. But bluebirds and most other cavity nesters are unable to do so. They use natural cavities and spaces in structures, or they inherit cavities abandoned by woodpeckers.

The North American bluebird population (*Sialis* species) began to decline in the late twentieth century, mainly due to:

- the removal of dead and dying trees in urban areas
- loss of habitat from urban and agricultural development
- loss of nest sites to the aggressive non-native European Starling and House Sparrow.



© 2016 PHOTO BY PEGGY HONDA

With the shortage of natural cavities, bluebirds will use human-made nest boxes. If you would like to get involved providing safe nesting sites for our local bluebirds, consider hanging and monitoring bluebird nest boxes. Despite the common misconception, touching a nest or opening a nest box will not cause the parents to desert the nest, however timing to prevent early fledging (leaving the nest) is essential.



© 2014 PHOTO BY JENNIFER IYER

The female is brownish gray with chestnut across the breast and blue in the wings and tail.



© 2010 PHOTO BY JENNIFER IYER

The male has blue upper parts, throat, wings and tail with rust-orange breast.

The Western bluebird is a thrush about 7” long with a small straight bill. Bluebirds are mainly insectivores, but eat shrub and tree berries when insects are not available:  
[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Western\\_Bluebird/](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Western_Bluebird/) .

## How to Monitor a Nest Box

Monitoring involves checking nest boxes weekly during the nesting season. The purpose is to gather data and determine the age of the nestlings. **To prevent young from flying (fledging) from the nest prematurely, the box should not be opened after the nestlings are 12-14 days old.** At this stage of development, nestlings could leave the nest before they are able to fly, greatly reducing their chance of survival.

After hatching, the chicks will remain in the nest for 17-24 days.

They grow rapidly with both parents feeding the hatchlings insects.

The adults also remove white fecal sacs from the nest and drop them away from the cavity.

This may reduce the chance that predators can smell the chicks. To see photos of daily growth, nests and eggs: <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/NABSFactsheetMonitoring.pdf> and <https://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/EABL%20Nesting%20Growth%20Chart.pdf> . Local observations indicate that Eastern Bluebird chicks grow faster than our local Western Bluebird chicks.



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After the bluebird constructs her nest within the nest box, she will lay 1-6 light blue (sometimes white) eggs, one each day, and keep them warm (incubate) until they hatch in 12-14 days.

# A box that is not monitored may do more harm than good.

Monitoring nest boxes alerts us to problems that bluebirds may be facing with competitors and predators. House Sparrows and European Starlings seize cavity nest sites, a primary reason for declines in bluebird populations. Starlings nest in many of the natural cavities but can be excluded from nest boxes by creating smaller entry holes that are 1½ or 1⅝ inches in diameter. House Sparrows are smaller, so they can enter bluebird nest boxes.

They kill bluebirds, destroy their eggs, and drive them from their nests. **At no time should either species be allowed to successfully nest in bluebird boxes**, as it will increase the invasive population and reduce the number of bluebirds. See the NABS factsheet on House Sparrow Control:

[http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/House%20Sparrow%20Control\\_2018.pdf](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/House%20Sparrow%20Control_2018.pdf) .

**It's illegal to remove native bird nests and eggs**, but it is legal to remove House Sparrow nests because they are not natives. If House Sparrow eggs are found (gray-white egg, speckled with dark brown), move the box. House Sparrows are so persistent that they will keep returning, so it's better to try a new location for the box.



