

UUCOD Sacred Grounds June 2023 Update

Greetings from Sacred Grounds! A lot has been happening so let's catch you up. We are hard at work and eager for you to join in the creation of the Celebration Garden and several Native Plant Community Gardens.

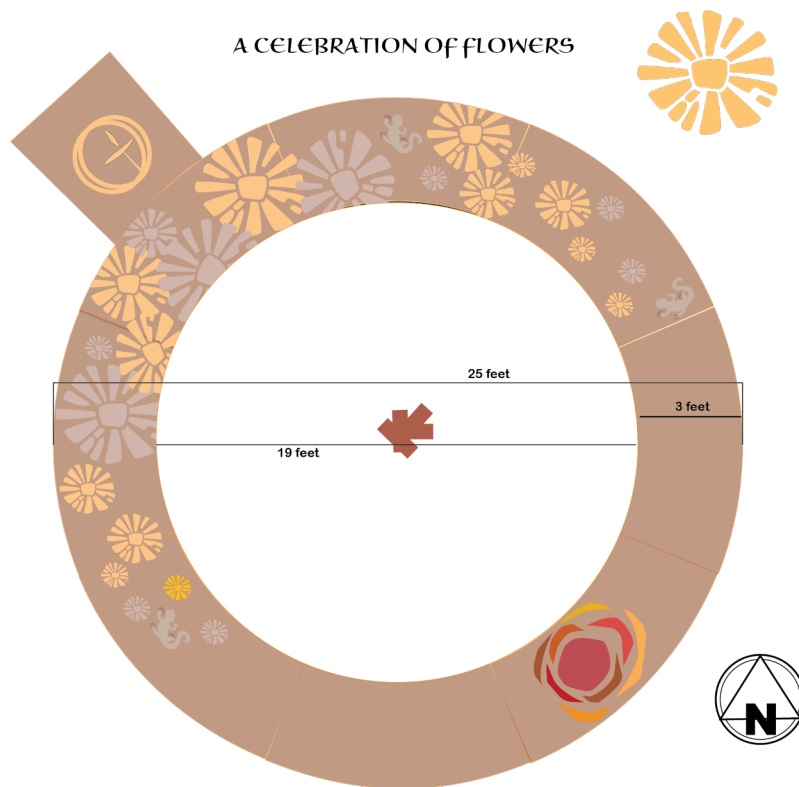
Spoiler: October looks to be a big month!

Steering Committee

We formalized how we operate, completed a formal agreement with the Board establishing Sacred Grounds as a Special Interest Group, got approval for fundraising from the Finance Committee and the Board from now until the auction, and fired up a Steering Committee with initial membership of Rod Belshee, Dave Emmerson, Jack Fitzsimmons, Diana Leslie, John Ressler, and Mel Wilkinson. Mel provides close connection with the Facilities Committee, and we are inviting one of the new Board members to join as well.

Celebration Garden

The long-planned Celebration Garden will be built in October-November. We will relocate the commemorative pavers from the patio plaza to a circular walkway surrounding Gene Kain's beautiful sculptures, which will also be the place for new Sacred Stones. The walk will be fully ADA compliant, and John Ressler has created a colorful encelia design that will be stamped and colored in the walkway.



UUCOD Celebration Garden. Sacred Stones will be placed inside and outside of the circular walkway.

Proceeds from Sacred Stones purchases, plus donations, fund the Sacred Grounds projects.

Native Plant Communities

Building on Dave Emmerson's, Sue Engle's and Mel Wilkinson's UCR California Naturalist capstone project, we are going to create three demonstration native plant community gardens, in addition to our existing Blow Sand community.

1. Desert Dry Wash by the retention pool

2. Creosote Bush Scrub – alluvial fan/consolidated dunes on much of the campus
3. Desert Canyon – Boulders and Rocky Outcrops
4. Desert Blow Sand – along the Southwest area above the church (This area contains the endangered milk vetch and will remain undisturbed.)

Each community will have native plant species grouped together as they exist naturally in the Coachella Valley (*see proposed species at the end of this email*). Importantly, these gardens will provide habitat for native pollinators, birds, lizards and small mammals, preserving critical biodiversity in the valley. As the desert climate changes it is critical for people to establish preserves to provide refugia for these native communities.

The Demonstration Gardens will facilitate outreach to the Coachella Valley community and provide education for the congregation and all who visit our beautiful and calming space. The plants will be labeled with additional signage explaining the significance of each plant community.

We will begin creating and planting these communities in late October early November. Between now and then we will be developing plans and ordering plant materials. Let us know if you want to help.

Grounds Maintenance

A number of volunteers have been giving love to the land every week, keeping the plants healthy throughout the drought, removing debris, fixing irrigation, weeding and more. Our gardeners rake and trim. Feedback from congregants has been great at the improved appearance.

Sacred Grounds seeks to increase habitat for our fellow creatures. For example, UUCOD trims the palms trees, but that is the native habitat for yellow bats and two species of orioles so we will recommend ceasing trimming the fronds. Over the next few weeks and beyond we will create recommendations to balance creating refugia for native species and having an attractive landscape. Let us know if you want to help formulate these recommendations.

September-October

In September we'll begin raising funds for the plant communities. You will be able to "purchase plants" and rock "homes" for native creatures. Before that we are creating plans for the gardens. How would you like to help?

When the weather begins to cool, we will need help preparing the grounds and planting. We'll make the tasks doable so all of us can participate.

Most of all we need your enthusiastic support and curiosity.

What would you like to know more about?

How would you like to help?

Happy Summer!

The Sacred Grounds Steering Committee

Demonstration Plant Communities
Proposed species from UCR California Naturalist Capstone project
Dave Emmerson, Sue Engles, Mel Wilkinson

1. Desert Dry Wash down by the retention pond
 - smoke tree (*Psoralea argophylla*)
 - desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*)
 - dyebush (*Psoralea emoryi*)
 - catclaw (*Senegalia greggii*),
 - desert marigold (*Baileya multiradiata*)
 - desert broom (*Baccharis sarothroides*)
 - Schott indigobush (*Psoralea schottii*)

2. Sand Dune: blow sand area
 - Coachella Valley milkvetch (*Astragalus lentiginosus* var. *coachellae*)
 - desert sand verbena (*Abronia villosa*)
 - hairy Desert Sunflower (*Geraea canescens*)
 - fourwing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*)
 - cattle saltbush (*Atriplex polycarpa*)

3. Creosote Bush Scrub, alluvial fan/consolidated dunes/ (most areas of the grounds)
 - sweetbush (*Bebbia juncea*)
 - creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*)
 - burrobush (*Ambrosia dumosa*)
 - brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*)
 - golden cholla cactus (*Cylindropuntia echinocarpa*)
 - beavertail cactus (*Opuntia basilaris*)

4. Desert Canyon BOULDERS FOR ROCKY OUTCROPPING SIMULATION, some irrigation.
 - jojoba (*Simmondsia chinensis*)
 - desert ironwood (*Olneya tesota*)
 - desert lavender (*Condea emoryi*)
 - chuparosa (*Justicia californica*)
 - desert mallows (*Sphaeralcea ambigua*)
 - rush milkweed (*Asclepias subulata*)