

“Mary’s Garden” at the Children’s Museum of Sonoma County

1835 W. Steel Lane, Santa Rosa, CA 95403

The Children’s Museum of Sonoma County opened up Mary’s Garden, an educational and interactive outdoor nature garden in June of 2014. Mary, short for the Spanish word for butterfly “*mariposa*,” is herself a butterfly that invites children and their families to explore and learn about science, art, and the natural world.

Mary comes to life as a large 16’ high interactive sculpture that allows children to flap her giant wings up and down. She greets children and families as they enter her garden and encourages them to emulate her lifecycle, dig for treasure on the Sonoma Coast complete with bubbling rocks, and “catch and release” simulated salmon from a miniature Russian River that is naturally filtered. Connected to the river is an observational wetland with indigenous plants offering an up close glimpse of the flora and fauna found in the local wetland areas of Sonoma County.

The water play area also offers a wet and fun way to explore the mechanics of water and learn how hydroelectric power is generated. Visitors use various hand pumps to bring the water up from storage tanks underneath to illustrate that water does not flow freely into our homes and business, but instead requires mechanical power to generate it. Along the Garden’s nature walk, visitors get the chance to power the wings of three more butterflies using solar, mechanical or wind energy.

A farmer’s market welcomes young shoppers to a real farm area and offers budding gardeners an opportunity to see where strawberries, beans, tomatoes and other veggies actually come from. During harvest, they get to taste them too! The farm tractor offers active minds the chance to imagine tilling the soil and the windmill attracts curious minds wondering how water is brought up from the ground using just wind. Rain harvesting gutters on roofs and bio swales installed in the garden conserve water by allowing it to flow freely back into the ground water system.

Interpretive signage located throughout the garden educates visitors about renewable energies, pollination, habitat, wetlands, and the salmon lifecycle – all of which are key to what make Sonoma County a special place to live. Eighty percent of the plants in Mary’s Garden are drought resistant and native to California, illustrating that families can have a beautiful garden while protecting water as a valuable resource.

Mary’s Garden is an organic and artful combination of interactive sculptures and natural areas that celebrate, illustrate and educate visitors about our precious natural resources and the need to conserve and protect them for future generations to come.

For more information visit: [Children’s Museum of Sonoma County](#)