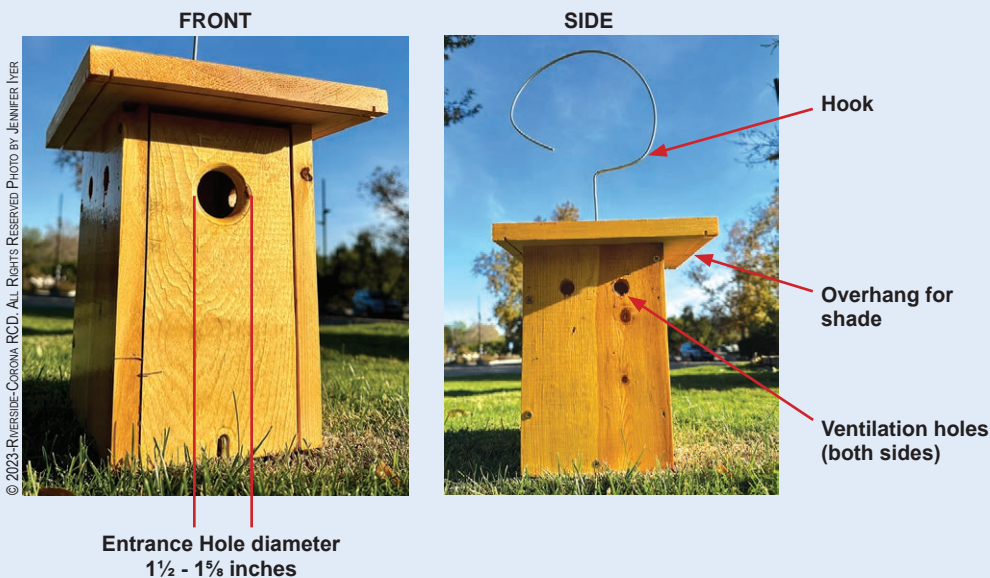
Male House Sparrow

© 2015 PHOTO BY MATTHIAS APPEL CC0 WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



House Sparrow eggs

© 2008 PHOTO BY NOTARY CC BY-SA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



FRONT

SIDE

Hook

Overhang for shade

Ventilation holes (both sides)

Entrance Hole diameter  
1½ - 1⅝ inches

If native House Wrens take over a nest, allow them to fledge and then find a new location for the box. A breeding House Wren will destroy the eggs of other nesting birds in its territory, so avoid placing nest boxes where they are also nesting. They are not strictly cavity nesters and are highly versatile about where they will nest.

Other nest invasions may include paper wasp nests, beehives, ants, rodent nests, and predators like cats, raccoons, and snakes. The use of hanging boxes on hooks and careful box placement can reduce the threat of climbing predators. Find control information at <https://socalbluebirds.org/reducing-pests-and-predators/> and <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/NABSFactsheetPredatorControl.pdf> , and for ants at <https://nestwatch.org/connect/blog/what-should-you-do-about-ants-in-birds-nests/> .

Bluebird boxes need to be constructed for ease of opening, monitoring and cleaning. After each nesting effort has ended, either due to nest failure or successful fledging of the young, monitoring includes removing the used nest and cleaning the box as soon as all chicks have fledged.



House Wren

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House Wren nests are made of sticks and look very different compared to a Bluebird cup nest.

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## A box in the wrong place may do more harm than good.

- Do not hang a box in a back yard or public place where outdoor cats are present.
- Do not hang a box in view of a bird feeder. Nearby feeders add stress to bird parents by drawing many birds and possibly predators.
- Place nest boxes above irrigated grassy areas, including lawns, golf courses, parks, and cemeteries where bluebirds can easily find and feed on spiders and insects, like grasshoppers, ground beetles, crickets, and caterpillars.
- Hang nest boxes with the hole facing away from prevailing winds and facing north or east to avoid direct afternoon sun on the opening. Shade is especially important in regions where summer temperatures become very high. The internal temperature of a box can become higher than the ambient temperature and be lethal to the birds.
- Position nest boxes far enough out on a sturdy tree branch to where predators may not reach them.
- Place boxes high enough to be safe from vandalism and hidden from view if possible.
- Remove any leaves or twigs that may touch the box to minimize the ability of ants to enter.
- Stay away from brushy and wooded areas: House Wren habitat.
- Avoid areas subject to pesticide and herbicide use during nesting season.
- Avoid areas where the House Sparrow is abundant, including barns, feedlots, and yards where people feed birdseed containing millet and cracked corn.
- Get permission before hanging a box on public or private property that is not your own. Put contact info on the box in case you need to be reached.



