

Mexico: A Celebration of Plants & Culture

2023 IDEA Project





About Naples Botanical Garden

- Naples Botanical Garden conserves the plants and habitats of the tropics, cultivates beauty, offers knowledge, and inspires the protection of nature.
- 170 acres, including 90 acres of managed natural areas
- ~200 staff



We had another project in mind for the IDEA cohort, but Hurricane Ian on September 28, 2022, necessitated a change of plans.

As our community began to put itself back together post-hurricane, the year of exhibits and programming we had been planning took on new significance. Given the relationships we had begun to develop in the planning of this year, we realized our 2022-23 annual theme, *Mexico: A Celebration of Plants & Culture*, was our IDEA project.

Our founders designed this garden with the idea of transporting visitors to different lands, but until this point, we had never celebrated plants through the lens of culture. At the same time, our visitor demographics did not reflect those of the community—29% Hispanic or Latino. About 53% of the students in our school district are Hispanic and about 42% speak Spanish at home.

The reasons for celebrating Mexico at Naples Botanical Garden are numerous.



Mexico is the birthplace of some of the world's most important agricultural crops.

As the crow flies, Naples is closer to the Yucatán Peninsula than some cities in the Florida panhandle.

We have a lot in common botanically: South Florida and the Yucatán Peninsula are the same ecological region type (Tropical Wet Forest).

Mexico is mega-diverse. About 10% of the world's flora is in Mexico, placing it among the top 10 largest floras on the planet.

Plants of Mexican origin are already well represented in our collection: ~1900 items over 530 taxa. This theme gave direction for new acquisitions.



Relationship-building and reaching out to trusted advisors was key to building authenticity into our efforts.



Consulado General de México en Miami

May 12, 2022 · Coral Gables · 🌐

MEXICO: A CELEBRATION OF PLANTS & CULTURE

A pleasure to meet with CEOs @donnamcginnis @naplesbotanical & Andrés Paz @adventureswfl to discuss our collaboration in "Mexico: A Celebration of Plants & Culture", on the occasion of #DiadelosMuertos family festival this coming November 5-6, 2022.

— at Consulado General de México en Miami.

We celebrated Mexico through a new festival and exhibits throughout the year, as well as new programming and our Café menu. We also affirmed our commitment to multilingual signage and materials. A summary of exhibits and programming is on the following pages.



La Calavera Catrina

- November 1, 2022-January 29, 2023
- Traveling exhibition from Denver Botanic Garden
- 8 fiberglass sculptures created by artist Ricardo Soltero with companion exhibit in our café
- Each *Catrina* sculpture highlights different aspects of Mexican culture and Día de los Muertos celebrations.



Artist Ricardo Soltero
signing autographs for
young fans at Naples
Botanical Garden,
December 2022.





Día de los Muertos Celebration

- November 5-6, 2023 – our first weekend open post-Hurricane Ian
- A weekend-long family-friendly celebration featuring music, dance, family activities, a community *ofrenda*, memory wall, and sunset-viewing of *La Calavera Catrina*
- Weekend attendance: 3,160 (attendance on same weekend in 2021: 2,135)
- Will be an annual event going forward



CELEBRATE the memory of a loved one
by writing a message or recollection
on a butterfly and adding it to the
Community Memory Wall.



CELEBRA el recuerdo de un ser querido
escribiendo un mensaje o un recuerdo
en una mariposa y agregándolo al Muro
de la Memoria de la Comunidad.

Millions of monarchs journey thousands of miles every year
to leave colder climates in North America and overwinter in
the warmth of central Mexico. Their arrival in Mexico
coincides with the celebration of *Día de los Muertos* and
signifies the spiritual return of deceased loved ones.

Millones de mariposas monarca viajan miles de millas cada
año dejando atrás los climas más fríos de América del Norte
para pasar el invierno en la calidez de México central.
Su llegada a México coincide con la celebración del
Día de los Muertos y simboliza el regreso espiritual
de los seres queridos fallecidos.





Naples Botanical Garden is at Naples Botanical Garden.

