



In the Central Valley, A Tropical Paradise

By [Kate Washington](#)

Trickling water, cool palapas, and waving palms. It's not an island getaway but rather **Flora Tropicana**, a five-acre nursery that shimmers on a humdrum byway in Elk Grove, Calif. The offbeat spot specializes in bamboos, rare Japanese maples, and water plants, with demonstration ponds that lure hard-core landscapers and casual visitors alike. "Sometimes people bring a picnic and stay for two hours," says co-owner Marco Tjaden.

No wonder folks linger. It takes time to see everything—from the bamboo meditation garden to regional artists' copper sculptures to urns in vibrant kumquat and azure. What's more, partner Wendy Tjaden pours complimentary Sierra foothills wines every day in spring and summer. Those plotting a backyard makeover will find everything for a garden stream or contemplative fishpond—even koi flown over from Japan and quarantined in Flora Tropicana's special facility.

On hot summer days, families congregate at the koi tanks, where kids can feed the fish. Friendly koi, including two-foot, 21-year-old mascot Murray (named for a Wiggles character), gently nibble little fingers. "When i hear kids laughing and screaming, i know that they just fed the fish," Marco says. 10255 Grant Line rd., (916) 714-4200, floratropicana.com.

