

## Biodiversity Gets a Boost in Larkspur

by Laura Lovett

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In the face of steady loss of species and habitat complexity due to a changing climate and extensive development, it is important not to be discouraged, as everyone can take steps to help combat losses. One of the key things we can do is to find ways to make the habitat welcoming to wildlife in our urban and suburban spaces. Our public spaces are notably underutilized, often planted solely with thirsty lawn grass.

In the summer of 2023, the City of Larkspur became the first in the county to pass a biodiversity proclamation, joining the state of California in proclaiming September 7th as California Biodiversity Day, and declaring that City employees will do all they can to support biodiversity, thereby improving the wellbeing of humans and our environment.

They followed up this declaration with an important hands-on project. The old and outdated landscaping surrounding Larkspur's downtown parking lot (at the corner of Magnolia Ave. and Ward St.) was removed, the soil amended, and the beds replanted with California native plants. The layout and species list were drawn up by the Marin chapter of the California Native Plant Society, with help from nonprofit Refugia Marin and Roseann Dal Bello, ASLA. Plants were sourced from nurseries in Marin and Sonoma. On September 28th, a team of enthusiastic volunteers plus the City's Public Works crew gathered for planting. With many hands to help, it was finished in a few hours. The entire project was paid for by the Larkspur Community Foundation, many of whose members showed up on planting day, donned a blue LCF T-shirt, and got to work digging holes. Joan Lundstrom, president of the Foundation, was the galvanizing force behind the idea and its successful execution. In spring, we will be treated to a flourishing display.



*Dana Swisher of Refugia Marin applies mulch to a native plant garden in front of Larkspur's police station. Photo by Laura Lovett.*

Any list of other landscapes around Larkspur in need of upgrade would have to include the parcel set aside on Rose Lane for the future Larkspur Library. Julian Skinner, Director of Public Works, confirms that the City is selecting a design/build team through the RFP process now. We are happy to report that the specifications they were given for the new library state, "The entire property/site (approximately 2 acres) shall be fully landscaped with biodiversity plants that are drought resistant and California Native."

The City will choose the best team to design and build the project. Design will take place in the first six months of 2024, with building beginning later that summer. The team's scope also includes the landscaping. We look forward to seeing their ideas for it and discussing their suitability for the site.

Two other special garden projects are located along Doherty Drive: the Marin chapter of CNPS planted a pollinator garden around the sign in front of the Central Marin Police Station this year, and Refugia Marin has received a grant to upgrade and replace plantings along the road frontage of Hall Middle School.

With the anticipated addition of a rich and diverse landscape at the library parcel across the road, the City will have made big strides in implementing their brand-new Biodiversity Proclamation. Kudos to the Larkspur City Council and the Central Marin Police for their foresight and willingness to promote biodiversity using available public spaces. The green spaces being created will greatly enrich the town and provide a beautiful urban corridor for all to enjoy.

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