October 23, 2022 · Naples ·

...

Guests and Members are invited to be part of the celebration!

Ofrendas – or altars – are an essential part of remembering loved ones during Día de los Muertos.

Honor the memory of a friend or family member by emailing a digital photo of your loved one to ofrenda@naplesgarden.org by Oct. 28.

A digital slideshow of photos will be displayed on a community altar during our Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) Celebration on November 5, 2022, 10am – 7pm & November 6, 2022, 10am – 4pm.

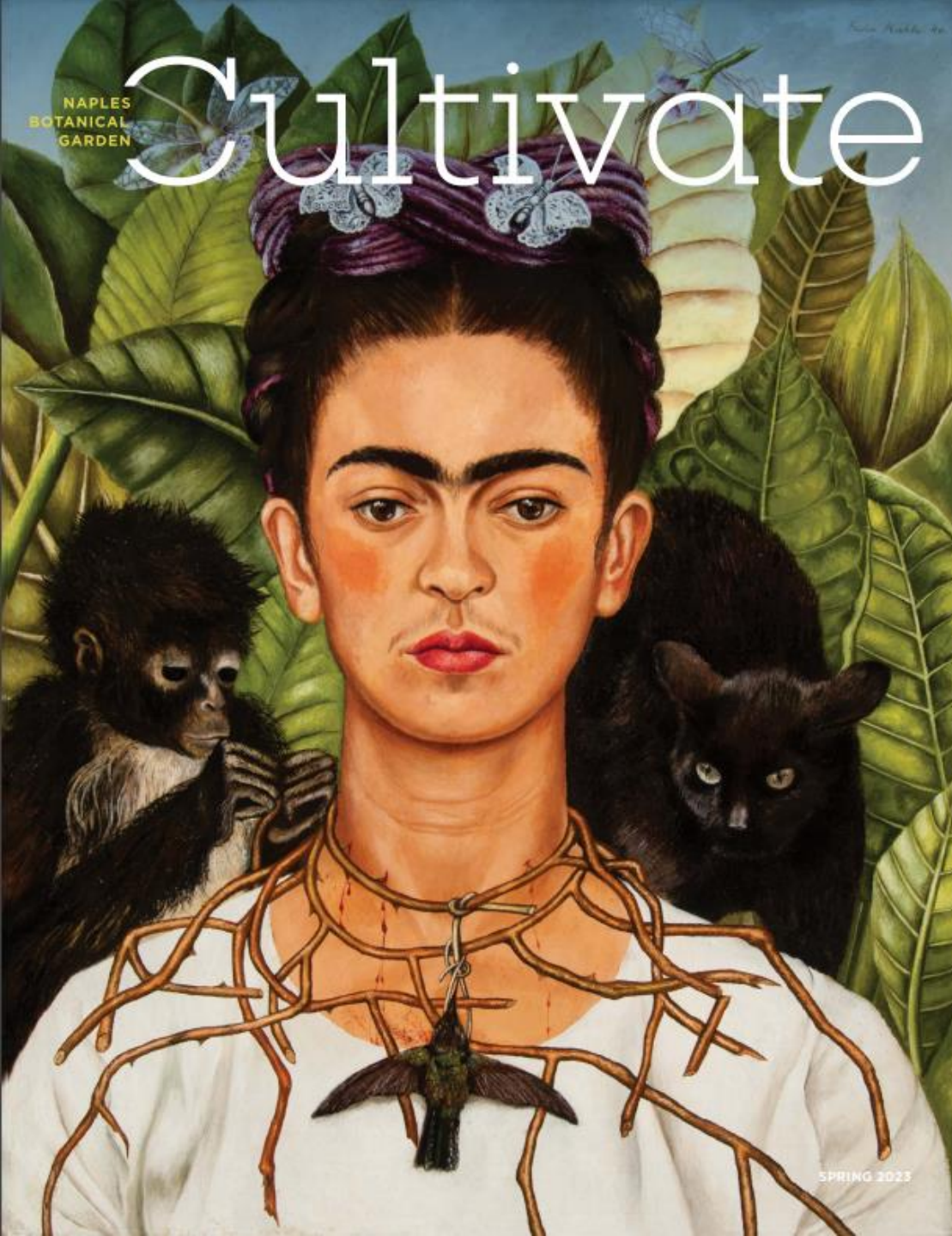


DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

CELEBRATION

NOVEMBER 5 & 6 • 10am-4pm





Frida and her Garden

- January 14, 2023-September 10, 2023
- Exhibit purchased from San Antonio Botanical Garden
- Recreation of *Casa Azul*, Frida Kahlo's longtime home
- Monumental animals depicting those important to Frida
- Exhibit highlights plants of Mexico, plants in Frida's garden, and plants featured in Frida's works
- Article about the exhibit from the Garden's publication *Cultivate* on the following pages



THE MAKING OF AN EXHIBITION

BY JENNIFER REED

Photos by John Eder
and Kristen Kerwin

How we transformed a forested, inaccessible portion of the Garden into an immersive experience

It's February 2022, and a group of Garden employees gathers in a wooded space between the Kapnick Caribbean Garden and the Kapnick Brazilian Garden.

"There is nice sun over here," says Elizabeth Beans, Associate Director of Horticulture, stepping into a pool of light. "We can utilize this space."

Erin Wolfe Bell, Director of Exhibitions & Special Programs, picks her way through the brush, envisioning a serpentine pathway.

"I think we can start curving it here," she says.

Vice President of Horticulture Brian Galligan agrees.

"Imagine all this is gone," he says. "Don't even think about the understory stuff."

The making of *Frida and Her Garden* began more than a year ago with tape measures, spray paint markings, and imagination. The exhibition is our most ambitious art installation to date, requiring the creation of a new display garden. A cross-departmental task force began meeting in November 2021 to determine how to transport visitors to *La Casa Azul*, (The Blue House), the home that served as the refuge and inspiration for Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907-1954).