© 2009 PHOTO BY GILLIAN MARTIN

## Are you a candidate for nest box monitoring?

**Please do not put up a bluebird nest box if you do not plan to monitor it!**

Monitoring is a weekly responsibility from February through July, depending on the number of broods. Volunteers lower a few boxes each week to check for a nest, to count eggs/nestlings, and to keep records. If you would like to become involved in collecting and reporting data to aid in the study of bluebird populations, please contact RCRC at [llc@rcrcd.org](mailto:llc@rcrcd.org) or your local bluebird club. Learn more about monitoring at: <https://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/NABS%20factsheet%20-%20Nestbox%20Recs.pdf> . To record data that includes number of eggs and birds fledged, see: <https://www.cbrp.org/record-and-report/> and <https://www.nestwatch.org/> .



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For monitoring and box cleaning we use a custom-made box "lifter" or pole-elevator that the nest box rests in. Find design specifications for the Purvis Lifter here: <https://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/Purvis%20Lifter%20for%20Hanging%20Nestboxes.pdf> .



## Other Ways to Help

If you decide that volunteering to do weekly monitoring and data collection from spring to summer is not for you, you can still help in other ways:

- Photograph native cavity nesting birds and report sitings at iNaturalist.org. Other local cavity nesters that will use nestboxes include the Ash-throated Flycatcher, Tree and Violet-green Swallows, Bewick's and House Wrens, the White-breasted Nuthatch, the Oak Titmouse, the American Kestrel, Western Screech and Barn Owls: <https://socalbluebirds.org/photo-gallery/> .
- Create habitat in your yard by providing water and planting native plants, especially berry producing plants. Learn about creating habitat in *Backyard Birds of the Inland Empire*, available from the Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District and libraries. To find what to plant, use: <https://gardenplanner.calscape.org/> .
- Eliminate the use of pesticides in your yard.
- Avoid pruning trees during nesting season, generally February through July. You may wish to retain dead trees (snags) as habitat for cavity nesters and other wildlife. See <https://cavityconservation.com/> or <https://treecareforbirds.com/> . Find tree care providers that are trained to be "Wildlife Aware" at the International Society of Arboriculture: <https://www.isa-arbor.com/> .



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© 2014 PHOTO BY PEGGY HONDA

Western Screech Owl



Nest monitors can help by removing dangerous human-made materials such as plastic twine and frayed tarps that can entangle birds.

If you are interested in hanging and monitoring a nestbox at your home (in a safe location, with correct hole size), and if you will regularly check it to prevent the invasion of non-native birds and predators, you may wish to leave a box hanging year round for bird protection from cold and rain. Make sure to clean out old nests and waste after each brood has fledged. If hole sizes are enlarged, such as by a woodpecker, replace the front with a correct hole size.

See pictures of nests and other species that will use bluebird boxes at *Is Your Backyard Bluebird Nest Box a Tragedy in the Making?* at <https://cavityconservation.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Is-your-bluebird-nest-box-a-tragedy-compressed.pdf> .

## Resources

- Learn more about the Western Bluebird at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Bird Academy: [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Western\\_Bluebird/](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Western_Bluebird/)
- California Bluebird Recovery Program: <https://www.cbrp.org/>
- *Sialis* website: <http://www.sialis.org>
- Southern California Bluebird Club: <https://socalbluebirds.org/>
- North American Bluebird Society: <https://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/>
- Merlin: a free app that can help you identify birds: <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>

We at RCRCD thank the Southern California Bluebird Club, Susan Bulger and Gillian Martin for information provided for this guide.



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## Learn to Monitor Bluebirds

Celebrate World Wildlife Day on March 2 by learning about local native birds. Erin Snyder will present about I.E. bird species and Cornell's NestWatch program at 1 p.m. Visitors can try hanging bluebird nest boxes. RSVP to [snyder@rcrcd.org](mailto:snyder@rcrcd.org) and also indicate if you are interested in volunteering to become a 2024 bluebird nest box monitor. Boxes are provided. RCRCD volunteers have helped expand our local bluebird trail for over 20 years.

## Attention Educators!

RCRCD offers teacher training in environmental education programs. Erin Snyder will be conducting a Project Learning Tree training on Saturday, February 17. To register: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdz4bDNMYUsl-eNGQWSqEp7mkcDI5b4bVaMjCORuzyyr-u6Cg/viewform>.

