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CASE STUDY/  
POST-OCCUPANCY EVALUATION

***WALGROVE WILDLANDS***

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Master of Landscape Architecture I, Year II

LA Midterm 03/19/2019

Prof. Claire Latané

*Special Acknowledgement to Ryan Drnek, Sodder Studios, who despite having been seriously ill and hospitalized, provided his insight and materials that made this report possible. The plans and plant lists in this report are his work.*

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Site Location.....	4
Background.....	4
Historical Evolution of the Site.....	5
Project Background.....	6
Site Analysis.....	7
Design process analysis.....	9
Interviews.....	10
Design Elements.....	11
The Habitat Gardens.....	11
Plans and Plant List.....	13
Programming Description/Behavioral Analysis.....	16
Maintenance.....	19
Interview with users and non-users.....	20
Archival Search.....	20
Significance and unique attributes of the project.....	22
Limitations.....	22
Lessons learned.....	22

# Introduction

This school garden project is in Mar Vista, a suburb of Los Angeles, at Walgrove Elementary School. This K to 5 school is part of LA Unified School District. It is part of an overall “greening” effort by the LAUSD. The main idea was to regenerate the campus to a state closer to what was originally there prior to urbanization and, with that, provide a unique learning experience to the students, an outdoor science laboratory that could be utilized to teach a host of different subjects, from science, to math, to environmental stewardship.

## Site Location

<b>Name of the Project:</b>	Walgrove Wildlands
<b>Landscape Architect:</b>	Ryan Drnek, Sodder Studios
<b>Address:</b>	1630 Walgrove Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90066
<b>Phone:</b>	(310) 391-7104
<b>Size:</b>	25,000 s.f
<b>Date:</b>	2012 Design development 2013 Completion

## Background

Mar Vista is a mixed residential and commercial neighborhood adjacent to Santa Monica and Venice. It has a population of approximately 38,000 and an average of 12,259/sq. mile

with a median age of 35, all normal for Los Angeles county. This is an ethnically diverse neighborhood with a high percentage of Asian population as compared to other neighborhoods in Los Angeles.

### **Historical Evolution of the Site**

First opened on July 1st, 1953, the campus started out as a typical blacktop and concrete yard. It went through a couple of iterations with some pervious green patches added until it arrived at the current state upon installation of the Wildlands in 2013.

Aerial photographs show the school campus as it was in 2002, 2012, and 2017, from the left:

1. 2002, with no green space, just school buildings and an asphalted yard.
2. 2012, some pervious areas added and peripheral planted beds and trees.
3. 2017 post installation of the Walgrove Wildlands.



## **Project Background**

A few of Walgrove Elementary School's bungalows were decommissioned and scheduled to be removed. The school saw what was to be a disturbance as an opportunity for positive change, and so did the parents and community. This prompted groups of parents, teachers, and community-based organizations to come together with the LAUSD and together create this project, from funding, to design to execution.

The Los Angeles Unified School District provided the funds to remove approximately 25,000 sq. ft. of asphalt and bungalow debris, and for an entirely new irrigation system. In partnership with Enrich LA, LAUSD, Ryan Drnek of Sodder Studio, and others, Walgrove Elementary School created a schoolyard habitat garden encompassing 25,000 square feet of its campus: land formerly occupied by six bungalows and impervious paving.

It took many groups coming together to execute this project. Below are some of the people and groups involved in this prime example of "it takes a village" project:

From the School:

Olivia Adams, Principal of Walgrove Avenue Elementary School, and the Walgrove Wildlands Committee: Zara Bennett – Parent & schoolyard greening advocate, Clare Carey – Parent, Actor/Producer, Activist, Emiko Kuwata – Parent & business owner.

From the LA Unified School District:

John Napoli – Complex Project Manager (CPM), Ana Lasso – Project Manager, Bill Piazza – Office of Environmental Health and Safety, Steve Zimmer – School Board Member

From the Community:

Astrid Diehl – Mia Lehrer & Associates, Ryan Drnek – Sodder Studios, Tomas O’Grady – Enrich LA, Steven Williams – Surfrider Foundation, Simon Bird – US Fish & Wildlife

## Site Analysis

Walgrove Avenue Elementary School is an LAUSD neighborhood school on the westside of Los Angeles.