We had acquired the exhibition from San Antonio Botanical Garden, which had commissioned it. But the architectural pieces and sculptures were only the start. We wanted to make *Frida and Her Garden* our own.

"It's really about telling a story," Bell says. "We've done that with other exhibits, but this one is different."

Venture behind the scenes with us to learn how we created *Frida and Her Garden* and why we spent over a year planning our tribute to the iconic artist.



Top: Horticulture Team members prep beds for new irrigation and plantings. Bottom: The facade and photo niches were eased into place with the help of forklift and crane. Bottom center: Bill Pattison, Special Projects Technician, drills the walls into the exhibition's slab foundation.



PREPARING THE SITE

We generally place large sculptures in the Garden's open vistas. (Think *La Calavera Catrina* in the Scott Florida Garden and *STOCKWORK* in the Kapnick Caribbean Garden.) But *Frida* required a different treatment.

"We went to San Antonio to go see it, and one of our first questions was, 'Gosh, where will we put it?'" remembers Britt Patterson-Weber, Vice President of Education & Interpretation. Unlike other exhibitions, the *Frida* pieces needed to be clustered together. Staff agreed the space between the Brazilian and Caribbean gardens was best because the foundational plants were already in place and because Mexico falls between those two places on the map.

"It was a prime location in the heart of the Garden, but it wasn't previously open to visitors," Bell says.

The exhibition site begins to take shape in December 2022 as the stepped pyramid is positioned into place, walls and niches assembled, and animal statues enlivened with a splash of fresh paint.



Site work began last summer. Plants that were important to the exhibition, such as guava, chocolate, and coffee, would remain in place. Many others needed to be relocated or removed. Beans and Stephen Jurek, Associate Director of Horticulture Maintenance, estimate that horticulturists cleared some 60 to 70 shrubs and moved 16 palm and hardwood trees. They dug a silk floss tree out of its place by the new Evenstad Horticulture Campus, where it interfered with construction, and replanted it in the exhibition area.

Staff added some 30 yards of fill dirt to add elevation and address drainage. They removed existing irrigation and added new lines. They installed electricity, poured concrete pads, and laid new pathways.

