

Circus Tree History

The **Circus Trees** were originally grown and created by **Axel Erlandson**, son of a Swedish immigrant. Inspired by observing a natural graft between two sycamore trees, Erlandson began to shape trees using intricate techniques. His techniques resulted in woven wonders made from **living wood**. The branches were carefully bent, rather than cut, and became complex and compound designs.

This botanical adventure began in Hilmar, CA in the 1920's. Erlandson planted the "**Four-Legged Giant**" to commemorate his daughter's birth, surprising his family when he brought the four trees together into one. In 1946, Erlandson moved his family and his trees to Scotts Valley, CA. A year later he opened the "**Tree Circus**" for locals and tourists to experience the wonder of the "World's Strangest Trees." By 1957, Erlandson had created more than 70 unique trees. **Ripley's Believe it or Not** featured them in the 40's and 50's. In 1957 a **Life** magazine article gave the trees notoriety. After Erlandson's death in 1964, they became part of a Scotts Valley attraction known as "**The Lost World**". In 1977 the property was sold with only 40 trees surviving.

A local Santa Cruz architect, **Mark Primack**, heard about the ailing trees around 1976 and eventually led a valiant effort to save them, even risking arrest for trespassing in order to water and feed them. Keeping as many alive as he could, Primack's efforts finally took root when they attracted the attention of tree lover **Michael Bonfante**. On November 10, 1985, Bonfante rescued the surviving 29 trees and gave them a home in **Gilroy, CA**. Check out our "**80-Ton Tree Caper**" video here: www.youtube.com/@gilroy_gardens.

There are **25 Circus Trees** still alive today. **Ten** of these amazing natural wonders are featured in Dixie Cup Plaza near the turnstile area at the front entrance of **Gilroy Gardens Family Theme Park** (formerly Bonfante Gardens Family Theme Park). **Nine** of them are planted in various areas inside the Park. The remaining **six** trees are behind the scenes and are not viewable to the public. See how many you can find today using the information inside!

For more information on the life and tales of the Circus Trees or Axel Erlandson, visit our gift shops for a copy of **My Father Talked to Trees**, a special publication written by Axel's daughter, **Wilma Erlandson**.

Then...



Entrance to Tree Circus
Scotts Valley, CA



Basket Tree - age 7 years

Now...



Entrance to
Gilroy Gardens



Basket Tree today

Guide to the Circus Trees

"Of all the people who have seen these trees, no one has ever been heard to say they saw anything like it elsewhere."

*—from the original
Circus Tree Brochure*



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Nonprofit Organization
Created & Built by Michael Bonfante.

Gilroy Gardens Family Theme Park
3050 Hecker Pass Hwy
Gilroy, California 95020
www.gilroygardens.org

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Some names are historical, some descriptive but the final names depend on what you see when you enter the Home of the Circus Trees!

Notice us as you enter.

Original location of these trees: Scotts Valley, CA



Squat Curvy Scallops

3 European Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)
Park location: 1st on North side of entrance



Spring Vine

European Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)
Park location: 2nd on North side of entrance
Fun Fact: Most of the vines are now missing!



Double Hearts

(*Acer sp.*)
Park location: 3rd on North side of entrance
Fun Fact: This tree is about 66 years old. The "hearts" now look more like plain holes.

Sideway Rope Rectangle

European Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)
Park location: 4th on North side of entrance



Picture Frame

Cork Oak (*Quercus suber*)
Park location: 5th on North side of entrance
Fun Fact: The hole gets smaller every year!

*Look for us where a banana splits
or you smell fantastic food.*



Spiral Staircase #2

2 European Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)
Original location: Scotts Valley, CA
Park location: Near Illions Supreme Carousel
Fun Fact: Erlandson was successful in repeating this similar design.

Zig-Zag

American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)
Original location: Hilmar, CA
Park location: Uncle John's BBQ
Fun Fact: This tree is also referred to as the Lightning Bolt Tree.

The Main Attractions:

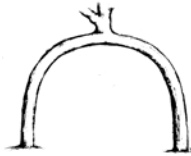
Basket Tree

6 American Sycamores (*Platanus occidentalis*)
Location: (Orig.) Scotts Valley, CA; (Park) Main Plaza
Fun Fact: The most intricate of the Circus Trees. Can you tell where one tree begins and the other ends?



Four Legged Giant

4 American Sycamores (*Platanus occidentalis*)
Location: (Orig.) Hilmar, CA; (Park) Mission Plaza
Fun Fact: Started in 1928 to commemorate Wilma Erlandson's birth. This was the first major Circus Tree.



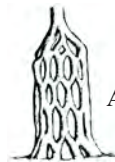
Arch

2 American Sycamores (*Platanus occidentalis*)
Location: (Orig.) Scotts Valley, CA; (Park) Claudia's Garden
Fun Fact: The center of the arch was about 9'7" tall.



Emblem

3 American Sycamores (*Platanus occidentalis*)
Location: (Orig.) Hilmar, CA; (Park) Next to Water Oasis
Fun Fact: This tree has been planted at Pinnacles Rock Maze since July 1997. It may have been started in 1929.



Almost Circle Cage

10 American Sycamores (*Platanus occidentalis*)
Location: (Orig.) Scotts Valley, CA; (Park) On right after you exit the parking lot. **Fun Fact:** A similar shaped tree (Telephone Booth) was donated to the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland.

See us near the entrance, too!

Original location of these trees: Scotts Valley, CA

Revolving Door

(*Acer sp.*)
Park location: 1st on South side of entrance



Short Table

2 Box Elders (*Acer negundo*)
Park location: 2nd on South side of entrance



Compound Eight

Box Elder (*Acer negundo*)
Park location: 3rd on South side of entrance
Fun Fact: This tree is about 67 years old. The top and bottom holes are almost closed.



Spiral Staircase # 1

2 Box Elders (*Acer negundo*)
Park location: 4th on South side of entrance
Fun Fact: Some of the rungs are missing.



Figure Y

Cork Oak (*Quercus suber*)
Park location: 5th on South side of entrance



*To find us, take the train or
play a game of chance.*

Oil Well

3 Box Elders (*Acer negundo*)
Original location: Scotts Valley, CA
Park location: South County Backroads
Fun Fact: This tree looks different from each of its three sides.



Chain Link

American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)
Original location: Scotts Valley, CA
Park location: Across from Villa Pasta & Pizza
Fun Fact: Also known as the 3, 2, 1 tree.

