

NatureScape Case Study

Rosie Perez, Rancho Del Rey



Create a NatureScape in your yard or garden to provide a beneficial habitat for bees, birds and other wildlife while conserving precious resources – especially water. A NatureScape provides food for insects, birds and other animals; furnishes a water source; and creates protection for animals to live and raise their young. Residents who create a NatureScape may be able to receive designation as a Certified Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation.



Rosie Perez

Creating a NatureScape is a great way to extend your living space while benefitting wildlife. In Chula Vista's Rancho Del Rey neighborhood, Rosie Perez has created a lush, water-conserving sustainable landscape surrounding her entire home. Thirty years after moving to the first development in Rancho Del Rey, Rosie was considering what to do with her yard with non-fertile sandy loam soil and no vegetation except for some hedges.

"It starts with creating a plan. Start small with what you like and follow key principles of developing structure with trees and shrubs. Be patient and build the layers," Rosie said. "Originally we made an Italian-type garden but over time, we've created different garden 'rooms' that have evolved and the key is bringing in wildlife. Now the gardens have more of a wild look." Bringing in wildlife is the purpose of a NatureScape garden. The garden becomes a haven and a home for insects and birds - both year-round and migrating species.

Rosie learned the benefits of composting from her mother and grandmother. Compost is a natural fertilizer that supplies soil with nutrients and retains moisture. Early on she used compost to build healthy soil. She makes her own compost using a 32-gallon trash can and does worm composting in a bin to create highly nutritious vermicompost soil amendment. In some areas, she has left the soil "as is" to provide habitat for native burrowing bees.

The Meadow



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- Rosie Perez

Her NatureScape includes the Meadow, Butterfly Grove, Rose Garden and Honeysuckle Walk. The variety of plants provide green shades on different visual levels from the ground up. An abundant palate of numerous California-friendly plants along with drought-tolerant species of trees, shrubs and flowers are prominent throughout the gardens. She has planted palm, cypress and fruit trees; flowering shrubs include lantanas, lavender, camellias, star jasmine, rosemary; and, flowers, including more than 100 rose bushes; honeysuckle climbing shrubs; which all provide a range of color and food sources for insects and birds. She has learned to mix edibles with decorative plants. There is a small, limited amount of lawn which serves as a natural carpet mostly bordering the Rose Garden.

Hummingbirds, sparrows and other birds enjoy eating the strawberries and apples and feel safe among the honeysuckles. A Mason bee house near the honeysuckles provides a home for “mason bees.”

Rosie and her family regularly enjoy the views and the soothing sounds of birds and the trickling of fountains. The fountains along with regularly filled pans provide a water source for wildlife. “We can look out the windows and see the garden, this is very important to me as the gardens are an extension of our home,” Rosie said.

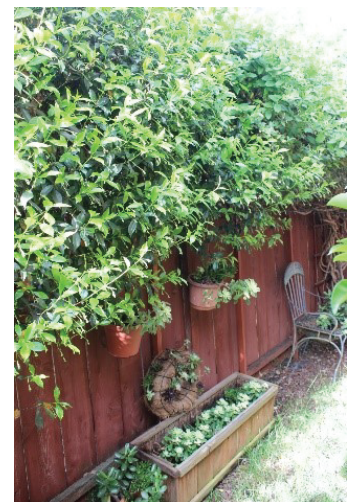
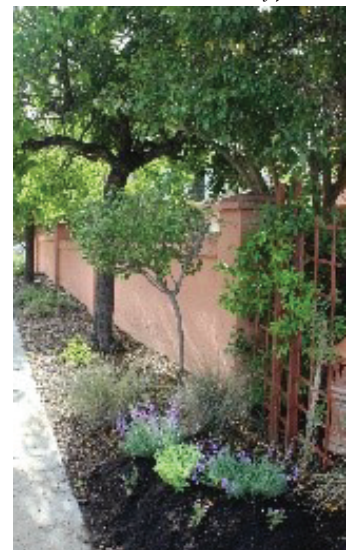
Rosie uses an irrigation controller set on a timer for a drip system, as well as sprinklers and soaker hoses. “I love to hand water with a watering wand,” she said. “When I hand water, I can observe plants and conditions in the gardens.”

Regarding pests, Rosie does not use toxic chemicals and only sprays organic pesticides when needed. She mixes her own and favors one with water, baking soda, vegetable oil and dishwashing soap. She also makes a garlic tonic by boiling garlic cloves to keep the “bad bugs” away.

Most importantly, her ongoing observation of plants and ecosystems in her garden rooms and experimentation taught her what plants need to thrive and enhanced her creativity in implementing sustainable garden practices.

“I find my gardens to be exhilarating and soothing, it takes my breath away and I am very grateful,” she noted.

Butterfly Grove



Rose Garden

Honeysuckle Walk