"(Horticulture) is involved in all the exhibits, but this is probably the most intense one," Beans says. "The plants are as important as the actual exhibit itself. It's *Frida and Her Garden*. We're in the name."



Erin Wolfe Bell, Director of Exhibitions & Special Programs, and Kristen Kerwin, Exhibitions Coordinator



"(Horticulture) is involved in all the exhibits, but this is probably the most intense one. The plants are as important as the actual exhibit itself."

– Elizabeth Beans, Associate Director of Horticulture

By fall 2022, dozens of plants accumulate in the nursery, prior to being potted or planted at the exhibition site.

SOURCING THE PLANTS

With that in mind, Liz Chehayl, the Brian Holley Curator of Collections, delved into research on Kahlo's work and the plants she featured in it. Starting last fall, she and Director of Collections Nick Ewy scoured nurseries for plants that appear in her paintings, those that reflect Mexico's culture and ecosystems, and other interesting finds that would create the tranquility and beauty Kahlo valued.



"I'm excited to get the cacti," Ewy says. Among their finds were "tree yucca," a towering succulent, and

Mexican fence post cacti, a species that Mexicans use to create living fences. "We'll use those for Frida and then repurpose them in the Foster Succulent Garden or put them in pots and rotate them for display," he says.

Chehayl and Ewy also looked for plants that help tell Kahlo's story, such as "frogfruit," a flowering groundcover chosen for Kahlo's husband, muralist Diego Rivera. He nicknamed himself "the toad-frog."



DISCOVERING THE ARTIST AND HER WORLD

Garden educators have researched and rolled out more than a dozen new experiences all themed around Mexico and Frida Kahlo.

They include tours highlighting Mexican plants, and Dig Deeper programs about Mexican foods, spices, and unique plants, such as cacti and succulents.

The Garden stays open late every Wednesday from February through May for Sunset Wednesdays. For an



Guests may create flower crowns reminiscent of Frida's during Sunset Wednesdays Special Programs on March 22, April 26, and March 24. See page 8 for more details.

additional fee, guests can partake in special group activities, such as making flower crowns reminiscent of Frida Kahlo's.

"I think the programming extends the experience of the exhibit beyond the exhibit," Patterson-Weber says. "You can continue exploring this theme in different ways while you are at the Garden."



In addition to these programs, you don't want to miss Frida After 5, first Fridays through May! More information on page 8 and at naplesgarden.org.

This bird's-eye view of the Frida and Her Garden site, taken while under construction, reveals the exhibition's breadth. Not shown here are the six monumental animal sculptures nestled throughout the Garden.



WHY FRIDA?

If you think it's unusual to spend this amount of time in exhibition planning (preliminary research started three years ago), you are right. But Frida Kahlo seems to cast a spell on her viewers, and we were determined to create something worthy of her legacy. (Discover more about the artist's biography on page 13.)

"I think it's just her striking sense of self," says Patterson-Weber. Kahlo dressed in traditional Mexican attire, even when traveling abroad, and even when photographed for *Vogue* in 1938.

Her self-portraits reflect both excruciating pain and defiant beauty.

"People who know about her and her life see her as a symbol of strength," Patterson-Weber says. The artist had suffered from polio as a child and was in a horrific crash as a young woman.

All the Garden's exhibitions connect to our mission, but Kahlo's ties are especially pronounced.

"I was interested in exploring her through the lens of plants," says Bell. "The Blue House and her personal garden, which is really what we're exploring, was her most rooted place throughout her whole life ... Through turmoil and trouble and tragedy, her

garden was her refuge, and we all can relate to that."

Kahlo's story invites people—even those who don't consider themselves outdoorsy—to explore the natural world.

"The visual arts can make an emotional connection for people that they may not have when looking at a plant in isolation," says Patterson-Weber. "Storytelling is where you make connections with people."

Jennifer Reed is the Garden's Editorial Director.



Some of the sculptures featured in the exhibit.





Visitors to the *Frida and Her Garden* exhibit included Perla Labarthe, left, head of the Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico, as well as Mara Cristina Teresa Romeo de Hentschel (Frida Kahlo's grandniece) and her daughter Mara De Anda Romeo (Frida Kahlo's great-grandniece), pictured above.