A Google Earth look at the surroundings reveals quiet residential street and a few parks and recreational spaces around it. Most of the structures around the school are single family residential homes. The Santa Monica Airport is in the vicinity, several blocks to the West, but because this airport is surrounded by residential areas it has some of the strictest sound controls in the country, besides the fact that air traffic has been steadily reducing in the last few years in preparation for the closing in 2028.



The area has a relatively good number of parks and recreational spaces, including the Learning Garden at Venice HS, one of the pioneering campus greening projects in the area. Adding a pollinator garden at this location contributed to the defragmentation that is vital for the regional ecological health.

The site had some previous elements that had to be tied into the new plan, like an Orchard that had been started in the 2000's by another school that co-occupied the space for some time.

Soil analysis revealed that the soil was contaminated, which is the norm for LAUSD soil under the blacktop. it was replaced to become suitable for edibles and habitat use.

# Design process analysis



The guiding principles that shaped the development of the Walgrove Wildlands design were:

“Create a schoolyard habitat that restores native species and works towards re-creating a native ecosystem on campus.

Create a hands-on, outdoor laboratory in which students learn about science, ecology, and environmental stewardship.

Pursue a joint-use agreement to make greened area available to the community after school hours.”

# Interviews

From the Landscape Architect, Ryan Drnek, via e-mail:

“[Walgrove Elementary] has dramatically improved this past year.

The habitat garden was founded in 2013, by myself and a group of school mothers. Over the last six years, we have engaged local non-profits for small improvements and the habitat is just beginning to mature. It is designed for a thousand purposes, but mainly to educate people and protect wildlife.

The habitat is designed to replicate the local forest, meadow and coastal dune environments. This has been achieved by carefully directing water on and off site, grading and plant selection. As a landscape architect, I rarely have the opportunity to stay engaged in a project beyond a plan on paper. By random luck, I have become a part of the Walgrove Elementary School community by working in the habitat for a few hours every week. It’s a lot more rewarding than a computer. It has given me insight into the creation of these learning spaces, vast knowledge about our local ecology, and humbling realities that come with creating gardens within the LAUSD.”

# Design Elements



*Credit: Illustration Retrieved from [www.enrichLA.org](http://www.enrichLA.org)*

## The Habitat Gardens

The Wildlands are built in an area where the native ecosystem is called “Coastal Sage Scrub.” It includes four types of plant communities: Woodland, Meadow, Chaparral, and Riparian (wetland). These existed here in abundance prior to urbanization, The Wildlands seek to restore the land to a more natural state that can educate the users on what was here before and, hopefully, awaken a sense of environmental stewardship in them.

## Woodland

Displays by a mix of large trees and many other plants: shrubs, small trees and herbaceous plants. Plants representing this community: Oak Tree, Sycamore Tree, and Manzanita.

## Meadow

Meadows have flowers, grasses, roots, and the aging and decaying plants from previous years' growth. Plants representing this community: Poppy, Tidy Tips, and Lupine.

## Chaparral

California coastal sage and chaparral are part of Mediterranean forests, woodlands, and scrub biomes. Plants representing this community: Palo Verde, Lemonade berry, Hummingbird Sage, Milkweed, and Ceanothus.

## Wetland/Riparian

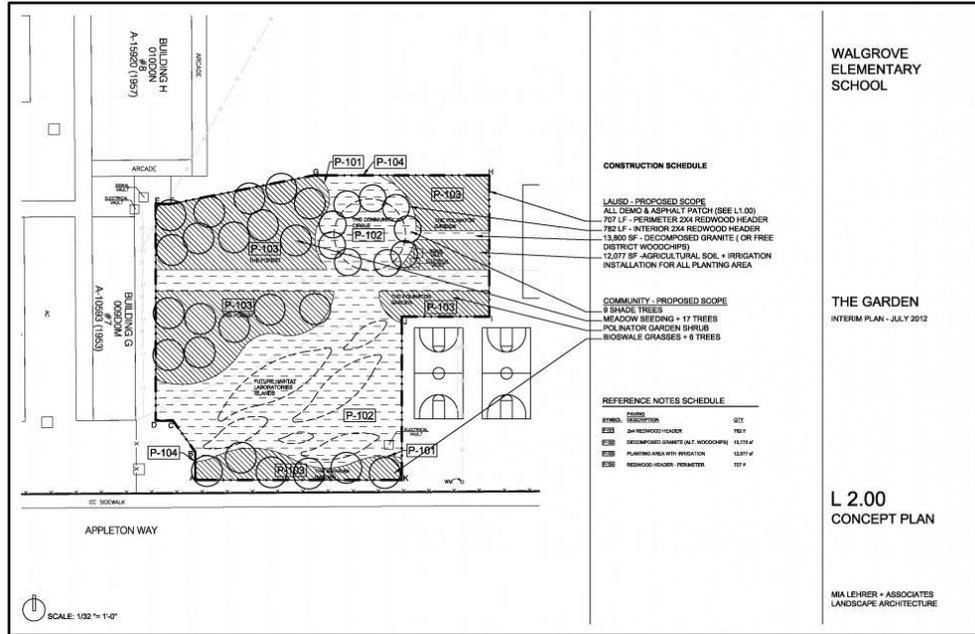
Wetlands have three main characteristics: water, saturated soil, and plants that are well adapted to wet conditions. Plants representing this community: Willow Trees, Alder Trees, Wire Grass, and Deer Grass.