Erin will conduct a training for Project WET on Saturday, March 23. Register: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeiNNhkJI\\_P\\_hE5d1LlnSJAqTmGXk0-RSOKHIXYqSfPqBppRg/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeiNNhkJI_P_hE5d1LlnSJAqTmGXk0-RSOKHIXYqSfPqBppRg/viewform).

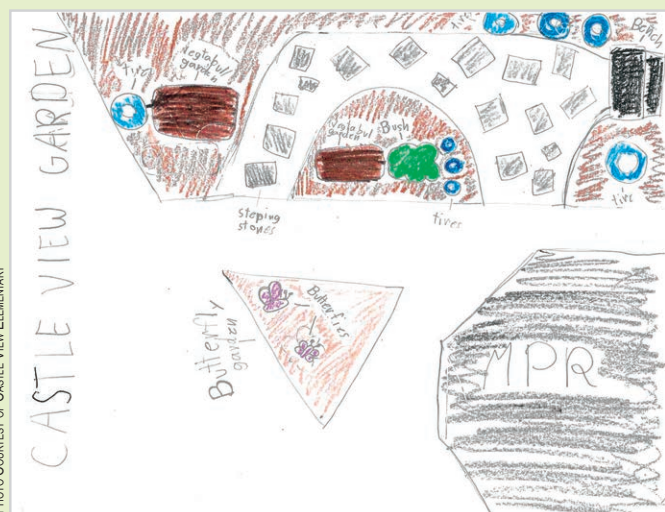
Educators can also request access to virtual education programs about water (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwZvfI9M3og&t=2s>) and pollinators (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OI4OKwIMOIw&t=3s>) that include instructional videos, curriculum and resources by emailing Erin at [Snyder@rcrcd.org](mailto:Snyder@rcrcd.org).

Educational materials, programs, and school garden mini-grants are provided free of charge to teachers, youth groups, and home schooling families who reside or work within the Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District's boundaries.

Map: <https://www.rcrcd.org/district-boundary-map>. Visit our website to order free materials and programs: <https://www.rcrcd.org/school-programs-and-educational-materials>. Learn about a variety of our free stewardship and educational programs on our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZ9qcZKB2xePvErzAbsCZuQ/videos>.



RCRCD's Matt Klohn and Erin Snyder prepared a museum exhibit of an enlargement of soil life. They are working to complete our new "underground" room with a hands-on soil experience.



Castle View Elementary School students drew plans for their garden. Teachers were awarded \$1,400 to help develop a pollinator garden, veggie patch, and grove.

## Educators Dig In to Free Garden Funding

RCRCD offers conservation mini-grants of up to \$500 per teacher for schools within our district boundaries. Projects may include tree plantings, school vegetable gardens, composting, erosion control plantings, and pollinator or native plant gardens.

For more information and inspiration:

- see <https://www.rcrcd.org/mini-grants-and-school-gardens>
- stop by our LandUse Learning Center demonstration garden
- contact Resource Educator Jenny Iyer at [iyer@rcrcd.org](mailto:iyer@rcrcd.org) or (951) 683-7691, ext. 226.



# Friends of the LandUse Learning Center (LLC)

RCRCD has had the great fortune to partner with a variety of organizations and individuals who provide programming and site support to the LandUse Learning Center (LLC), our 3-acre demonstration garden of sustainable practices for Native Habitats, Urban Areas, and Agriculture. The LLC has seen some major improvements and additions over the past few months including two new buildings, seven raised garden beds, a renovated Yard 4 food garden, a renewed bridge over the stream, the start of a permaculture demonstration, a native plant sale area, pruning of berry and fruit trees, and the frescoing of walls for our “Underground” soils room. Most of these projects and presentations were completed with help from partners, including the California Conservation Corps, UCR College Corps Fellows, Jacob Mabie of Green Hands Foodscapes, the DiHG Eco-Prise Permaculture class, numerous Master Gardeners, the California Rare Fruit Growers, and many individual volunteers. We couldn't have done it without their support.