ORIGINS: Patricia Cavazos

- February 3, 2023-May 29, 2023
- Inspired by Mexican folk art and her many visits to Frida Kahlo's *Casa Azul*, Orlando-based artist Patricia Cavazos (pictured, right) uses vivid colors and forms to tell stories of the culture and history of her homeland, Mexico, through intricate and abstract textile artwork.



Inside Fogg Cafe's spotlight exhibit through May 29, ORIGINS: Patricia Cavazos, which highlights Aztec culture and mythology through intricate, abstract textile artwork. *Jonah Hinebaugh/Naples Daily News*



Mexico as Muse by Isabelle de Borchgrave

- April 29, 2023-June 11, 2023
- Inspired by a trip to Mexico and Frida Kahlo's home, *Casa Azul*, Belgian artist Isabelle de Borchgrave explores iconic symbols and traditions in Mexican culture. Borchgrave's works are constructed entirely from paper, playfully inviting the viewer to look deeply at the work as well as the complex ideas they represent.



Programs created for *Mexico: A Celebration of Plants & Culture*

Dig Deeper: A casual cart-based drop-in educational program for adults. Offered daily with admission.

- Botany of Brewing: Mezcal & Tequila
- Cacti, Succulents, & Spines, Oh My!
- Feeling Hot! Edible Pepper Varieties
- Monarchs of Mexico
- Oh Wow, Cacao
- The Buzz South of the Border
- The Spice is Right – Spices of Mexico
- Spice Series – Achiote

