Seed to Forest — Flourishing at 40

By Jeannie Perales

As Sonoma Botanical Garden prepares to celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2027, I've been reflecting on how far we've come—and how much there is to look forward to.

Our story began in 1987, with founder Jane Davenport Jansen's vision to conserve rare and endangered plants from East Asia. Through decades of botanical exploration and partnerships with esteemed international institutions, including the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UC Berkeley, and the Chinese Academy of Sciences, that vision grew into an internationally significant living collection tucked into the hills of Glen Ellen.

Today, we're building on that legacy, while finding new ways to share the Garden with our neighbors.

When I joined in 2023, we introduced the Museum Model — a simple idea borrowed from museums: combine special exhibitions, art, music and programs to give people new reasons to visit throughout the year.

Our community has responded enthusiastically. Attendance has more than doubled, membership has more than tripled, and our volunteer corps has grown. But what makes me happiest isn't the numbers. It's seeing families exploring the trails, friends gathering for summer concerts, and visitors discovering plants they've never encountered before.

The Garden's reach extends beyond our 63 acres. Each year, we work with nearly 100 local artists, makers and vendors and collaborate with dozens of nonprofits and businesses. These relationships help make the Garden a place where nature, art, culture, and community come together.

This December 10–13, we're introducing *Winter Wonder Lantern Walks,* inviting guests to experience the quiet magic of the Garden after dark. Evenings begin with hot cocoa, spiced cider, wine tasting, and cookies, followed by a guided lantern-lit stroll.

And there's plenty more to come!

Our 40th anniversary season, *From Seed to Forest: Flourishing at Forty,* celebrates our botanical roots while bringing fresh experiences to the Garden. We'll kick off 2027 with *The Bonsai Show: East Meets West!* showcasing bonsai artistry with a special focus on California native trees.

In April, we'll welcome *Origami in the Garden,* a spectacular exhibition of monumental sculptures inspired by Japanese paper folding. These imaginative works will dot the landscape through summer, offering delightful surprises around every bend.

We'll also present *Flora of Asia,* a display of botanical illustrations celebrating our Asian collections. Our much-loved *Acoustic Sunsets* concert series returns, including special *Nihon Nights* featuring Japanese performing arts. Families can look forward to *Sunday Funday* programs and *The Nest*, a nature-based playscape featuring whimsical sculptures of an owl family and quail couple that were created for our 2025 *Winged Wonders* exhibit.

At the heart of it all are the plants. Our commitment to conservation, education, and caring for this extraordinary living collection remains as strong as ever. We're honoring the vision of those who came before us while inviting more people to make the Garden their own.

Forty years after its founding, Sonoma Botanical Garden is flourishing, thanks to the community that surrounds and supports it. I hope you'll join us for this milestone year.

Jeannie Perales is Executive Director of the Sonoma Botanical Garden.

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