

PRESERVING HISTORY AT THE HOTEL DEL MONTE ARIZONA GARDEN

The main site of Naval Support Activity Monterey (NSAM), home of the Naval Postgraduate School, encompasses the historic Hotel Del Monte and grounds. When the Navy bought the property in the 1940's, it assumed responsibility for a national treasure. The NSAM Environmental Division is intricately involved in maintaining these resources.



A group of Sailors, family members, and gardeners gathered recently to spruce up the historic "Arizona Garden" on NSA Monterey.

This Arizona Garden dates back to the early 1880's, when the property was originally developed as the world-class Hotel Del Monte resort. Rudolph Ulrich was hired as Head Gardener and set out to design and oversee the installation of a series of themed gardens throughout the hotel grounds. The most exotic garden was the Arizona Garden, laid out in a formal design and filled with cacti and succulents from Arizona and northern Mexico. At that time, plant collectors simply went into the wild and dug up what they wanted. Ulrich's first trip to the desert resulted in four railroad box car-loads of plants, including saguaro and barrel cacti, two striking specimen plants still seen in the garden today. The garden underwent a full refurbishment in 1993-1995 by the (now defunct) Friends of the Arizona Garden, a group of dedicated and visionary students, staff, and community members.

NSAM's Todd Wills recently requested and received a modest National Public Lands Day grant to purchase replacement plants and soil additives for the garden. About 35 volunteers showed up to pull weeds, reset serpentine rock edging, and plant 50 new cacti and other succulents that were purchased at a local nursery. Todd was pleasantly surprised by the turnout. "We really thought there'd only be about eight of us, maybe," he said. "This is really nice to have so many people willing to help." Volunteers included Naval Postgraduate School students and their spouses, Sailors attached to NSAM, and two generous ladies from the Historic Gardening League.

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Above: Hotel Del Monte Arizona Garden, Isaiah Taber, 1895. Courtesy of Naval Postgraduate School, Dudley Knox Library.

Below Left: Hotel Del Monte Arizona Garden, ca 1926-1940. Branson Decou painted lantern slide. Courtesy of Special Collections, UC Santa Cruz.

Below Right: The Arizona Garden today. The Navy takes its responsibility for stewarding cultural resources such as this historic garden very seriously. This sometimes means taking advantage of nontraditional resources, such as the most recent National Public Lands Day event that relied on volunteers to refresh the garden.

