

SANTA FE BOTANICAL GARDEN TO MANAGE ORTIZ MOUNTAIN SITE

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Author: Paul Weideman, Photos courtesy of Santa Fe Botanical Garden

This month, the Santa Fe Botanical Garden will hold a dedication for the Ortiz Mountains Educational Preserve, an area of approximately 1,300 acres donated to the organization as part of an agreement between Friends of Santa Fe County and Lac Minerals USA Inc., owners of the Cunningham Hill gold mine.

In the coming months and years the Garden will help with land-restoration and trail-building activities at the new preserve, which holds old-growth trees and animals including bear, cougar and bobcats as well as artifacts from a long history of mining by American Indians and European settlers.

Lac also will contribute funds for ongoing management, conservation, maintenance and educational activities. The property is gated but tours are planned in the future.

Santa Fe Botanical Garden, founded in 1987, today has over 700 members. Nearly 95 percent of SFBG staff efforts involve education, outreach and other community-oriented service. Volunteer involvement is substantial.

“We don’t have a formal garden like they do in Denver or Phoenix, but we manage the 35-acre Leonora Curtin Natural History Area and now the Ortiz Mountain Preserve,” said Jo Martín, SFBG administrative director. “We’re also involved in designing and installing an ethnobotanical trail in collaboration with the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture.”

The Garden’s offices at Santa Fe Community College include a library with more than 800 books, plus magazines, newsletters and slides. A staff botanist answers everyday gardening questions and writes a weekly column for The New Mexican with some emphasis on drought information and xeriscape gardening.

The Garden is in the process of expanding its mission to take a leadership role regarding issues about water use in the landscape. Martín added that the organization also is “pursuing a more formal educational component, maybe in the form of credit for continuing-education courses.”

Leonora Curtin Natural History Area was donated to Santa Fe Botanical Garden by El Rancho de las Golondrinas, a living-history museum in La Cienega.

Historically, this cienega (marsh) was a stopping place along the Camino Real that extended to Mexico City. In cooperation with El Rancho de las Golondrinas and the Paloheimo family that owns the property, SFBG has been working to restore the site to pre-settlement condition. Recent grants from the New Mexico Environment Department and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are helping to fund water-quality and conservation improvements.

“We’re doing some dredging in conjunction with the museum to get cattails out of the pond

there, which also is the source of water for the mill at the museum,” Martín said.

The Garden contracted with Earthworks International to dredge the pond earlier this spring. The next step is revegetating the disturbed areas using 25 cottonwood and black willow poles donated by the Natural Resources Conservation Service and 175 bare-root native shrubs from Trees New Mexico and Santa Fe Beautiful.

Students from E.J. Martinez Elementary School helped out on April 23, planting native landscape plants.

Now Garden enthusiasts are getting batty about the wetland preserve. Knowing that bats pollinate flowers and eat lots of pesky insects – an individual can consume more than 1,000 flying bugs in an hour – SFBG will add bat-habitat enhancement to Leonora Curtin Natural History Area, and Lawrence Montoya has volunteered to build a number of bat houses.

The Curtin preserve is home to large, old cottonwood trees and more than 200 plant species such as New Mexico privet and peachtree willow, and a rich diversity of birds.

“Programs including birdwatching, which is really interesting there because of the pond and the fact it’s on a migration route,” Martín said.

Leonora Curtin Natural History Area is ADA compliant (wheelchair-friendly). Access to is limited to arranged school and other public tours, work groups and biweekly morning walks – see the calendar later in this story.

The Museum of Indian Arts & Culture is working with Santa Fe Botanical Garden on a master plan for an ethnobotanical trail at the Camino Lejo museum complex. MIAC Director Duane Anderson said the project will include fiber, food and dye plants and heirloom gardens.

Catherine Clemens, incoming SFBG president and a Santa Fe landscaping professional, has donated all her design time on the trails plan. Her work has included analyzing site hydrology and archaeological information for a suitable trail location. She also joined a senior ethnobotanical class from the American Institute of Indian Arts to examine artifacts in the MIAC archives – including a fully intact yucca medicine bag containing dried herbs.

