



Milkweed Magic

How Pollinators Help Nature Heal

Southern California's wildlands have faced devastating challenges in recent years—from repeated wildfires and drought to the spread of invasive species over once-thriving native plant habitats. These stresses make it harder for native plants and wildlife—especially pollinators—to survive.

While wildfires leave behind great loss, they can also create space for ecological renewal. Fire can clear out overgrown vegetation, stimulate the germination of native plants, and open the door for pollinators to help ecosystems recover. Many of Southern California's native plants are “fire followers,” meaning they rely on fire to germinate. When fire clears out old vegetation, it can open the soil to sunlight, sparking unexpected native blooms of wild buckwheat, lupines, and poppies. California's butterflies and bees are adapted to these cycles of fire and regrowth, and their presence signals that nature is healing.



Bee on buckbrush

Thanks to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Conservation Fund, TreePeople—in partnership with the California Botanic Garden—has spent the past two years expanding pollinator habitat restoration across the burn scars of the Angeles National Forest. As part of this effort, we've planted 2,235 milkweed seedlings along with 10 other native plant species across 183 acres, while actively removing invasive plants that threaten these ecosystems. About 1,500 of these milkweed seedlings were propagated in TreePeople's own nursery, a six-month journey from seed to planting.

This project is a major step forward in restoring pollinator habitat as well as an exciting piece of a bigger vision in landscape renewal. TreePeople is creating connected corridors of thriving ecosystems across the Angeles National Forest and beyond. These native, herbaceous plants improve soil moisture, support understory growth, and help interrupt the grass-fire cycle, where invasive weeds replace native species and increase fire risk. At the heart of it, they create thriving habitats that sustain whole ecosystems.



Monarch caterpillar on milkweed



Fragrant pitcher sage

Why does this matter? Pollinators are nature's quiet heroes. They increase seed production, support the spread of native plants, promote biodiversity, and help suppress the spread of invasive species. Monarch butterflies, in particular, are specialist pollinators: They thrive on milkweed, which is toxic to most other insects, and their presence is an indicator of habitat health. Every bee, beetle, and moth plays a role in rebuilding food webs and restoring healthy soil microbiomes, creating a landscape that resists invasive takeover and future wildfire risk.

At TreePeople, these projects invite community members to dig-in, through hands-on restoration events, educational programs, and free tree distributions, allowing volunteers to see firsthand how their efforts can support pollinators and native habitats. This restoration work has blossomed into a true community triumph, powered by 841 volunteers to date, who have already contributed 3,199 hours across multiple sites in the Angeles National Forest. Despite unique challenges, like milkweed's natural dormancy period and unpredictable weather conditions, seeing the first monarch chrysalis in the field made every day worth the effort.

You can be part of this renewal too! Pollinator-friendly plants aren't just beautiful—they're lifelines. Imagine a narrowleaf milkweed in your garden, giving monarch butterflies a safe place to feed and reproduce. Or the delicate slender mariposa lily, welcoming the ultra-green sweat bee. Each milkweed planted creates a ripple of hope. By creating a safe haven for pollinators in your neighborhood, you're helping nurture biodiversity and ensuring that California's wild landscapes can thrive for years to come.

Here are three easy ways to get started:



Pollinator Pantry: Plant native wildflowers, shrubs, or milkweed to give pollinators food and shelter.



Safe Zone: Minimize pesticides to keep pollinators safe.



Sip & Rest: Add a shallow water dish with pebbles, refreshed daily for pollinators to drink and rest.

Together, these individual actions weave into a larger story of resilience, where people, communities, and pollinators work side by side to bring life back to our forests, parks, and backyards.

People care about their pollinators. Monarch decline has become common knowledge throughout most of the west coast. I think the conservation efforts should serve as an inspiration to us all of what we can accomplish when we come together for a common goal.

Alyssa Walker
Associate Director of Conservation



Milkweed Monarch Mash Event

Join us at **Castaic Lake** on **Saturday October 18th** for a special planting and pollinator costume contest, plus **take home a milkweed of your own!**

bit.ly/milkweedmash



Wildfire Resilience Fund

Your contribution to our Wildfire Resilience Fund expands our critical fire prevention efforts, restores fire-scarred landscapes, and ensures our Southern California home is prepared to respond when disaster strikes. Each donation plays a vital role in proactive fire mitigation treatments, native plant restoration, and community-driven conservation efforts.

Double your impact! All gifts to the Wildfire Resilience Fund are still being matched dollar for dollar!

Donate today and help create resilient landscapes and communities.

treepeople.org/wildfire

Remembering Jim Hardie *A Day of Service, A Lifetime of Inspiration*

On Thursday, September 4th, TreePeople staff came together for a special volunteer day at our Coldwater Canyon Park, to honor our late colleague, mentor, and friend, Jim Hardie. Together, we tidied our trails, nurtured native habitat, and tended to the land Jim loved so dearly. The team filled the park with the same spirit of dedication and camaraderie that he inspired in so many.

It was a joyful day of service that reflected the heart of Jim's legacy: People coming together to care for nature and for one another.

Jim's journey with TreePeople began over 40 years ago as a volunteer and grew into a lifetime of service that shaped our park and our community. Over the years, he served as Director of Forestry, a TreePeople Board Member, and most notably, Director of Coldwater Canyon Park. Jim trained hundreds of TreePeople's very first Citizen Foresters, led the planting and care efforts for nearly 400 trees on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in South Central Los Angeles, and founded our beloved *Once Upon a Canyon Night* performance series, alongside his wife, Eileen Knight. At TreePeople, Jim planted the seeds for countless opportunities for people to come together and connect with nature.



Jim Hardie



TreePeople staff park work day in honor of Jim Hardie



TreePeople staff, board members and former staff members work in honor of Jim Hardie at the park

As we cared for the park together in his honor, we were reminded of Jim's extraordinary legacy and the progress TreePeople experienced under his leadership. We invite you to visit Coldwater Canyon Park, stroll the trails Jim loved, and pause at his memorial bench for a moment of reflection. And if you'd like to carry forward his spirit of stewardship, consider becoming a TreePeople Member of our monthly giving program The Canopy, to help us sustain this park and our forests for generations to come.



Become a TreePeople member!
treepeople.org/canopy



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