Additionally, the project includes:

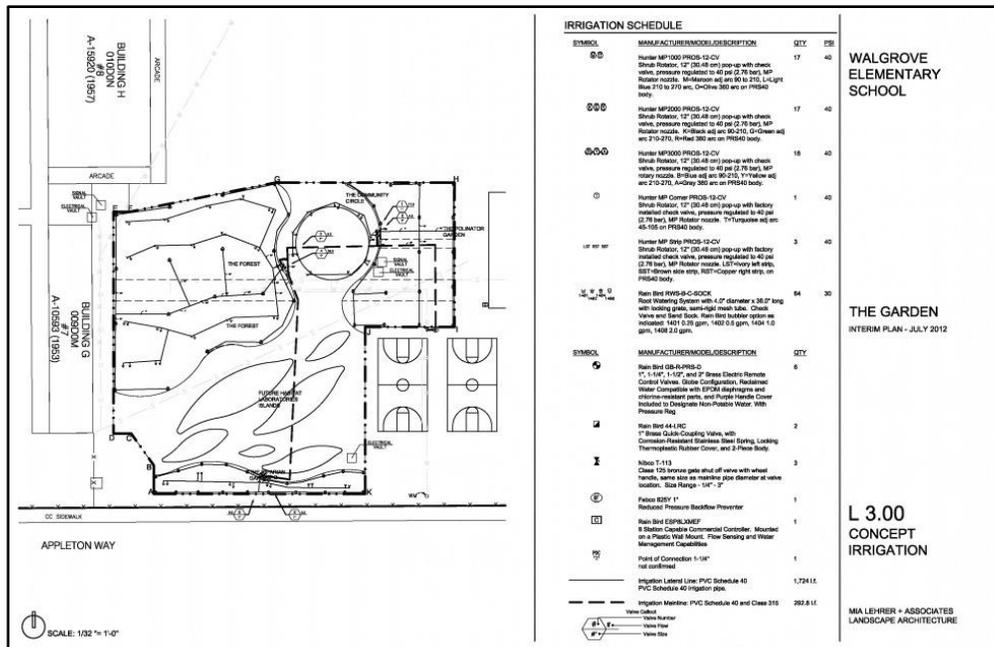
- A kinder "garden" that is an officially recognized Monarch Butterfly Habitat
- An orchard
- An edible garden

