



# A California Love Story

*When native plants become the muse*

BY LIV O'KEEFFE

The Gottlieb Native Garden is here to seduce you. Backed by a multimedia platform of art, books, a website, and events, the California native garden of Susan and Dan Gottlieb is now a brand, engineered to lure you into a love affair with native plants and animals.

"You protect what you love," she says of the motivation behind her approach.

A decade ago, the Gottliebs opened the G2 Gallery in Venice to share the work of nature photographers. "We opened the gallery to open the conversation," Susan recalls. In just a few years, she watched her friends and clients transform. "By listening to the artists who are

conservationists themselves, our customers really learned about what they were looking at and the importance of it."

Gottlieb, a former nurse, recalls her own moment of insight back in the early '90s. Following the work to save Mono Lake, she was inspired to create a water conservation garden. "But the more I learned about the connection between native plants and the survival of native wildlife, the more I realized it wasn't just about using drought-tolerant plants to conserve water, it was about using native plants to preserve native wildlife," she explains.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF  
SUSAN GOTTLIEB

The G2 Gallery in Venice enabled the Gottliebs to donate more than \$1 million in art sales and in-kind donations to non-profit organizations during the gallery's 10-year run.



## The Gottlieb Native Garden

At the height of G2's success, Susan decided to close the gallery so she could focus full time on the garden. Recently, she invited universities, researchers, and interested individuals to her home to pursue special projects.

Today, Peter Kareiva, head of UCLA's Institute of the Environment and Sustainability, Lisa Tell, hummingbird researcher for UC Davis, and Eric Strauss, who runs Loyola Marymount's Center for Urban Resilience, are among the environmentalists using the Gottlieb Native Garden as a living laboratory.



"I don't know if it was Susan's background as a nurse, but she had an early vision for what California needed well before people started to realize that we need to take care of our planet," says Tell.

With more than 200 native plant species, the stunning canyon garden takes visitors from a large patio busy with hummingbirds, through paths of sage, lupine, and coyote brush, and down a rustic hillside path surrounded by toyon, coffee berry, quail bush, native succulents, oaks, and much more. Wildlife cameras on the property have captured visitors such as deer, bobcats, foxes and owls.

"The Gottlieb garden provides an extraordinary example of what is possible in an urban context," says Strauss. "The site has great historic ecological value that has been restored thanks to the commitment to native plants and a management strategy that facilitates biodiversity."

### Going to print

Working with publicist Diane Shader Smith and the late environmental journalist Mallory Smith, Gottlieb published *The Gottlieb Native Garden: A California Love Story* in 2016 through the National Wildlife Federation. Hoping to further extend the reach of her garden to those unable to visit, she also created a website in 2018, [thegottliebnativegarden.com](http://thegottliebnativegarden.com).

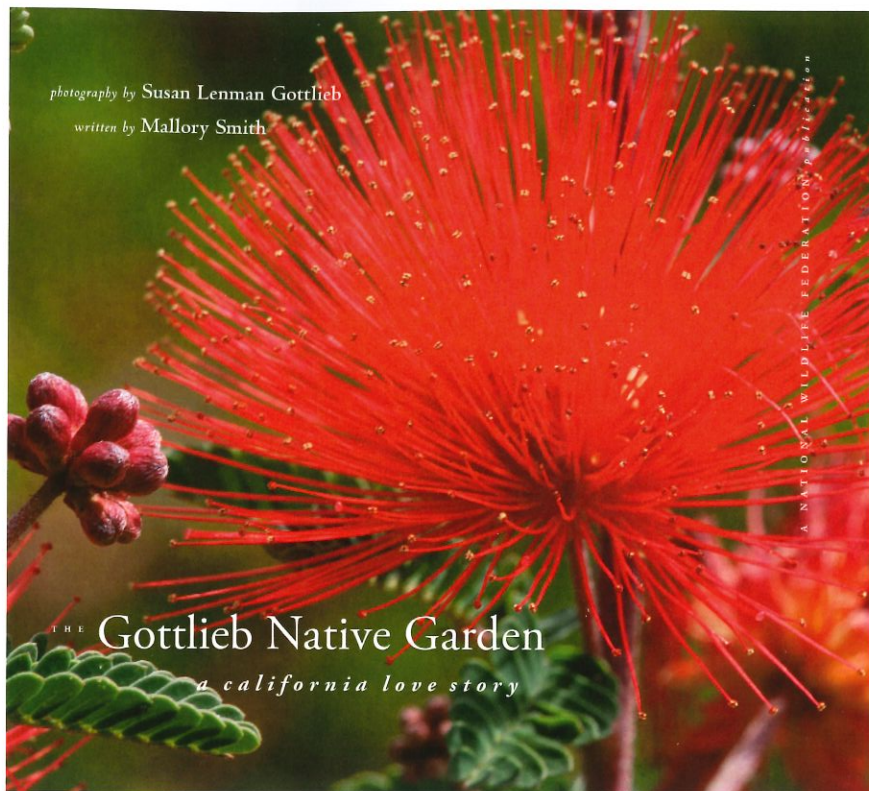
Now, she is launching a publishing entity for beautifully produced environmental books. This spring, G2 Books will publish two hummingbird books and, in the fall of 2019, a book about the wildlife in her garden. Susan has also contributed to the publication of the upcoming CNPS and Badger Press book, *Beauty and the Beast: California Wildflowers and Climate Change*.

"At every turn, she's layering on another way to reach people," says Shader Smith. "Not any of this is for profit, as she underwrites the material, donates her time, and opens her home to those wanting to work in her garden."

### A lasting impression

Soon, Californians will learn about a rare and newly discovered monardella, named in honor of Susan. Dan Gottlieb, the man who has made much of these endeavors possible, wanted to honor his wife's work by securing the naming rights in a special CNPS auction to benefit native plant conservation.

Susan explains her passion for native plants: "Not only are they beautiful, they are intelligent. They've evolved to survive and thrive in harsh conditions, even fire. This is our history – our heritage. This is our California story."



Susan Gottlieb has distributed her first book in both the U.S. and Canada, including her donation of more than 1,000 books to the attendees of the CNPS 2018 Conservation Conference.



Above: Thousands of Californians visit The Gottlieb Garden each year.

Left: Susan Gottlieb