

Welcome to Test Plot
an ongoing experiment
in community-based ecological restoration
of our public lands



2nd Los Angeles Urban Soil Symposium

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Keywords:

Community-based land care
landscape maintenance
indigenous resource management
tended wilderness
models of reciprocity
disturbance ecology
non-equilibrium theory of ecosystem stability
globalization of the environment
ruderal aesthetics
novel landscapes
regenerative landscapes
projective ecologies
design activism
subversive stewardship



“Our California landscapes [...] both natural and cultural, bear the indelible imprint of a medley of management techniques.”

*-M. Kat Anderson, from *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources**

“From the modern ecological perspective, the apparent stability of current plant associations is an illusion; the only certainty is that things will be substantially different within fifty years.”

*-Peter del Tredici, from *The Role of Horticulture in a Changing World**

Connecting back to the land



Harvard University
Graduate School of Design

News

GSD experts on a major barrier to climate crisis mitigation: “The majority of Americans have little experience with the land and its rhythms”



Reopening



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PARKS AND RECREATION | AUG. 11, 2021

I Tackled My Climate Anxiety by Becoming a Parks Department Super Steward One weed at a time.

By Stephanie Foo



The writer standing in Forest Park, Queens. Photo: DeSean McClinton-Holland

Who is Test Plot?

Local residents
Land caretakers & stewards
Landscape Architects
Teachers
Students
Ecologists
Soil Scientists
Gardners
Wildlife enthusiasts



* Each site has different partners based on land ownership and who the community caretakers are *

Mantras

Bring back beauty + biodiversity

Low-tech, low-budget

Hands in the soil; land care is self-care

Honor and work with the seasons

Experimentation is good; permission to fail

Monitor + evaluate; pro-science

Expansion and scalability in mind

Seek a coalition of community groups

Between Native Gardening and Ecological Restoration



The approach: site specificity is key



1. Understand the site context at a landscape scale



Rio de Los Angeles Test Plot Partners:
USC Landscape Architecture & Urbanism
Audubon Center @ Debs Park
California State Park Champions
Abuelas de Parque

- are we on a hill or a valley?
- to what degree has the land and watershed been manipulated?

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2. Site preparation depends on the challenges and opportunities



Elysian Test Plot Partners:

Saturate California

Terremoto

LA Department of Recreation & Parks

Citizens Committee to Save Elysian Park

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- is there an extensive weed seed bank?
- how compacted are the soils? What is the land use history?
- microclimate factors i.e. proximity of eucalyptus, slope & runoff

3. Adapt plant palette to soil & management factors



Ribes integrifolia
LEMONADE BERRY



Artemisia californica
CA SAGEBRUSH



Salvia mellifera
BLACK SAGE



Zauschneria californica
CA FUCHSIA



Yucca whipplei
OUPLOORD'S CANDLE



Baccharis pilularis
COYOTE BUSH



Ceanothus oliganthus
HAIRY CEANOTHUS



Eriogonum giganteum
GIANT BUCKWHEAT



Eriogonum fasciculatum
CA BUCKWHEAT



Salvia apiana
WHITE SAGE



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- how attractive will new plants be to gophers and rabbits?
- what happens when everything else is summer dormant?

3. Adapt plant palette to soil & management factors

Oak

Sage

Buckwheat

Baccharis

Sunflower

Artemisia

Coastal Climate



Engelmann
Oak
Quercus engelmannii



Hummingbird
Sage
Salvia spathacea



Sea Cliff Buckwheat
Eriogonum parvifolium



Mulefat
Baccharis salicifolia



Canyon
Sunflower
Verenaxia carpesioides



Douglas
Sagewort
Artemisia douglasiana

Current Climate



Coast
Live Oak
Quercus agrifolia



Black
Sage
Salvia mellifera



California
Buckwheat
Eriogonum fasciculatum
var.
fasciculatum



Coyote
Bush
Baccharis pilularis



Bush
Sunflower
Encelia californica



California
Sagebrush
Artemisia californica

Drier Climate



Scrub
Oak
Quercus berberidifolia



White Sage
Salvia apiana



Eastern
Mojave
Buckwheat
Eriogonum fasciculatum
var.
foliolosum



Broom
Baccharis
Baccharis sarothroides



Brittlebush
Encelia farinosa



Big Sagebrush
Artemisia tridentata



Baldwin Hills Test Plot Partners:
USC Landscape Architecture & Urbanism
LA Audubon
Nature Nexus Institute

- Which plants may do better with warmer temperatures and heavier precipitation events?
- How might plant communities shift in the coming decades in response to climate change?

4. Tailor ongoing maintenance to community capacity



- What capacity / knowledge / style do community stewards bring?
- What kind of outreach and engagement works for each particular community?

4. Tailor ongoing maintenance to community capacity

TEST PLOT

ELYSIAN PARK
RIO DE LOS ANGELES STATE PARK
BALDWIN HILLS SCENIC OVERLOOK

ABOUT
SUPPORT
ON OUR SHELF

PLOT 4 - South facing plot. Existing young sycamore tree.

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Plot 1: Cardboard mulch
Plot 5: Compost top dressing
Plot 10: Mulch only

July 2021 9:15 am, sunny and hot.

Plot 1: Texture: Damp and clumping, even where it does not appear to be wet. // Color: Upper 2" dark, rich brown (due to moisture). Lower: light brown-gray. Pockets of orange close to the plot, white away from the plot. // Fauna: Earwig, Isopod

Plot 4: Texture: Smooth, muddy // Color: Upper profile is dark, rich brown. Lower is a mid-gray brown, with some white. // Fauna: Many ants, possibly attracted to the moisture. They appear to be carrying something white.

Plot 5: Texture: Compacted and very difficult to dig. Gritty and dusty. // Color: Upper inch is dark brown from recent watering. Lower is light brown-gray, with some white. // Fauna: Some ants.

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August 2021

MONITORING: PATTERNS OVER TIME

TEST PLOT

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August 2021: 85 person hours. At the beginning of the month, volunteers came out for special Park Champions volunteer day. Park Champs removed invasive plants, including clover and fennel, and shared park experiences and generally socialized. In other exciting news, the official Test Plot zone, I plant therefore I am: Learn how to make a TEST PLOT, was released with a launch party at Plant Matter in Eagle Rock.

MONITOR: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & LABOR INPUTS

Why Test Plot

Healing the earth requires healing our connections with the natural world and with each other. Building an ethic of care requires ongoing stewardship.

Solutions need to be understood within geographical, ecological and hydrological extents, not political boundaries.

Open mindedness and flexibility is key.

We think a community engagement model is a really special way to do this because of the healing that happens with both the land, and the people.





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