For visitors to the LLC, we have started a Facebook group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3224903464479472>. Due to growing interest, we are forming a slightly more formal support group for our special garden, and we are inviting individuals and organizations to join our first “advisory” board meeting this winter. If you would like to be involved in the Friends of the LLC inaugural Advisory Board or would like to learn more, please contact Diana Ruiz at [Ruiz@rcrcd.org](mailto:Ruiz@rcrcd.org) or (909) 238-8338.

## Got Seeds?

Our seed library is back! People can now share or pickup free seeds from the Seed Library at the LandUse Learning Center. The seed storage is currently being managed by Master Gardener Steve Orr and UCR's College Corps Fellows. THANK YOU!

You will have the opportunity to learn more about seed collecting from our First Saturday speaker: Master Gardener Christine Lampe next September 7, 2024.



Super volunteer and Master Gardener Steve Orr

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PHOTO BY DIANA RUIZ

## Native Plants Now Available

Help re-wild the inland area with locally grown native plants from RCRCD's nursery. A rotating selection of more than 20 species are available throughout fall and winter at the LandUse Learning Center in Riverside. Stock is updated weekly.

The cool season is the perfect time to put native plants in the ground as the weather is milder, and seasonal rains can help them get established before the summer heat. Native plants are adapted to our climate, and generally take less water and care than non-native species. They also provide food and habitat for native birds, butterflies and other pollinators.

Plants are \$10 for one-gallon pots. Our selection of sustainably grown species includes trees, shrubs, flowers, and the white sage discussed on page 15.



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PHOTO BY DIANA RUIZ

Not sure what to plant? Visit our demonstration garden and pick up free plant lists and /or purchase a copy of *Wildflowers and Important Native Plants of the Inland Empire*. Find an order form at [www.rcrcd.org/books](http://www.rcrcd.org/books). For information: Resource Educator Jenny Iyer, [iyer@rcrcd.org](mailto:iyer@rcrcd.org) or (951) 683-7691, ext. 226.



## We ♥ Volunteers

RCRCD and monarch butterflies send a great big THANK YOU to all of the wonderful volunteers who donated their time to help care for our monarch habitat and gather valuable information about the monarch population. We could not do it without you!



Upcoming Monarch volunteer days include January 19 and February 3, 2024 at 9 a.m. To register, please email [Felix-Derbarmdiker@rcrcd.org](mailto:Felix-Derbarmdiker@rcrcd.org) or call (951) 683-7691 ext. 218.

To learn about all our volunteer opportunities, please visit our website at <https://www.rcrcd.org/volunteer-opportunities>.

## Green Hands!

RCRCD greatly appreciates the volunteer efforts of Jacob Mabie who has taken over management of the LandUse Learning Center's (LLC) edible garden in Yard 4. He has done some incredible work revitalizing raised growing beds, applying mulch, planting winter crops, and more.

Jacob is owner of Green Hands Custom Foodscapes ([www.greenhandsfoodscapes.com](http://www.greenhandsfoodscapes.com)), and he installs and maintains custom gardens "to create a more sustainable and food-secure future...". Stop by to see Jacob's great work and learn about food production on residential landscapes, or contact him at [customorganicgardening@gmail.com](mailto:customorganicgardening@gmail.com), (951) 205-5856. We at RCRCD truly appreciate his support.



## Permaculture Persists

Students in the free Permaculture Design Course classes built an herb spiral planter and a sheet mulching demonstration at the LandUse Learning Center. Classes are held the second Saturday of each month. Upcoming classes include fruit tree pruning, solar technology, and small animal care. Information: [dihgeco.org](http://dihgeco.org).



# College Corps on Hand for Hands-on Experience

Climate Action Fellows from the College Corps program at UC Riverside are getting their hands dirty this school year working at RCRCD. Fellows Diego Alvarez, Aaliyah Graham-Fajardo, Reggie Martinez, and Riley McAlister have been busy painting water-themed murals, planting in our edible garden, collecting seeds for propagation, trimming plants, spreading mulch, picking fruit, making compost, and welcoming garden visitors. We are thankful for the hard work of our UCR Fellows.



