



Reasons to visit Rancho Los Alamitos Historic Ranch and Gardens

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photos by Cristina Salvador Klenz

Like The Huntington and Descanso and Lotusland, [Rancho Los Alamitos](#) was once an estate. But what makes The Rancho my favorite of these four Southern California estates turned into public gardens is its modest size and its agricultural heritage. It's like the place your farm-loving grandmother might have created for her family--if she'd been born a little earlier and a little wealthier.

Here, for instance, is what the ranch house--an early 19th century adobe--looks like. Looks comfortable rather than imposing, wouldn't you say? Who couldn't imagine living here?



I drove to Long Beach recently to get a peek at the Rancho's new state-of-the-art educational center which is being shaped out of the old barn. It will be open to the public in 2012. The barn, if you haven't been to the Rancho in awhile, is not where you're used to seeing it. It was moved once in 1968 but is now back in its original location. Watching this move was hair-raising said executive director Pamela Seager. But all went smoothly. [The slide show](#) documenting the process gives you a feel for what that entailed and why Seager was nervous.

Visiting the Rancho again reminded me, once again, of how much I love the place. So, on the chance you've never been there or haven't been in a long time, let me share some photos that might make you want to remedy that.



The above photo is of the massive Moreton bay fig (*Ficus marcophylla*) you get a hint of in the previous shot. The tree was planted around 1887 and has an *above-ground* root system 50-60 feet across and a canopy spread of 120 feet or so.





The three photos above are from the Cactus Garden, my favorite section. If it reminds you of the cactus garden at The Huntington, there's a good reason. William Hertrich, the horticulturist who designed the Huntington Estate gardens, helped Florence Bixby, the last homeowner of The Rancho, create this section.



This is the grape arbor--a pleasant path that parallels the tennis courts and leads to the Cactus Garden. A modest reminder that juxtaposing edibles and ornamentals is not such a new thing. Artichokes, inherently ornamental, line one side of the walk as they have from Bixby's time. Grape vines crawl up and over the pergola, and climbing roses rise to meet them from the opposite side.



Above is the Geranium Walk, named for the [*Pelargoniums*](#) in pots that have always graced the wall of this pleasant walk shaded by California pepper trees ([*Schinus molle*](#)). This section of the garden was designed by [Florence Yoch](#), the noted Pasadena landscape designer.

At the end of this walk, you step down into a small rose garden, and then, if you turn back in the direction from which you came, you pass through a wonderful allee--my second favorite part of the garden and a very close second at that.

Below is how the path looked last fall. Now, imagine what those crape myrtles might look in glorious full bloom which they are right now. (And is it my imagination or is this the best year in recent memory for [*Lagerstroemia*](#)?)



Cristina sent dozens more photos just as fine but these should suffice to give you a feel for [The Rancho](#). Lovely place to wander on a summer's day.