



PRESS RELEASE  
For Immediate Release

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## Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens Celebrates 60 Years

*A three-day celebration of history, community, and a "47-acre Flowerland"*



**FORT BRAGG, CA – April 29, 2026** — Sixty years ago, the Gardens began with a simple but ambitious idea... a flower-filled landscape for the people, stretching all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Now, you are invited to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the grand opening of the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens with a three-day celebration taking place May 6, 7, and 8.

"Retro Days" honors the Gardens' roots with a nostalgic look back, special pricing, and family-friendly activities set against the spectacular coastal landscape. During the celebration, admission will be just \$1, with \$1 ice

cream scoops at Rhody's Garden Café. Enter daily drawings upon arrival for a chance to win Gardens swag, memberships, and admission tickets.

### A Garden Begins with a Vision

Founded in 1961 by Ernest Schoefer, his wife Betty, and their friend Stan Ledarsky, the Gardens grew from a shared vision into a hands-on labor of love. Ernest, a retired landscape nurseryman who once operated the largest nursery in the San Fernando Valley, spent years searching for the ideal site before assembling five parcels along the Mendocino Coast. He chose the location for its rich soil, ample water, and temperate coastal climate, ideal for rhododendrons and other ornamental plants.

Working long days, often more than twelve hours, he transformed the rugged property with windbreaks, irrigation systems, and miles of trails woven through floral landscapes.

The Schoefer's daughter, Marilyn Wagner, who still resides on the Mendocino Coast, recalls those early days vividly. "During November and December 1961, Father designed the layout of the Gardens and began the backbreaking process of clearing land covered in briars and jungle-like overgrowth," she said. "In the following year, he planted rhododendrons and nurtured native flowers." Reflecting on his determination, she added, "At sixty years young, he had to get going before his unbelievable stamina slowed."



When the Gardens opened to the public on May 6, 1966, the experience was simple and personal. Visitors signed in beneath a bright yellow umbrella, with hand-drawn arrows guiding them toward the Cliff House overlooking the ocean. Admission was \$1 for adults and 50¢ for children.

A few years later, the gift shop was completed. Betty curated a thoughtful collection of art, imports, and locally crafted goods that helped sustain the Gardens and restore the farmhouse where the founders lived. Known for her wide-brimmed hats and warm presence, she helped shape the experience from the very beginning.

Attendance quickly grew from 4,000 visitors in the first year to 18,000 by year four, as word spread about this unique “Flowerland to the Sea.”

### **A Living Legacy**

Over six decades, the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens has become a beloved destination and a community hub known for its coastal setting, diverse plant collections, and commitment to fostering a deeper connection with nature. That founding spirit still carries through today with our Giving Garden Program, ongoing conservation efforts, Nature Walks, and Education Program.

Be a part of the Gardens’ story. Join us for Retro Days, May 6 through 8, to explore the 47-acre landscape and reflect on a place that began as a retirement dream and continues to grow with each generation. For more information, visit [www.gardenbythesea.org](http://www.gardenbythesea.org).

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### **About the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens**

Nestled along the breathtaking Northern California coastline, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens is a nationally recognized nonprofit public garden. Our mission is to engage and enrich lives by conserving plants in harmony with our coastal ecosystems while preserving public access to the coast. Through educational programs, conservation efforts, and immersive experiences in nature, we serve our community while inspiring environmental stewardship. We are home to diverse plant collections, stunning landscapes, and a passionate community of visitors, volunteers, and members.

We recognize with humility that the land we steward is the ancestral land of the Northern Pomo People. As stewards of this land, we commit to caring for it with respect—for those who came before us, those who walk it now, and those yet to come.

[www.gardenbythesea.org](http://www.gardenbythesea.org) | 707-964-4352 | 18220 North Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437