A gardener's hat, left, sits on a post along one of the many winding garden paths that cut through Gary Walker's garden. The Escondido resident's garden is part of this year's Garden Conservancy tour, and was the 2002 grand prize winner in San Diego Garden Magazine. Twelve North County gardens will be featured in this year's tours. Above, Walker stands on a hillside looking down onto his garden creation. Right, a path meanders past arches in Walker's garden.

A trellis of tours

Garden Conservancy embraces a network of greenery

Stories by GARY WARTH / Staff Writer ■ **Photos by MICHAEL HENNIG** / For the North County Times

Before Gary Walker bought his 3-acre property off Felicita Road in Escondido, neighbors had named the place.

"They called this 'Jurassic Park,' " he said.

That was six years ago, when the land was overrun with palms, vines, fallen trees and brush. But in a story that will inspire any gardener, Walker combined vision and hard work to create a garden that was called the best in the county by San Diego Magazine two years ago. He will get even more exposure this year when Better Homes and Garden magazine visits in two weeks for an upcoming article.

And on April 10, county residents can see his garden for themselves, along with five others that day, as part of the Garden Conservancy's Open Days Program. Almost 450 gardens nationwide are participating in the annual tour. They are listed in the conservancy's Open Days Directory, available for $15.95 ($10.95 for Conservancy members) at www.GardenConservancy.org or by calling (888) 843-2442. Directories also are available by writing P.O. Box 219, Cold Spring, New York, 10516.

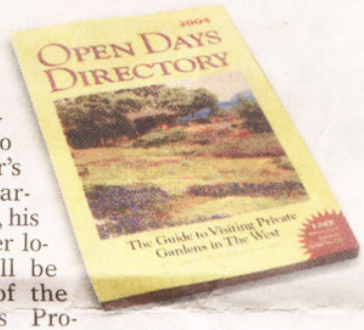
Garden tours throughout the nation begin May 1 in Birmingham, Ala., and end July 31 at Snohomish, Wash.

San Diego-area tours will be April 10, May 8 and May 15. Twelve of 18 San Diego County gardens are in North County (see story, right).

➤ **TRELLIS,** D-9

Colors abound in Gary Walker's garden, one of many to be featured in this year's Garden Conservancy Tours. The Garden Conservancy is a nonprofit group that helps preserve significant gardens nationwide.

Annual tour to feature North County sites



You won't have to wait for the feature in Better Homes and Gardens magazine to see Gary Walker's Villa Floreal garden. On April 10, his and several other local gardens will be open as part of the Open Days Program organized by the Garden Conservancy.

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➤ **TOUR,** D-9

TRELLIS

Continued from D-8

Conservancy embraces network of gardens

When Walker talks about his garden, he is part art historian and part nature enthusiast. Not surprisingly, he studied art in college and makes his living with plants as owner of Green Tree Arborist.

"I tried to base this on Monet's gardens," he said, looking at the reflection of Felicita Creek, which runs through the garden he calls Villa Floreal at Oak Creek, named after a villa in Casablanca, Morocco, where his grandmother lived.

"One of the aspects of impressionist paintings is light and how it behaves on various surfaces at different times of the day," he said. "You can create dark areas that seem to go deep and light areas that come forward."

After clearing vegetation for six months, the creek was finally visible. Walker then brought in 200 60-pound bags of concrete to build six small dams that created depth and width in the stream, which now has calm pools and rippling waterfalls.

The inspiration for a trail system through the property came from his 6-year-old son, Trevor, who named one of the six gardens Squirrel Island. The others are the Meadow, the Italian Garden, the Boulder Garden, the Native Garden and the Rain Forest, which has African masks hanging from trees and a misting system that creates a rain forest effect.

Other area gardens on the tours include:

■ Nuestra Casa, a restored adobe house in Escondido with 2 acres of landscaped gardens, an adobe chapel "ruin" and 10 patios, all connected by a quarter-mile of stone and concrete walkways.

■ The Soto Garden at Casa Arroyo Lindo in Escondido, an all-native garden with rock staircases leading the way to a native stream restoration with footbridges and walking paths.

■ The Heirloom Gardens in Escondido's Hidden Meadows community, which contains a children's garden, a kitchen garden, rose garden and more.

■ The Art Therapy Center of North County Inspiration Garden in Encinitas, which includes arbors, sculpture and a walking meditation labyrinth.

■ The Hirschkoff Garden in Encinitas, which has been featured in Sunset and Better Homes and gardens magazines, and was San Diego Home & Garden's Garden of the Year in 2001.

■ Pa'a Nani-Dahl Garden in Leucadia, with South Pacific flavor and flora, including a teak-colored thatch hut, waterfall ponds and multiple colors of bougainvillea and Australian and Tasmanian tree ferns.

■ The Sterman-Wittenberg Family Garden in Encinitas, which features optimal use of resources, including recycled materials, low-water plants, compost, vermicompost and more.

For more about viewing the gardens, visit the Web site www.GardenConservancy.org or call (888) 843-2442.

Contact staff writer Gary Warth at gwarth@nctimes.com or (760) 740-5410.

TOUR

Continued from D-8

North County sites featured this year

servancy.org or by calling (888) 843-2442. Directories also are available by writing P.O. Box 219, Cold Spring, New York, 10516.

The Garden Conservancy is a national nonprofit organization founded in 1989 to preserve exceptional American gardens for the public's education and enjoyment. It works with garden owners, community groups and public agencies to help preserve hundreds of gardens. They range from the garden at Alcatraz Island to Steepletop, the garden of poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, in Austerlitz, N.Y.

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Besides Walker's garden, the April 10 Escondido tour includes the gardens of Christina Douglas, Dick Lievers, Matthew Midgett's Nuestra Casa Adobe, Cindy Payne's Heirloom Gardens and Sharon Soto's Casa Arroyo Lindo.

The May 15 Encinitas tour will include the gardens of Debora and Jim Carl and Bobbi Hirschkoff, the Art Therapy Center of North County Inspiration Garden, the Leucadia garden of Cris Dahl and the Olivenhain gardens of Patty Daniels and Nan Sterman.

The May 8 tour of east San Diego includes gardens in El Cajon, La Mesa and Lemon Grove.

Contact staff writer Gary Warth at gwarth@nctimes.com or (760) 740-5410.