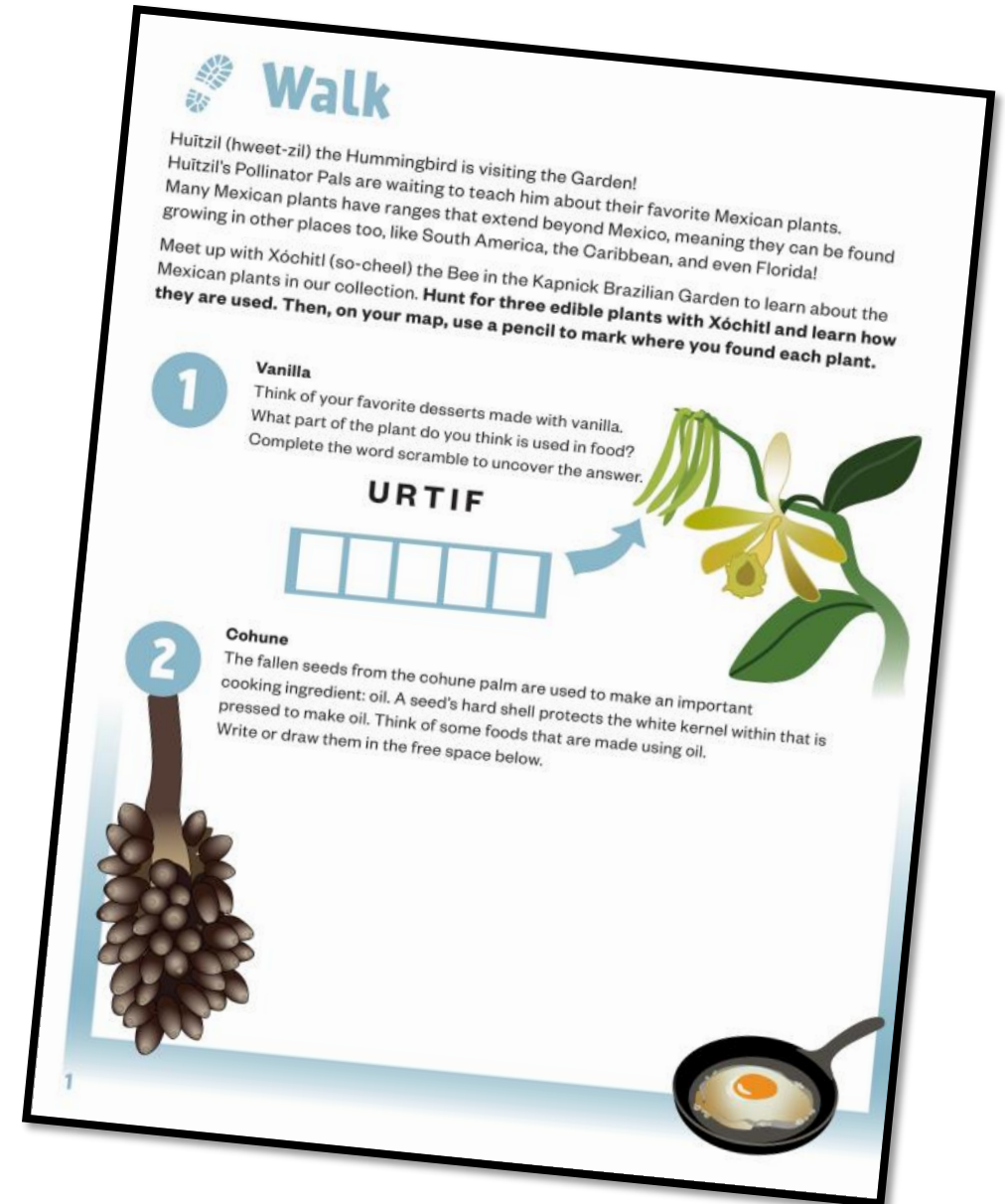
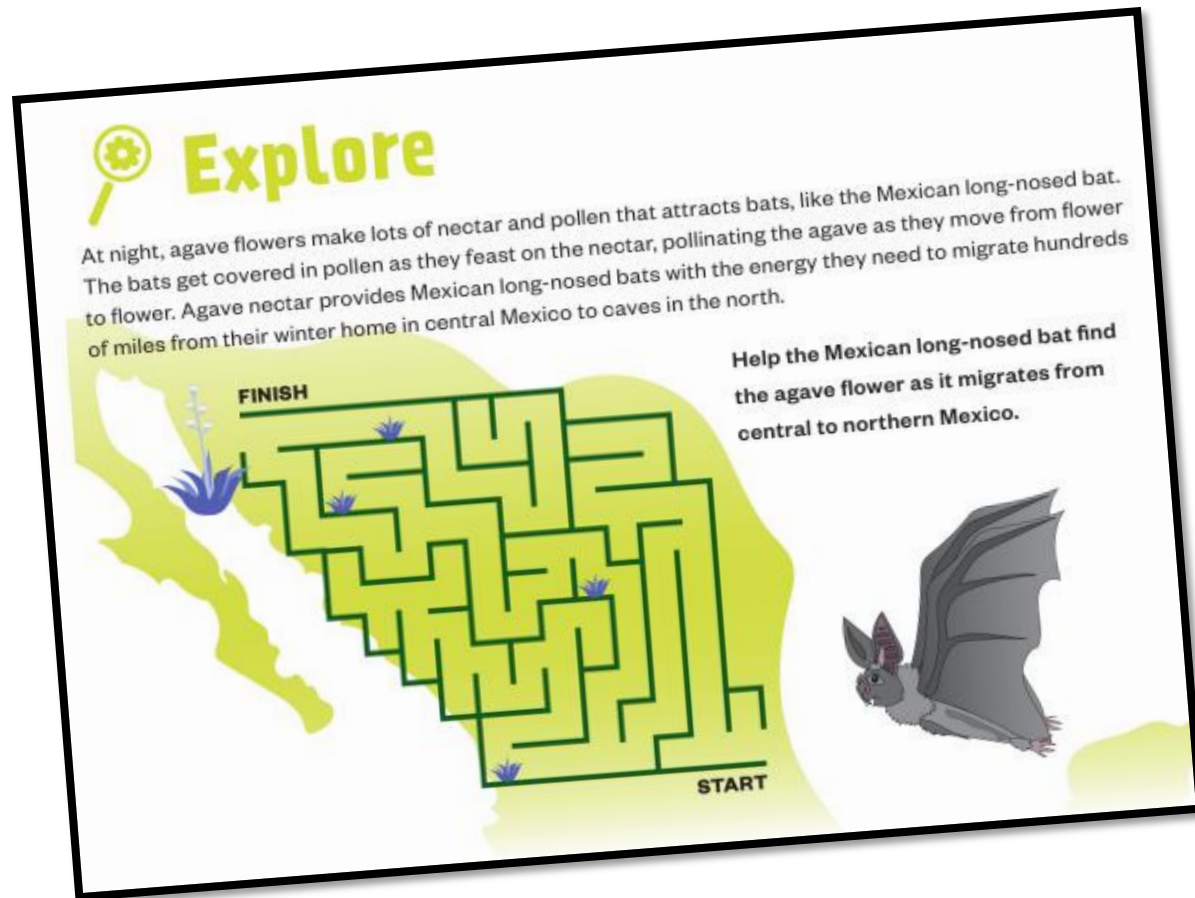
Tours:

- Cacti & Succulents
- Comida y Cultura
- Art & Special Exhibitions
- Mexico: A Celebration of Plants & Culture
- Self-guided Audio Tour, Mexico: A Celebration of Plants & Culture



Programs created for *Mexico: A Celebration of Plants & Culture*

The Garden offers a self-guided activities for families in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. This year's activities emphasized the Mexico theme.



School Groups

A special field trip program was offered this year, “Flora of Frida and Mexico” for K-5th graders. Second graders in this program, at right, were surprised by Frida Kahlo’s family members outside the exhibit this spring.

An unanticipated result of the *Frida and Her Garden* exhibit was a dramatic uptick in high school groups wishing to visit the Garden. As students get older and their schedules get more complex, they take fewer field trips. However, a number of high school art and Spanish teachers brought their classes to the Garden this year. This is an audience we have traditionally not seen much of at the Garden.



Frida After 5

The *Frida and Her Garden* exhibit inspired us to offer extended hours on select Fridays during season—*Frida After 5*. These family-friendly events provided the opportunity to see the exhibit, as well as enjoy festive music, dance, and themed specials in the Café. The March event featured live performances by Opera Naples resident artists of selections from the opera *Frida*, including a special performance by world-renowned soprano Catalina Cuervo (pictured, in red), who has been the leading performer nationwide in the title role of *Frida* since its revival in 2015.

Garden guests enjoying Opera Naples at Frida After 5.





Frida Task Force

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Britt Patterson-Weber
Viewed about a minute ago

Shared Documents

Background reading on Frida Kahlo
and Casa AzulBritt Patterson-Weber
Viewed November 9, 2022

Shared Documents

Frida Task Force - May 2022
MeetingBritt Patterson-Weber
Viewed August 18, 2022

Important Dates - Timeline

July 6
July 7
July 12
September 15 - October 15

Frida Kahlo's birthday, 1907, according to her birth certificate
Frida Kahlo changed her last name to Kahlo in 1929, to identify
with the rest of the Mexican population
Date of Frida Kahlo's death, 1955
National Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe
September 15 marks the Independence Day for the entire
Hispanic community. In 1925, Frida Kahlo, Leonora
Kahlo, and Nicanor Parra and other artists celebrated their
Independence Day on September 15 and 16. The celebration
began in Mexico City and spread to other parts of Mexico
in 1926 to mark a 50-day period.
(By the Mexican Day of the Dead)
The celebration of Day of the Dead has roots in ancient
Mesoamerican religious beliefs of indigenous people of Mexico.



Shared Documents

Task Force - September 2021
meeting - key datesBritt Patterson-Weber
Viewed July 14, 2022Frida Task Force
November 17, 2021

Shared Documents

Frida Task Force - November 2021
MeetingBritt Patterson-Weber
Viewed July 10, 2022Frida Task Force
September 20, 2021

Shared Documents

Frida Task Force - September 2021
MeetingBritt Patterson-Weber
Viewed July 10, 2022

✕

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collaborate in real-time and
share resources across
Microsoft 365 with your team.

