

In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.

~John Muir

Walking is probably one of the best exercises for both body and spirit, and while walking clubs have sprung up at local malls and indoor locations, there's no better place than being in nature for a nice long walk, hike, stroll or saunter. In fact, Southern California consistently ranks high as a walking area by *Prevention Magazine*. Sure, there are freeways and traffic, but we have great weather and elaborate hiking and trail systems scattered across the landscape.

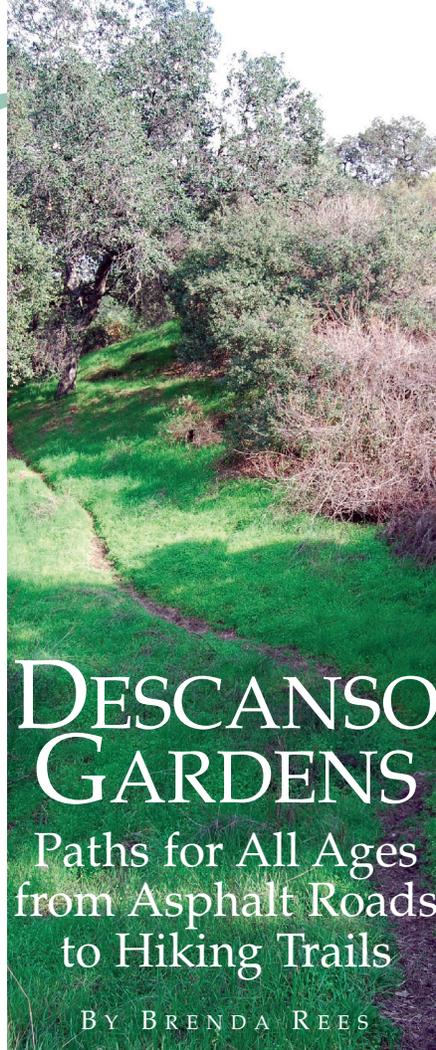
In La Cañada's Descanso Gardens, there are paths for all ages, from smooth asphalt roads to hidden hiking trails. Pedestrian walkways, both on and off the beaten path, offer unique and interesting glimpses inside 160 acres of botanical gardens.

For more than six years, Cara Davis and Cam Hall have offered yoga classes at Descanso, but before they settle in for an hour of stretching and postures, the duo leads participants on a 30 minute walk through the Gardens. "These walks get the blood pumping and clear your head so you are ready to enjoy the yoga," says regular yoga student Stacey Smersfelt of La Cañada.

Smersfelt admits that when she comes to Descanso with her kids, "it's more of an amble in the gardens than exercise. What we do with yoga class is a fitness walk, but we always stop and smell the flowers. We take the time to appreciate the Gardens."

When coming to the Gardens with children, don't expect to experience a heart-thumping, conditioning walk. Many parents see the secret trails underneath the camellia canopies as opportunities for creative expression and play.

Some trails, however, are definitely not stroller material and better suited to older children. This spring, for example, Descanso unveiled a new walk that provides stunning views out over the valley toward the San Gabriel Mountains. Located near the Boddy House, this simple – but somewhat steep – walk



up to Hope's Garden starts at a rock stairway and weaves past an olive grove and Mediterranean garden, ending at a peaceful large stone ("Hope's Rock") that doubles as a seat. Sit back and enjoy the view.

Elsewhere, a network of footpaths are "a real joy to discover and not officially mapped," says horticulturist Kevin O'Connell who cares for the California Native Garden. These dusty footpaths are often just a few feet from the main asphalt; they sometimes lead up to precipitous trails near the fence lines. "We call them 'Discovery Trails' because they can lead to all sorts of interesting places," says O'Connell. "You just have to find them yourself."

There is, however, one official path, the Chaparral Trail, that's a short, winding trail that was created in the early 1960s by a local Boy Scout troop. Walkers can pick up a map at the Visitors' Center or just follow the signs and postings near the Native Garden.

Climb past elderberry and toyon bushes, and beware of poison oak,

which grows freely here. Step over exposed roots and duck under tree limbs, and come out at the top of a small hill where a small bench presides over a lovely view accompanied by the smell of native sage and chaparral. "It's one of the more wild areas of the Gardens," says O'Connell.

Other walkers might want to keep a more conventional profile during their outdoor adventures. There are a number of easy walks mapped out in themes for visitors. "Discovering Trees," "The World of Roses" and "Walk with an Empress" are just a few of the self-guided walks available. These maps are available on Descanso's website (www.descansogardens.org) and from the Visitor's Center.

Many regular walkers, however, enjoy the freedom to walk wherever the mood takes them. Coming to the Gardens practically every day for her afternoon walk is 92-year-old Ernestine Petersen.

"I have a path I usually like to take," says Petersen describing her walk through the Japanese Garden, past the lilacs and redwoods, up the steep hill she nicknamed 'Cardiac Hill' to the Boddy House, down to Fern Canyon and up to the Native Garden, finishing at the Rose Garden.

"If I don't stop to talk to anyone, it takes me 30 minutes, but I usually stop and talk to people along the way," she admits with a laugh.

A volunteer at the Gardens for 43 years, Petersen never grows tired of her walks. She used to walk around her neighborhood, but "this is much better. It changes from day to day and you get such a feeling of peace. Most people think spring is good, but in the summer, it's cool and there are lots of shady places and with a little breeze, why it's so beautiful, it takes your breath away." 🌿

Descanso Gardens is located at 1418 Descanso Dr., La Cañada. General admission: \$8 adults, \$6 for students/seniors and \$3 children 5-12. Children 4 and younger are free. Descanso is opened from 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. every day except Christmas. Membership supports Descanso. For more information, call (818) 949-4200 or visit www.descansogardens.org.