Fellow Riley McAlister painted a mural of a stream.



Fellow Aaliyah Graham-Fajardo planted a raised bed in the edible garden at RCRCD's LandUse Learning Center.



Fellow Diego Alvarez watered native plants in the plant sale.



Fellow Reggie Martinez collected acorns that will be used for RCRCD's habitat restoration projects.

## Science Happening Here

Dr. Tonya Huff's biology students at Riverside City College are conducting experiments on plants they are growing in the community garden at the LandUse Learning Center. Many thanks to the California Conservation Corps for building the raised beds.





# Sanitize Soil? Who knew?

by Ernesto Alvarado, RCRC's Native Plant Nursery Manager

As the grower of native plants for restoration projects, the RCRC Native Plant Nursery has made efforts to maintain a site that is free of harmful soil pathogens. Nursery sanitation and phytosanitary guidelines have become increasingly important due to the documented spread of pathogenic water molds in the genus *Phytophthora* from nurseries to restoration sites.

A main component of managing a phytosanitary nursery is sterilization of potting soil. This has been a challenge since the nursery first started adopting a number of new Best Management Practices (BMPs) that are designed to minimize the spread of plant pests, pathogens and infection. Thanks to our partnership with the California Conservation Corps (CCC), our Native Plant Nursery has obtained a soil steamer that allows us to sterilize large batches of soil and used pots. This has helped the nursery become more efficient, productive and sanitary.



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RCRC's Native Plant Nursery is partnering with the California Native Plant Society's (CNPS) San Bernardino - Riverside chapter to conduct an in-depth tour of our nursery and BMPs on February 17, 2024. For more information and to register, visit <https://riverside-sanbernardino.cnps.org/index.php> . For this limited tour, priority will be given to CNPS members and those affiliated with nurseries.

## Beautiful and Useful

Nursery manager Ernesto Alvarado has been planning improvements to our front landscaping. The prior lawn area will feature a native meadow and a section with groupings of native shrubs for pollinators and birds. All plants were grown at the RCRC native plant nursery using locally sourced seeds. This landscape will also function as a seed source for some meadow species including an array of native bulbs and corms.



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Ernesto Alvarado, Resource Conservation Technician Alicia Ruan, and California Conservation Corps member Robbie Givens have been busy developing another demonstration landscape.



# 2024 Native Plant Programs

by Dr. Arlee Montalvo

The Riverside-San Bernardino Chapter of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) will hold programs on the third Saturday of each month, from January through June, 10 a.m. to noon at RCRCD's Building F. Lecture programs are usually hybrid (in person and zoom) and are open to the public. The February program will require an RSVP, will be in person, and open to CNPS members and others associated with nursery production of native plants. Please see our website for updates and for information about how to RSVP: <https://www.riverside-sanbernardino.cnps.org/>.

- January 20** Dr. Fred Roberts will speak about *Seasonally Flooded Alkali Wetlands of Western Riverside County*.
- February 17** Nursery Manager Ernesto Alvarado will conduct a tour of RCRCD's native plant nursery and seed processing - storage facilities. See the amazing new steamer for sanitizing soil and pots.
- March 16** Dr. Chris McDonald will talk about invasive plant species in our region and what is being done to control them to protect native biodiversity.

## Woolly Star Field Trip

On June 24, 2023 we had a rewarding CNPS-RSB field trip to the Santa Ana Woolly Star Preserve in the upper Santa Ana River Wash. We saw two federally listed endangered plants: the slender horned spineflower (*Dodecahema leptoceras*) and the Santa Ana River woolly star (*Eriastrum densifolium* subsp. *sanctorum*). A highlight of the trip was seeing the giant flower-loving fly (*Raphiomidas acton*). This amazing fly sips nectar from the long flowers of the Santa Ana River woolly star.



Dr. Christopher McDonald of UC Cooperative Extension will speak about invasive plants.



The California Native Plant society tour managed to catch the rare Santa Ana River woolly star in full bloom!



*Raphiomidas acton*, Giant Flower-loving Fly was seen feeding on the flowers of the Santa Ana River woolly star.



