

The Encinitas Community Garden won the *Excellence in Environmental Stewardship* Award in the Nonprofit category for 2023. This award, presented by the City of Encinitas Environmental Commission, recognizes their commitment to sustainable urban food production and community building.

Gordon Smith started his journey to bring a community garden to Encinitas, the first of its kind in the city. As president of the garden, he still plays a pivotal role in nurturing this green oasis with a board of dedicated, volunteer members. Their passion for cultivating both plants and community spirit is evident in their efforts. The garden is a place where learning blossoms alongside the crops helping members grow environmentally, sustainably produced food. The community garden values transparency, honesty, diversity, and mutual respect in its operation.

Building the raised-bed plots was spearheaded by board member Doug Long and volunteers. On opening day, then mayor, now Senator Catherine Blakespear, helped cut the ribbon. A key value of the garden is water conservation with irrigation timers on each plot and rainwater captured on-site for use. The 120 plots are leased annually for a small fee and all have organic soil. Synthetic pesticides and fertilizers are prohibited. A large compost with plant material for gardeners' use helps minimize waste reduction. An on-site greenhouse is provided to start plants from seed until they are hearty enough to grow in the ground. Harvested surplus vegetables are deposited in a plastic receptacle picked up by the nonprofit Healthy Day Partners which distributes to food insecure populations. The most important part of the nonprofit's mission is the supportive community it has created where neighbors can share tools, skills, and inspiration. "During the pandemic," Smith said, "the garden was a refuge from Covid isolation. We maintained the distancing protocol but it was a welcome haven for our members."

Walk into the garden, no matter the season, you will see vegetables and fruits in abundance. As the gardeners connect with the land, growing their own food not only helps them economically, they become hopeful, confident, and healthy.





