

History of Amir's Garden

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Amir Dialameh worked a steep hill in Griffith Park for than three decades with a pick and shovel and turned a scorched, barren landscape into a lush, shaded grove that is visited daily by a steady stream of hikers and horseback riders.

For thirty-two years, Dialameh worked in the garden most days of the week, hiking up a service road to the rugged Mineral Wells location. Over the years, he planted pine and jacaranda trees along with rose bushes, geraniums, oleander, and yucca that grew into the beautiful oasis it is today.

"... what you need first and foremost here is shade," Dialameh explained in 1989. "That's why I planted trees like the jacaranda. In ten years, this place will be covered with their branches."

His words were prophetic. Today Amir's Garden is nearly five-acres of shady rest stop for Griffith Park's hikers and equestrians.

Dialameh first came to appreciate nature as a child during hiking trips in the Alborz Mountains of his native Iran. As his love of hiking and nature developed, so did his affinity for the United States of America.

"I was intrigued by the volunteerism that built this country... people doing things instead of relying on the government." In 1963 while visiting his brother in Pittsburgh, Dialameh made the ultimate decision to immigrate and moved to the Los Angeles area.

Dialameh began his Garden in 1971 after a major brush fire ravaged the area. Long before, he regularly hiked the Mineral Wells trail through Toyon Canyon on his way across Griffith Park. The remains of the fire really troubled him. *"I said to myself, 'This is really ugly. Somebody ought to build a garden here.' So I said, 'I'll do it' ...and I did."*

Dialameh first obtained the necessary approval from city officials to create his Garden on park property. For several years after that he worked alone, clearing approximately 200 carbonized tree stumps with a pick and shovel he carried from home and building a retaining wall with discarded fencing he found near the Zoo.

His goal was to make, "an attractive rest stop for hikers," because outdoor recreation was as important to him as breathing. *"There are so many problems, so many pressures,"* Dialameh once said of city life. *"All people do is complain. They need to get away from that."*

History of Amir's Garden *(continued)*

It was typical for him to work six or seven days each week for up to eight hours at a time terracing the slopes, building stairs to the picnic area, and adding wooden benches he painted with bright vivid patterns. After a full day in the Garden, he worked as a local wine expert.

By the late 1970s, other hikers and volunteers were helping him keep up the grounds. 11-year-old Billy McGeehan spent the summer of 1979 clearing an area on the west side of the Garden which Dialameh then named "Billy's Point."

Dialameh's work on the idyllic landscape didn't come without incident, however. During the rare times when he was away, people stole plants or demolished saplings. Sadly, one Sunday in 1991, he was beaten and robbed by a group of teenagers. Two major brush fires in 1995 and 1996 damaged the eastern side of the garden, which he then patiently restored. But the rare negative incidents could never deter Amir from the Garden that shares his name.

Amir Dialameh passed away unexpectedly in late 2003, leaving behind a verdant five-acre gift to the citizens of Los Angeles. His gift is still maintained by volunteers and volunteer groups with assistance when possible from the City of Los Angeles Park Rangers and park maintenance workers.

"Only in America can a man build something like this," Dialameh said in a 1983 interview on the day the City of Los Angeles dedicated Amir's Garden by formally placing a sign at its entrance.

"This country was built by volunteers. I believe everyone should do something for his community.... I built a garden."

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