“The main concept is to have sort of a snaking trail down the hill to an arroyo where people can leave behind their grocery-store reality and look around with new eyes and an appreciation for the incredible amount of botanical knowledge you’d have to have to survive on the land,” Clemens said.

“The trail will be like a botanical garden because we’ll have plant groupings in permanent installations, then at the bottom of the hill a couple of flat areas we’re calling ‘ethnobotanical plazas’ where the museum can hold events like a fiber-arts festival with weaving and dyeing demonstrations.”

Clemens said the adjacent Laboratory of Anthropology has begun work on exhibits, starting

chronologically with a hogan-type structure and a mockup of a pit house, that will take visitors through history.

“Another area we’re calling Gatherers’ Walk will have useful native plants, labeled, to show what would have been gathered by early people in this area,” she said. “We’re also looking at installations that will tell the stories about ancient agriculture – including growing cotton! – and water-harvesting techniques such as gravel mulch and waffle gardens.

“One interesting thing about this is the idea of people transitioning between gathering food to a cultivating society where you understand you have control when you plant seeds.”

Joyce Begay-Fosse, MIAC’s director of education, is excited about the project, too.

“Joyce works with Indian children and she has been saddened at the lack of connection some of the kids have with that rich, ancient knowledge,” Clemens said.

“One of the main things the Botanical Garden is moving toward is to be a resource for local people seeking horticultural information, and I think the next step is looking at these ethnobotanical gardens and seeing how we can incorporate some of this ancient wisdom into our gardens today.”

CALENDAR

Santa Fe Botanical Garden plans three tours of area gardens during the growing season.

The first tour, scheduled for June 23, focuses on the South County/Eldorado area and the challenges of wind, drought and rabbits. The second, on July 14, peeks into some of the professionally landscaped gardens in the Bishop’s Lodge area.

Then, on Aug. 11, participants will visit gardens in La Tierra Nueva and Las Campanas that have been designed for season-long color and contrast with mountain vistas.

Call the Lensic Performing Arts Center box office, 988-1234, for tickets, which are \$25 for each tour or \$65 for all three. For detailed information about the 2002 garden tours, contact Janice Tucker at 820-9398.

Another of the Garden’s programs is the Seed to Harvest series, cosponsored by Santa Fe Community College. Three of these Saturday workshops, taught by local experts, are scheduled for June 1 (“Garden Upkeep”), July 6 (“Seed-Saving”) and Aug. 3 (“Preserving the Bounty”).

SFBG docents lead Ecology Walks through the Leonora Curtin Natural History Area on May 26, June 13, June 30 (focus on birds), July 28 (“Native Plants for Landscape Design”), Aug. 25 (“Medicinal and Other Traditional Uses of Native Plants”) and Sept. 29 (on the Garden’s restoration plans).

The Garden will offer Santa Fe Area Farmers’ Market Gardening Programs from 9 to 10 a.m. on

May 11 and May 14.

On July 27 Christie Green will present an in-depth tour of two model gardens. Participants will learn about soil-building and water-harvesting techniques, microclimates and garden beauty and diversity. The cost for this event is \$45.

For more information about the Santa Fe Botanical Garden and its programs call 428-1684.

Caption: 1. This rural property on Old Dog Run in southeast Santa Fe County will be the focus of the June 23 garden tour. The concept here is renovation and reclamation, including ridding meadow areas of Russian thistle and replacing it with native grasses. 2. A small, Zen-inspired garden on the Aug. 11 tour was designed by Richard Wilder for low maintenance and beauty. A dry bed of river rock meanders through pea gravel, amid piñons and ornamental grasses. 3. This residential garden on the Bishop's Lodge-area tour was designed by Julia Bergman. It is filled with perennials including primrose, yarrow and phlox; also Virginia creeper and Russian sage, climbing roses, Miscanthus grass and crabapple trees.