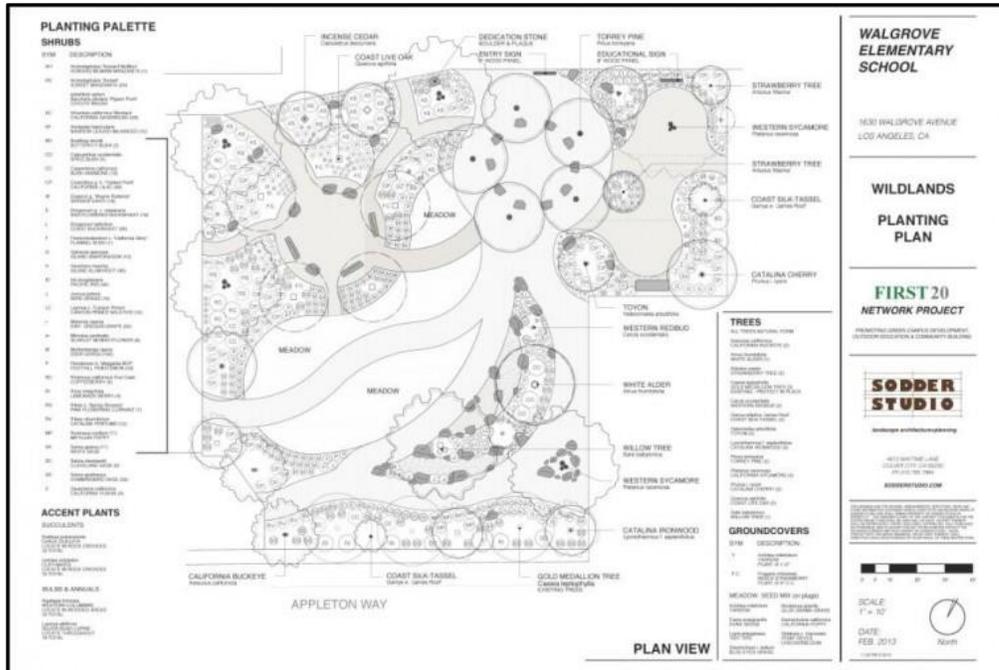
# Plans and Plant List

## Conceptual Plan:



## Irrigation and Design Plans:





Walgrove Wildlands Master Plant List - 1.27.2019

No.	Name	Common Name	Area	Notes
1	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow	Meadow, Arroyo, Sensory Garden	
2	<i>Agrostis pallens</i>	West Coast Bent Grass	Meadow	
3	<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	White Alder	Forest	
4	<i>Aquilegia formosa</i>	Western Columbine	Forest	Wildflowers
5	<i>Arctostaphylos insularis</i> 'Canyon Sparkles'	Canyon Sparkles Manzanita	Forest, Sensory Garden	
6	<i>Arctostaphylos densiflora</i> 'Howard McMinn'	Howard McMinn Manzanita	Forest	
7	<i>Arctostaphylos</i> 'John Dourley'	John Dourley Manzanita	Forest	
8	<i>Arctostaphylos pacifica</i>	Pacific Manzanita	Coastal Dunes	
9	<i>Artemisia californica</i>	California Sagebrush	Forest	
10	<i>Artemisia californica</i> 'Montara'	Montara Sagebrush	Forest, Coastal Dunes	
11	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	Mugwort	Sensory Garden	
12	<i>Asclepias fascicularis</i>	Narrow-Leaved Milkweed	Sensory Garden, Arroyo	Wildflowers
13	<i>Baccharis pilularis</i> 'Pigeon Point'	Dwarf Coyote Brush	Forest	
14	<i>Baccharis pilularis</i> 'Twin Peaks'	Dwarf Coyote Brush	Forest	
15	<i>Berberis aquifolium</i> var. <i>repens</i>	Creeping Barberry	Forest	
16	<i>Calocedrus decurrens</i>	Incense Cedar	Forest	
17	<i>Calycanthus occidentalis</i>	Spicebush	Forest	
18	<i>Camissoniopsis cheiranthifolia</i>	Beach Suncups	Meadow, Coastal Dunes	Wildflowers
19	<i>Carex pansa</i>	California Meadow Sedge	Meadow	
20	<i>Carpenteria californica</i>	Bush Anemone	Forest	

