



Long Beach Organic Flourishes

By Kirt Ramirez

For 26 years, Long Beach Organic (LBO) has provided community garden plots for residents to grow their own food. Founded by Belmont Shore resident Capt. Charles Moore in 1994, LBO started as one garden but has grown to eight across Long Beach. People from all walks of life and economic backgrounds cultivate healthy fruits and vegetables in pleasant surroundings, without the use of pesticides.

"I love the peace and tranquility of every visit to my plot; I can spend hours pulling weeds or just doing what gardeners do and our COVID world disappears," said LBO gardener Debbie Davis, who has a 10 x 10 plot at the Zaferia Junction Community Garden. "It is solace, a wonderful escape from our crazy world these days."

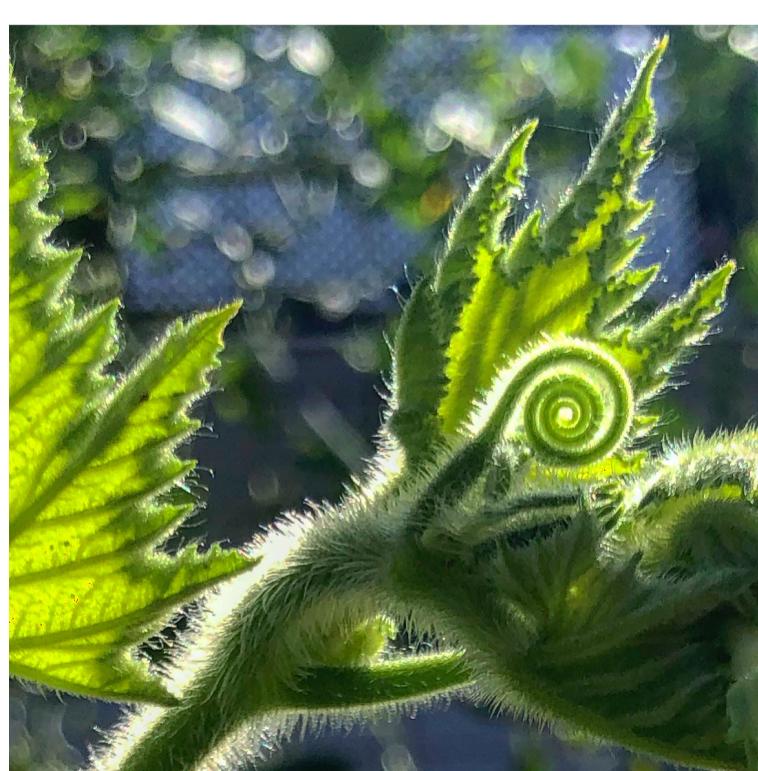
Davis rents an apartment in Bluff Heights and doesn't have enough space outdoors for growing food. Through LBO she raises lots of produce, which right now includes peas, broccoli, cauliflower, beets, cabbage, carrots, herbs, and salad greens.

"I love my garden," Davis said. "And my garden neighbors are so cool – it's great to have a little social interaction in the open air. Long Beach Organic has given so many of us the opportunity to grow our own fresh food with all that we need to do it; it's by far the best thing I have done for myself in years."

There are no plot openings at any of LBO's eight gardens currently, but residents can join a waiting list on the nonprofit's website, explained LBO Garden Director Joe Corso. "The average wait right now is about a year," he said. Plots are on average 10 x 10 feet and gardeners pay \$40 per half-year, plus a \$25 yearly membership fee.

Corso started gardening with LBO in 2005 and then joined its board in 2008. He took the paid position of director in 2010. Corso also is an artist and an accomplished chef.

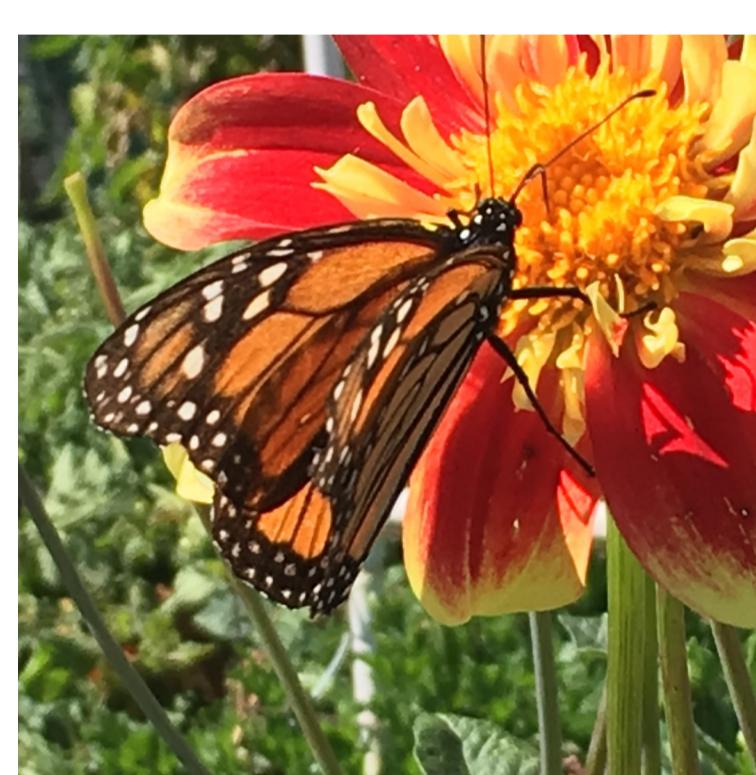
Meanwhile, an LBO "Go Plant Me" fundraiser is coming up. Organic seedlings will be provided at Zaferia Junction at 3709



E. 10th Street from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, March 20. Donations will help with the organization's operating costs.

"We are still working out the details on how to do this with COVID," Corso said. "We will have a pre-order form on our website and online donations. Donors will choose a time slot to pick up their plants. Last year the minimum donation per 6-pack was \$3.00." Various seedlings will be available.

"We are offering a little of everything," Corso said. "March is a great time to plant – it's still cool enough for cabbage, kale, salad greens, and herbs. It's also time to look ahead to tomatoes, peppers, squash, and other warm-season crops. We will be offering a selection of all these."



Corso explained that cool season crops are currently at their peak. "Anything you eat the leaves of – cabbage, Swiss chard, kale, collard greens, lettuce, spinach," he said. "And anything you eat the roots of – radishes, carrots, beets, turnips. Peas and fava beans grow in winter as well."

Two of LBO's gardens have beehives; Zaferia Junction and the South 40 garden at 2813 South Street. The bees are maintained by outside beekeepers, Corso said.

A number of interns earn college credit by helping out at LBO. They prepare fresh items donated by the gardeners as one of their tasks.

"We have expanded our charity garden to provide produce for the Beach Pantry at CSULB," Corso said. "We do a weekly roundup of all the gardens on Thursdays and bring the produce to Zaferia, where it is washed and sorted by the interns. We leave it there for a volunteer to take to the university Friday morning for their weekly drive-through food distribution."

To learn more about LBO, visit www.longbeachorganic.org.

Kirt Ramirez was born in Long Beach but raised in Cypress. He moved to Long Beach about 20 years ago and has lived in Bluff Heights for the last five years. He enjoys walks on the beach and visiting with family and friends.