Wilderness Gardens Hiking Trails
There are over three miles of hiking trails in the preserve, and all are considered easy to moderate. All trailheads are identified by name, and trails are clearly marked with intermittent signposts.

The Alice Fries Trail is a half-mile loop trail. It starts and ends near the staging area kiosk. The trail follows along the north side of the San Luis Rey River and then runs back along the bluffs.

The Main Trail, which crosses the river, runs the length of the preserve and is flat and shaded. All of the other preserve trails start and end on the Main Trail. Restrooms and park benches are found along this trail. It serves as both the entrance and the exit trail from the preserve interior. This trail is an easy hike.

The Upper Meadow Trail is the most scenic trail in the preserve, offering commanding views of the Pauma Valley and the mountains to the east. This trail is moderate in difficulty.

The Pond Loop presents visitors with the opportunity to view nature both above and below the water in this small pond. A variety of amphibians, waterfowl and migratory birds can be seen in this area.

The Camellia Trail is located at west end of the preserve. This short loop trail passes along an abandoned pond once used to irrigate hundreds of camellia plants. Although these flowers are gone, this trail exhibits the many trees and plants native to the region.

Wilderness Gardens
County Preserve
A San Diego County Open Space Preserve

INFORMATION
County of San Diego
Department of Parks and Recreation
5500 Overland Avenue, Suite 410
San Diego, CA 92123
Reservations & Information:
Toll Free • (877) 565-3600
Local • (858) 565-3600
Visit us at www.sdnparks.org

Preserve Hours
8 a.m. – 4 p.m. • Thursday – Tuesday
Closed Wednesdays and the month of August

RULES AND REGULATIONS

ACCIDENTS: The County of San Diego shall not be responsible for loss or accidents.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES: Alcoholic beverages are permitted providing the alcohol content does not exceed 20%.

DEFACEMENT PROHIBITED: No person shall remove, deface, or destroy trail markers, monuments, fences, trees, park amenities, or other preserve facilities.

DRONES: Remotely piloted aircraft and drones are prohibited.

FIRE HAZARDS AND SMOKING: Smoking, including the use of vaporizing products, is not permitted in County parks.

LITTERING: Littering is prohibited.

MOTOR VEHICLES: The unauthorized operation of motor vehicles is prohibited.

NO HUNTING: No person shall use, transport, carry, fire, or discharge any firearms, air guns, archery device, darts, bows, fireworks, or explosive device of any kind in a preserve.

PRESERVATION OF TRAIL FEATURES: All wildlife, plants, and geologic features are protected and are not to be damaged or removed. All historical resources are to be left in place.

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Welcome to Wilderness Gardens County Preserve
14209 Highway 76 • Pala, CA 92059 • 760-742-1631

Located in northern San Diego County, along the San Luis Rey River is a hidden gem. Wilderness Gardens County Preserve is a beautiful reflection of the rich cultural and natural diversity of the region.

In 1973 Wilderness Gardens became the first nature preserve for San Diego County Parks and Recreation. Today, a combination of natural vegetation types including oak woodland, riparian, chaparral and coastal sage scrub, provide habitat for a variety of indigenous wildlife. Many bird species, including migratory birds, resident waterfowl and other wildlife life are commonly seen in the preserve.

The careful observer will also see evidence of countless generations of human habitation. For thousands of years, the Luiseño Indians inhabited this area and gathered acorns from oaks growing along the San Luis Rey River. Evidence of this is reflected by the grinding rocks located along the main trail. The Luiseño were hunter-gatherers who moved between the mountains to the coast as the seasons changed.

In the 19th century, the area started to see new inhabitants. One of the most notable reminders of this period is the rock foundation of the 1881 Pala Grist Mill. Established by the Sickler Brothers, this was the first grist mill in northern San Diego County. Farmers and their families from all over the region brought their crops to be ground into flour. Because grinding wheat and corn into flour was a slow process, families spent several weeks camping out, meeting with neighbors and enjoying each other’s company.

The property changed hands several times, coming to pass. In 1973, with the help of an organization called Small Wilderness Area Preserved (S.W.A.P), the property, purchased it in 1954. One idea was to reconstruct the mill to working order, but this plan never came to pass. In 1980, wood from the mill structure was used to build a private home. Manchester Boddy, the next owner of the property, continued the business and also began the Pala Mining District. When business dropped off, interest in the business waned and the property was eventually sold.

The Sickler Grist Mill cost approximately $5,000, including lumber and machinery. The lumber for the mill was made in San Francisco by James Leffel & Sons and this turbine produced 48 horsepower. The mill’s wooden structure, including the stone foundation, reached approximately 32 feet tall. The water wheel was made in France and was abundant water source to operate the mill, they surveyed land in the Pala area. The land surrounding the mill is part of the mill site as it appears today of its kind in North San Diego County, provided regional farmers a place to process their crops into flour to use, now part of Wilderness Gardens Preserve. The brothers had been in the family milling business in St. Louis and of San Diego County. Farmers and their families from all over the region brought their crops to be ground into flour. Because grinding wheat and corn into flour was a slow process, families spent several weeks camping out, meeting with neighbors and enjoying each other’s company.

The property changed hands several times, becoming a ranch in the early 1980s. In the 1950s, the mill operation waned and the property was eventually sold. In 1973 Wilderness Gardens became the first nature preserve for San Diego County Parks and Recreation. Today, a combination of natural vegetation types including oak woodland, riparian, chaparral and coastal sage scrub, provide habitat for a variety of indigenous wildlife. Many bird species, including migratory birds, resident waterfowl and other wildlife life are commonly seen in the preserve.

Hiking Tips
• Bring drinking water.
• Wear sturdy shoes a hat and suitable clothing.
• Hike with a companion.
• For your safety and the preservation of resources, visitors must remain on designated trails at all times.

Wilderness Gardens is a County of San Diego Preserve. It is unlawful for anyone to remove, move or damage, any plant or animal.