21	Ceanothus 'Frosty Blue'	Frosty Blue Ceanothus	Sensory Garden	
22	Ceanothus 'Ray Hartman'	Ray Hartman Ceanothus	Forest, Sensory Garden	
23	Ceanothus thyrsiflorus var. griseus 'Yankee Point'	Yankee Point California Lilac	Forest	
24	Cercidium 'Desert Museum'	Desert Museum Palo Verde	Arroyo, Sensory Garden, Coastal Dunes	
25	Cercis occidentalis	Western Redbud	Arroyo	
26	Cercocarpus betuloides var. blancheae	Island Mountain Mahogany	Forest	
27	Chlorogalum pomeridianum	Soap Plant	Arroyo	
28	Dendromecon harfordii	Island Bush Poppy	Sensory Garden	
29	Diplacus cardinalis	Scarlet Monkeyflower	Forest	Wildflowers
30	Dudleya brittonii	Britton's Dudleya	Coastal Dunes	
31	Dudleya edulis	Fingertips	Coastal Dunes	
32	Dudleya farinosa	Bluff Lettuce	Coastal Dunes	
33	Eschscholzia californica	California Poppy	Meadow, Forest, Sensory Garden	Wildflowers
34	Eschscholzia californica var. maritima	Dune Poppy	Meadow, Sensory Garden	Wildflowers
35	Ericameria ericoides	Mock Heather	Coastal Dunes	
36	Erigeron glaucus 'Ron's Pink'	Ron's Pink Seaside Daisy	Coastal Dunes	
37	Erigeron glaucus 'Wayne Roderick'	Wayne Roderick's Seaside Daisy	Coastal Dunes	
38	Eriogonum cinereum	Ashy-Leaf Buckwheat	Coastal Dunes	
39	Eriogonum fasciculatum	California Buckwheat	Meadow, Arroyo	
40	Eriogonum fasciculatum 'Dana Point'	Dana Point Buckwheat	Coastal Dunes	
41	Eriogonum fasciculatum 'Theodore Payne'	Theodore Payne Buckwheat	Coastal Dunes	
42	Eriogonum giganteum var. giganteum	Saint Catherine's Lace	Sensory Garden	
43	Eriogonum grande var. rubescens	Red-Flowered Buckwheat	Coastal Dunes	
44	Eriogonum parvifolium	Coast Buckwheat	Coastal Dunes	

45	Eriophyllum confertiflorum	Golden Yarrow	Arroyo	
46	Festuca idahoensis	Idaho Fescue	Meadow	
47	Festuca rubra	Red Fescue	Meadow	
48	Fragaria chiloensis	Beach Strawberry	Forest	
49	Fragaria vesca 'Montana de Oro'	Wood Strawberry	Forest	
50	Frangula californica 'Eve Case'	Eve Case Coffeeberry	Forest	
51	Gilia capitata	Globe Gilia	Meadow, Sensory Garden	Wildflowers
52	Hesperocyparis forbesii	Tecate Cypress	Sensory Garden	
53	Heteromeles arbutifolia	Toyon	Forest, Sensory Garden, Coastal Dunes	
54	Heuchera maxima	Island Alum Root	Forest	
55	Juncus patens	Wire Grass	Arroyo	
56	Juglans californica	California Black Walnut	Arroyo	
57	Layia platyglossa	Tidy Tips	Meadow, Forest	Wildflowers
58	Leptosiphon grandiflorus	Large flowered Linanthus	Meadow, Sensory Garden	
59	Leptosyne maritima	Sea Dahlia	Coastal Dunes	Rare Plant Rank 2B.2
60	Lessingia filaginifolia 'Silver Carpet'	Silver Carpet Aster	Sensory Garden	
61	Leymus condensatus 'Canyon Prince'	Canyon Prince Wild Rye	Arroyo	
62	Lupinus microcarpus 'Ed Gelding'	Yellow Bush Lupine	Meadow, Forest	Wildflowers
63	Lupinus bicolor	Miniature Lupine	Meadow, Sensory Garden	Wildflowers
64	Lupinus nanus	Sky Lupine	Forest, Meadow	Wildflowers
65	Lupinus succulentus	Arroyo Lupine	Meadow, Sensory Garden	Wildflowers
66	Lyonothamnus floribundus aspleniifolius	Channel Island Ironwood	Forest, Sensory Garden	
67	Monardella villosa 'Russian River'	Coyote Mint	Forest	
68	Muhlenbergia rigens	Deer Grass	Forest, Meadow	
69	Nemophila menziesii	Baby Blue Eyes	Coastal Dunes	
70	Penstemon 'Margarita BOP'	Margarita BOP Penstemon	Arroyo	

