

# 2024 LANDSCAPE X SYMPOSIUM

Saturday, 8/24

Landscape X Culture X Community

NCC24-010 The Gardens at Lake Merritt – A  
Public-Nonprofit-Art-Community Collaboration  
(1.25 PDH, LA CES/HSW)

Event Type: Field Session  
Time: 1:00 pm - 2:45 pm  
Capacity: 35

Join us for a tour of the Gardens at Lake Merritt, a public 7.5-acre collection of themed gardens in the heart of Lakeside Park in downtown Oakland.



## Panelists



### Justin Richardson, PLA, ASLA, LEED GA | GLS Landscape | Architecture

Justin Richardson is a landscape architect with a primary focus on urban projects in the Bay Area. His daily bicycle commute passes by the Gardens at Lake Merritt, a public space in which Justin has volunteered since 2015, including having served on the board of its nonprofit stewardship organization Friends of the Gardens at Lake Merritt. Satisfying his interest in the intersection of politics and landscape architecture, Justin serves as Northern California representative to the California Council of ASLA (CCASLA) to track bills in the State Legislature that impact the profession; and he currently serves as Treasurer for the Green Party of California.



### Jenifer Azulay | Volunteer Coordinator at The Gardens at Lake Merritt

Jenifer Azulay has been the Volunteer Coordinator at The Gardens at Lake Merritt since 2022. She has a genuine passion for community land stewardship and loves creating equitable, accessible opportunities for Oakland residents to become a part of the space/community. Her role ranges from welcoming single volunteers at regularly scheduled work days to hosting corporate/affinity/community groups of upwards of 175 people, all with the intention of fostering connection and cultivating the beauty and magic that come from collaborative endeavors.



### John Tsutakawa | Rock Garden Planner and Organizer

John Tsutakawa has been an avid rock gardener for 25 years. He has been involved in the Gardens at Lake Merritt since 2020. He served on the board for the Friends of the Gardens at Lake Merritt for 4 years. Prior to this, he was a volunteer at the San Francisco Botanical Garden volunteer nursery for 20 years where he learned about growing alpine plants. In 2020, John planned the Rock Garden at Lake Merritt as a demonstration garden. It was completed in January of 2021 through the efforts of over 30 volunteers and several city staff. The rock garden has 13 troughs and a center crevice garden. It contains many alpine and rock garden plants that do well in the San Francisco Bay Area.

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## Session Outline

The panelists will provide a historical overview of Lakeside Park and the Gardens at Lake Merritt. Then, we will proceed on a walking tour of the various themed gardens within and discuss key features along the way. We will talk about arrangements and entities that collaborated to create the spaces; evolving systems for stewardship of the Gardens now and in the future; and why this is an important environmental and cultural community resource.

The themed gardens we will see include the Bonsai Garden, Community Edible Garden, Japanese Garden, Mediterranean Garden, Palmetum, Rhododendron Garden, Sensory Garden, Succulent Garden, Oakland-Fukuoku Sister City Association Garden (The Torii Gate Garden), Bay Friendly Garden, Pollinator Gardens, Dahlia Garden, and Alpine Rock Garden, among others.

## Learning Outcomes

Learn about frameworks for collaborative stewardship of public space and how change is managed in the Gardens. Witness the successes and understand the challenges of this model. Gain an awareness of the many community organizations and constituencies that use the space.

## Guided Questions

1. How have the dynamics of the Gardens at Lake Merritt changed from the 1950's up to today?
2. How are maintenance roles and tasks divided between City staff and volunteers?
3. What is the relationship between the gardens and the Lakeside Garden Center building? How could this relationship be improved?