



[HOME](#)

[STEWARDSHIP EXCELLENCE](#)

[SCIENCE](#)

[BIODIVERSITY](#)

[STEWARDSHIP PROJECTS](#)

[ABOUT THE CONSERVANCY](#)

[OUR PRINCIPLES AND VALUES](#)

[OUR PARTNERS](#)

[OUR TEAM](#)

[WHERE WE WORK](#)

[IRVINE RANCH](#)

[NATURAL LANDMARKS](#)

[WILDLANDS AND PARKS MAP](#)

[GETTING INVOLVED](#)

[PUBLIC](#)

[PROGRAMS/ACTIVITIES](#)

[VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES](#)

[VOLUNTEER LOGIN](#)

[CAREERS](#)

[KEEPING INFORMED](#)

[NEWS/EVENTS](#)

[NEWSLETTER SIGN UP](#)

[CONTACT US](#)

DISCOVER
the wildlands and parks
on The Irvine Ranch
[CLICK HERE](#)



Harvest Festival to the Rescue

By IRC Volunteer Aleta Walther

Can five minutes in nature really boost self esteem? According to a [study](#) released from the University of Essex, as little as five minutes of a "green activity" such as walking, gardening, cycling or farming can boost mood and self esteem. This is yet another reason to unplug ourselves from our electronic devices and explore nature. IRC and its partners offer a variety of docent-led "green" programs designed to help people relieve stress by connecting them with the great outdoors that's right in our backyards: the Irvine Ranch Natural Landmarks. Whether it's as an outing participant or as an IRC volunteer, bonding with Mother Nature offers healing rewards. IRC volunteer Aleta Walther shares her story about how harvesting seeds at IRC's native seed farm debunked her fears of creepy crawlies and lifted her overall mood.

I volunteered for the Irvine Ranch Conservancy with visions of hiking, biking, and birding. However, a week after completing volunteer training, I was advised by my podiatrist to curtail walking and mountain biking due to plantar fasciitis in my right foot.

Naturally, I was disappointed knowing I was going to miss the wildflower blooms of Loma Ridge, the spring-green hillsides of Santiago Canyon and the downy plumage of the ducklings in Upper Newport Bay.

Alternatively, I assisted with editing the Landmark News where I learned of the Conservancy's initiative to cultivate native seeds for revitalizing about 2,000 acres of the Irvine Ranch Natural Landmarks. Dustin Snow, IRC intern, was recruiting volunteers to harvest seeds from the 22,000 seed-producing shrubs planted on the seed farm earlier this year. The seed farm is located in Orchard Hills, in a low-lying meadow protected by a stand of weather-beaten oak trees.

I considered volunteering for the "Harvest Festival," but balked at the idea of being on my hands and knees among the meadow's creepy crawly, slithering, slimy inhabitants. After all, there are rattlesnakes in Orange County, and don't forget the ticks, flies, corn seed maggots and spiders — big spiders, no doubt.

With my husband offering to protect me from these



minuscule threats, I signed up to pluck lupine and California poppy seeds. A number of native plants in the Irvine Ranch Natural Landmarks have been displaced by overgrazing, wildfires, and invasive exotic species, such as mustard and annual grasses. Each species needs a helping hand to reestablish itself across the landscape.

Upon our arrival, Dustin wrangled us into his truck and we proceeded to venture out to the Orchard Hills area and over its muddy, bumpy roads to the seed farm. It was cool and the foliage was still wet from an early morning rain. Although I wasn't happy about trudging through the mud and tangled lupin, I was pleased to learn that the cool weather reduced our chances of interacting with snakes and many insects.

As the sun moved higher in the sky and the dew evaporated from the foliage, I found myself enjoying the peacefulness of the meadow, punctuated by birdcalls and the wind whistling through the oak trees. The only insects I came across were an occasional honeybee and lots of lady bugs. Such was the case two days later when we assisted with an afternoon harvest.

Alas, my concerns were for naught. The effervescent camaraderie of the other volunteers was contagious and the refreshing experience of being so close to nature was grand. Although not a vigorous physical workout, I highly recommend this activity. Help restore the Natural Landmarks so when you do go hiking you can revel in knowing you helped the meadows, fields, hills and canyons flourish once again.



IRC volunteer Aleta Walther at the native seed farm in Orchard Hills.