71	<i>Penstemon spectabilis</i>	Showy Penstemon	Forest
72	<i>Philadelphus lewisii</i> 'Goose Creek'	Goose Creek Mock Orange	Forest
73	<i>Pinus radiata</i>	Monterey Pine	Forest
74	<i>Pinus sabiniana</i>	Foothill Pine	Forest
75	<i>Platanus racemosa</i>	Western Sycamore	Forest, Arroyo
76	<i>Prunus ilicifolia</i> ssp. <i>lyonii</i>	Catalina Cherry	Sensory Garden
77	<i>Quercus agrifolia</i>	Coast Live Oak	Forest
78	<i>Quercus chrysolepis</i>	Canyon Live Oak	Forest
79	<i>Rhus integrifolia</i>	Lemonade berry	Sensory Garden, Coastal Dunes
80	<i>Rhus ovata</i>	Sugar Bush	Coastal Dunes
81	<i>Ribes aureum</i> v. <i>gracilimum</i>	Golden Current	Forest, Arroyo
82	<i>Ribes speciosum</i>	Fuchsia-Flowered Gooseberry	Forest
83	<i>Ribes viburnifolium</i>	Catalina Perfume	Forest
84	<i>Romneya coulteri</i>	Matilija Poppy	Sensory Garden
85	<i>Rosa californica</i>	California Wild Rose	Forest, Arroyo
86	<i>Sambucus mexicana</i>	Western Elderberry	Coastal Dunes
87	<i>Salix laevigata</i>	Red Willow	Arroyo
88	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	Arroyo Willow	Arroyo
89	<i>Salvia leucophylla</i>	Purple Sage	Arroyo
90	<i>Salvia</i> 'Bee's Bliss'	Bee's Bliss Sage	Forest, Arroyo
91	<i>Salvia mellifera</i>	Black Sage	Forest

92	<i>Salvia</i> 'Mrs. Beard'	Mrs. Beard Sage	Arroyo
93	<i>Salvia spathacea</i>	Hummingbird Sage	Forest, Coastal Dunes
94	<i>Sisyrinchium bellum</i>	Blue-eyed Grass	Meadow, Arroyo
95	<i>Trichostema lanatum</i>	Woolly Blue Curfs	Sensory Garden, Coastal Dunes
96	<i>Umbellularia californica</i>	California Bay	Forest
97	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California Wild Grape	Appleton Way Fence

## Programming Description/Behavioral Analysis

This analysis was collected from a number of articles and comments on websites, Facebook, parent's comments, etc. It describes how specific parts of the garden are utilized.

### The Edible Garden

In the edible garden students work with a Master Gardener and other local community members to learn practices of seed-to-table growing, transplanting, harvest, safety, and

working together as a team. The program is complemented by classroom classes regarding plant ecology, anatomy, how pollinators behave and their importance, and plant cultivation needs: air, water, light, nutrients, and seasonality. This program also teaches weights and measures, geography, climate, and other basic concepts in scientific experiments. The students get to sample the produce, which helps them to establish an appreciation of healthy eating.

### Monarch Butterfly Habitat

Olivia Adams, former Walgrove Elementary principal: “It’s attracted all kinds of life. We see a lot of hummingbirds, a lot of butterflies. ... Three summers ago we actually had a duck family that came and hatched eggs.”



*Credit: Photo Retrieved from [www.walgroveelementary.edu](http://www.walgroveelementary.edu)*

## Inclusion

Special education teacher Kathy Elkins praises the garden for providing a unique learning opportunity for differently abled students:

“I’ve found that the garden itself, and just being in a place that has a lot of greenery, has been really impactful on them. Students that require more visual, multi-modality learning, this is a huge thing for them. ... They don’t get it from words on a page, but they do get it when they’re putting their hands in the ground.”

4th and 5th grade teacher Elvia Perez:

“There are some kids that come with a little bit of baggage from home. They will ask if they could step away for five to 10 minutes, and they’ll take a peer and they’ll go out there and walk around the Wildlands. It helps soothe them and get them ready for the class.”

## Education and Environmental Stewardship

Teacher Elvia Perez:

“One of our studio lab teachers tied math into art by going into the Wildlands, looking for the Fibonacci sequence in nature. And then we’ve also used the Wildlands for theater and for filming PSAs about weather. Students use it as a backdrop or as part of their plays”

Special education teacher Kathy Elkins:

“When students find a caterpillar out on the blacktop where it doesn’t belong, I see them without prompting, pick it up and put it on a leaf and carry it back, and put it on the right plant. This is not a teacher standing over you and saying, ‘Don’t kill the ant.’ This is

intrinsic value for life that I'm seeing. It promotes kindness, and it promotes a feeling that you're connected to something bigger."

## Maintenance

Many different community organizations pitch in to help maintain the garden:

1. The school itself has a garden team that calls for volunteers, they provide a link for those interested to sign up.

2. Friends of Walgrove is a nonprofit that supports Walgrove Elementary school. Among other things, they fund the Edible and Wildlands Gardens. They have a website where they call for volunteers to sign up and help maintain the gardens, work with the students, etc.