# Poaching, Profits and Loss of White Sage

by Michele Felix-Derbarmdiker, Naturalist

The Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District (RCRCD) has promoted stewardship of lands since 1953. RCRCD once primarily focused on water conservation and erosion control, but over the last seven decades our mission has evolved to include all components of our environment including air, water, animals and plants. While we face on-going challenges with our stewardship endeavors, plants are facing new battles. One in particular, *Salvia apiana*, or white sage, has become a victim of exploitation, primarily due to the entertainment industry. Not only does this plant face the challenge of human expansion into wild places, it is now also enduring poaching activity.

Over the last decade, the steady rise of showcasing “smudging” or burning of white sage in movies and television shows, has created a storm of poaching activity, and human demand has created a lucrative international black market. White sage has always been a sacred plant to indigenous tribes, principally those in California. It has many uses but is particularly important for ceremonies and prayers. The plant is considered a beloved family member, and is always gifted, not sold to those in need.

White sage is used in a healing ceremony meant to clear negativity and cleanse personal energy. Unfortunately, Hollywood and the New Age Movement have appropriated this sacred ceremony in the name of profit. Poachers, wanting a piece of the profit, have stolen thousands of pounds of white sage from its historical habitat. This once common plant of our chaparral plant community has started to disappear from areas where it painted the hillsides with pale lavender blooms and heavy aromatic scent.

Poaching techniques vary from cutting off chunks of the plant with machetes to uprooting the entire plant. With indigenous methods, the plants are harvested with respect and good intentions, and importantly after the plant has released its seeds, allowing a new generation of white sage to set roots in the Earth. To combat poaching and commercialization, please think twice about purchasing white sage kits.

We at RCRCD encourage the ethical option of growing white sage in your own yard. We sell sustainably grown white sage at the LandUse Learning Center. For additional information about supporting Indigenous-led efforts to safeguard white sage, visit the California Native Plant Society at <https://www.cnps.org/conservation/white-sage>.



White Sage provides nectar for pollinators.



White Sage, a California native, is a good choice for waterwise home gardens.



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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**LandUse Learning Center**

Open 7 days a week, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. Closed holidays.



**EEC Symposium**

**Saturday, February 24** (See cover page)

**Ask a Master Gardener** 9 a.m. - noon on the First Saturday of each month

**First Saturday Programs**

Start at 10 a.m. unless otherwise indicated. (See page 3)

<b>February 3</b>	<i>Backyard Fruit Growing and Scion Exchange</i>
<b>March 2</b>	<i>Lawn Alternatives</i>
<b>April 6</b>	<i>Controlling the Asian Citrus Psyllid</i>
<b>May 4</b>	<i>Aquaponics</i>
<b>June 1</b>	<i>Easy Techniques for Identifying Common Native Plants</i>

**California Naturalist Course** (See page 2)

Wednesdays January 24 - March 27, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

**Permaculture Certification Course** (See page 11)

Free. Second Saturdays from 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

**Educator Training** (See page 9)

Project Learning Tree training: Saturday, February 17, 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Project WET training: Saturday, March 23, 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

**Bluebird Nest Box Monitoring Training** (See page 9)

March 2, 1 p.m.

**California Native Plant Society**

Every third Saturday. (See page 14)

**Sycamore Creek Interpretive Center**




**Story Time Among the Sycamores**

Second Friday or Saturday at 10 a.m. To register, email: [scic@rcrcd.org](mailto:scic@rcrcd.org)

**Saturday Speaker Series** 10 a.m. • Free (See page 2)

<b>January 27</b>	<i>Get Ready for Monarchs</i>
<b>February 17</b>	<i>Fruit Trees: What Not to Plant and Scion Exchange</i>

RCRCD serves parts of western Riverside & San Bernardino Counties; areas surrounding and portions of: Riverside, Corona, Norco, Grand Terrace, Colton, Reche Canyon, Temescal Canyon, Gavilan Hills, Highgrove, Woodcrest. All RCRCD programs and services are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to race, national origin, religion, age, gender, or orientation.

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