

## JANUARY PROGRAM RECAP • GARDEN SHARE • RBLS EVENT

On January 11 the SCHS welcomed author Naomi Hirahara who spoke to us about Japanese American influences on L.A. gardening history, from the past to the present. Her program drew heavily on her own research and her book: *Green Makers: Japanese American Gardeners in Southern California*.



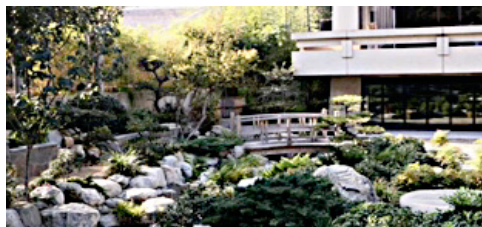
*Japanese American Gardeners in Southern California.*

As early as the late 1800s, immigrant Japanese worked as gardeners in California, living in boarding houses that were gateways to employment. They received training into the profession as more established gardeners needed workers. During the Depression, the League of Southern California Japanese Gardeners was formed to support members trying to sustain their livelihoods. By the mid-1900s, and before World War II, one in three Japanese American men in SoCal were gardeners, a number that dropped to one in ten post-war.

During WWII, while Japanese American families were interned at Manzanar and elsewhere, some of those from the nursery profession used their contacts to solicit plant donations and establish gardens. Several camps created Victory Gardens and other landscaped spaces where detainees could find respite in nature.

After the war, many of those in the gardening profession had to rebuild their lives and found work doing residential landscaping for soldiers settling into new

homes under the GI Bill. As the gardeners' ranks grew, so did support businesses, such as gas stations fueling their trucks, car dealers selling trucks, insurance agents, etc. Opportunities developed for the next generations to enter other professions, and by the 1960s this transitional aspect of employment led to the demise of the Japanese American gardener, creating an opening for new immigrants from Latin American countries and elsewhere. There are still a few family-owned nurseries scattered throughout L.A. today, as well as growers and sellers operating out of the downtown flower market.



*Photos courtesy of speaker.*

During the peak years of the profession, many of the gardeners were also cultural ambassadors, creating Japanese-style gardens in L.A. communities, and which are still in existence today. Hirahara suggested the James Irvine Japanese Garden in Little Tokyo at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center as an excellent example to visit.

Drawing on her personal history and her father's work as a gardener, Hirahara began writing the Mas Arai mystery books in the early 2000s, which feature an Altadena gardener who solves crimes, and for which she won an Edgar Award.

In addition to sharing her personal story and this significant part of L.A. gardening history, Hirahara answered audience questions and generously donated a number of her mystery books as door prizes for several lucky attendees.

Sabine Steinmetz

*Link here to see entire program on our YouTube channel:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8XbHiHzOts>

### SCHS MONTHLY GARDEN SHARE

*Keep your chore list light now and save some energy for spring!*

- Finish winter rose pruning - now.
- Plant cool season veggies and annuals, and don't forget to mulch.
- Start your deciduous fruit trees and citrus on a feeding schedule.
- Take advantage of the winter rains and sow some more wildflowers!
- Keep bird baths and other water features clean and refreshed to hinder mosquito breeding.
- Schedule a check-up for your tools and do any maintenance before spring is upon us in full force!

*Slowly ease back into a routine, a bit at a time will get it done.*

Sabine Steinmetz

## SCHS RUTH BORUN LECTURE SERIES - 2024 PROGRAM



**BRIAN KEMBLE**  
Curator at the Ruth Bancroft Garden

**SAVE THE DATE**

**Friday, April 12, 2024**  
at the Blinn House, Pasadena



REGISTRATION INFORMATION TO BE POSTED SOON AT [WWW.SOCALHORT.ORG](http://WWW.SOCALHORT.ORG)

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