An example of what the volunteers can expect to do (from their website):

Edible Garden: Weed all pathways around the raised garden beds and around the perimeter of the garden. This is in preparation for planting of the winter garden. Weed the orchard along Appleton Way.

Walgrove Wildlands: Weed, help move tree stumps for seating, wood chip mulch the area.

75-100 volunteers is their goal, the maintenance is usually scheduled for multiple days.

3. The Wildwood Foundation promotes the Garden and helps maintain it regularly.

4. UCLA student organization has an Earth Day maintenance day regularly scheduled where lots of the university's students and faculty volunteer to help.

## Interview with users and non-users

From an article on Patch, a Venice/Mar Vista local news site at the time of the opening:

Emiko Kuwata, Co-Chair of the Walgrove Wildlands Steering Committee:

"The Walgrove Wildlands are an example of what a community with a dream can make happen. "

Clare Carey, Co-Chair of the Walgrove Wildlands Steering Committee:

"Steven Bradford, Steve Zimmer and Mike Bonin all applauded the efforts of the students and the community to contribute to making the world a better place."

"Walgrove Elementary has been established as an official "Wildlife Habitat" with the National Wildlife Federation. Walgrove students work weekly with a Master Gardener learning how to care for the gardens and hold sales of the organic produce they have grown."

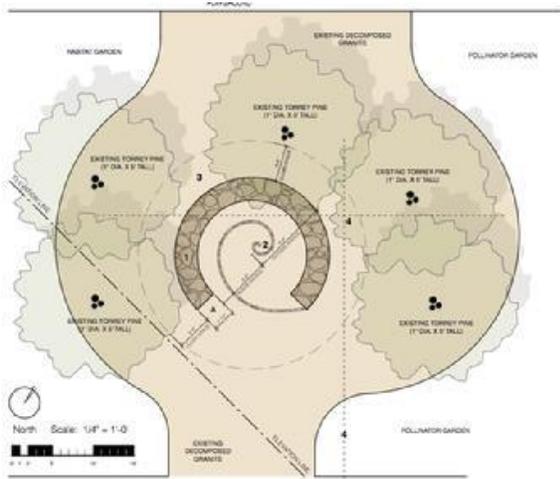
## Archival Search

There were many articles written about this school and the Walgrove Wildlands, it is currently part of local garden tours. All articles that were found spoke of it on a positive tone. Below are some links with samples.

<https://academics.lmu.edu/media/lmuacademics/cures/urbanecolab/module10/Wildlands%20Presentation.pdf>

<http://marvistagreengardenshowcase.blogspot.com/2018/04/walgrove-elementary-school-1630.html>

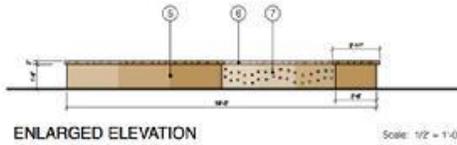
Additional Drawings Prepared for this Project:



PLAN VIEW

LEGEND

1. EARTH BENCH SEATWALL WITH 2" THICK FLAGSTONE TOP. BENCH CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS AND METHODS FOR SEPARATE EARTH BENCH-BUILDING PLAN AND SPECIFICATION SUBMITTAL.
2. 4" DIAMETER RIVER ROCKS BURIED FLUSH WITH TOP OF
3. THE EXTERIOR OF THE EARTH BENCH IS TO HAVE A SMOOTH PLASTER FINISH WITH NATURAL EARTH-TONE COLOR.
4. 2" THICK FLAGSTONE CAP. STONE TYPE AND METHOD OF INSTALLATION TO BE SUBMITTED BY EARTH BENCH BUILDER.



Concept and Bench Design by Lauri Matisse

**EARTH BENCH CONCEPT PLAN**

THE WALGROVE WILDLANDS  
WALGROVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



## **Significance and unique attributes of the project**

This project stands out due to the realized potential. It was a combination of efforts such as community members and organizations, the school and the district, all coming together and of one mind to make the most of this area.

The positive effects of what they accomplished will be felt for many years: not only this project regenerated a blacktop site and made into a recognized habitat area, it is educating generations of children on how to take care of the environment.

Community involvement is a major part of the success of this project. A number of organizations are still currently involved in the maintenance and care.

## **Limitations**

The design had to follow LAUSD guidelines for Elementary Schools

Getting approval from LAUSD

Secure funding.

## **Lessons learned**

An internet search did not produce any results that fit this category.

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