To create such a full year of programming, organization-wide input and buy-in was critical. A year before the season began, we assembled a task force consisting of representatives from every department that met periodically and shared resources in a dedicated SharePoint group. This way, every department received the same information and had the opportunity to share their ideas.



An unexpected outcome of this year of programming was the impact on staff, particularly those of Mexican descent. For example, Avelina Cruz Lopez, Community Relations Coordinator, pictured at left in black, has long celebrated Día de los Muertos at home and took an active role advising on the construction of the community *ofrenda*.

■ FOR SUBSCRIBERS DINING


Mexican cuisine, Frida Kahlo and horticulture: Naples Botanical Garden's hidden gem café



Diana Biederman Naples Daily News
Published 5:01 a.m. ET May 11, 2023 | Updated 8:54 a.m. ET May 11, 2023

Hear this story





 27 Photos

VIEW FULL GALLERY 

Frida Kahlo: a culinary & cultural immersion at Naples Botanical Garden's Fogg Cafe
Taste SWFL's best authentic Mexican food at Naples Botanical Garden's Fogg Cafe during its Frida Kahlo exhibit. You have until September 10 to visit.

The expertise of the Garden's Fogg Café team also received special attention in a recent issue of the *Naples Daily News* (excerpt on following page). What better way to connect people, plants, and culture than through food and beverage?

Throughout the year, Café creations played a starring role in educational programming, festivals, and special events. No previous year has required Garden teams to work so closely together.



Fogg Cafe's team of chefs and servers. Jonah Hinebaugh/Naples Daily News

Recipes rooted in tradition

Fogg's culinary team created a slew of special menu items rooted in traditional Mexican ingredients and cooking techniques that sous chef Lalo Hernandez and Noemi Vazquez grew up with. For Vazquez, cooking was a learning experience gleaned from "the bounty of the land."

Both explained that at a young age, parents bestow recipes passed down by each generation so children remember their roots. Being male or female doesn't matter.

Both chefs hail from central Mexico: He is from Zimapan in Hidalgo; she, Apaseo el Alto in Guanajuato, a state whose highly-regarded heritage for nuanced sauces plays a starring yet subtle role in the café's offerings.

Vazquez's expertise in all things sauce includes specks of salsa roja topping an alote dip. She explained that restraint with the amount is important because sauce can overpower a dish. So too, her sublime marinade for fantastic fish tacos al pastor.

Did *Mexico: A Celebration of Plants & Culture* help diversify our audience? It's tough to say. The impact of Hurricane Ian on our community cannot be understated. Not only was tourism down significantly in the region, but many people are still in recovery mode, more than eight months after the storm.

According to TruTrade data, our Hispanic audience remained essentially the same as last year—about 28% of visitors, which is close to the population in our MSA and more than comparable attractions in the area. What is significant is that our 'Children in Household' visitors increased from 23% to 30% (MSA 24.7%) from last year to this year.

We also heard anecdotally from guests about the impact of seeing their culture reflected in our programming and exhibits. One field trip student gasped when he saw *papel picado* around our information station, telling his guide excitedly, "That's from MY culture!" Another guest thanked us for the "beauty, dignity, and joy" that our Día de los Muertos event brought her family. Others commented on our authenticity, while some thanked us for the introduction to these traditions.



Family visitors at the Día de los Muertos Celebration.

Resources

Naples Botanical Garden Blogs

- [Behind the inspiration for ORIGINS: Patricia Cavazos](#)
- [Frida Kahlo's Extension of Self](#)
- [Telling Frida Kahlo's Story Through the Plants She Loved](#)
- [Agave: The First Spirit of the Americas](#)

Cultivate, Naples Botanical Garden publication, Spring 2023

[“Mexican Cuisine, Frida Kahlo and horticulture: Naples Botanical Garden’s hidden gem café,”](#) *Naples Daily News*, May 11, 2023

[“Mexico: A Celebration of Plants & Culture,”](#) self-guided audio tour (link will be live through September 10, 2023)

To learn more:

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