

## Napa Valley, Sonoma wineries are restoring ecosystems while preparing for a hotter future

*By Theresa Gonzalez- July 26, 2025*



The pollinator garden at Larkmead Vineyards in Calistoga.  
Bob McClenahan photo

More and more, local wineries are thinking beyond the monoculture — and embracing regenerative farming as a way to future-proof their business while giving back to the land. Today, that shift looks like this: river otters returning to creeks, pollinators finding safe haven, and wildlife corridors weaving through the vines.

“It shouldn’t be just grapes,” said Ann Baker, a landscape architect who grew up in the family business at Larkmead Vineyards in Calistoga. For over two decades, Baker has been helping reimagine the land not just for wine, but for local wildlife too.

In the late 1990s, the family noticed their vines were suffering from Pierce’s disease, a bacterial infection spread by blue-green sharpshooters — tiny pests that thrive in weedy, non-native plantings along waterways. Instead of turning to chemical solutions, Baker looked to improve the ecology and soil on Larkmead’s 110 acres of vineyards and surrounding landscape.

Baker began a massive creek restoration effort that included removing Himalayan blackberry and invasive vinca and replanting the stream banks of the Napa River and Selby Creek with native sedge, willows, and medicinal plants like yerba santa and bee balm. Rallying 13 other neighbors in 2005, she and her team also installed rock structures called groins and willow “baffles” to slow the water’s flow, reduce erosion, and create cool pools for salmon and steelhead.

“It was important to us to work with our neighbors and restore the whole stream, not just our own property,” Baker says. Over time, the stream began to rewild itself. Trees regenerated. Quail returned to the gardens. And those sharpshooters? Gone.

Larkmead’s focus on biodiversity now extends to every corner of the property. Insectary hedgerows — rows of flowering plants strategically placed throughout the vineyard — support natural predators like lacewings, ladybugs, and tiny *Anagrus* wasps, which target grapevine pests. Pollinator gardens at the winery entrance are planted with California lilac, manzanita and sages and bloom across seasons to feed bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. And to reduce tilling, they’ve planted perennial grasses along vineyard avenues to cut dust, discourage mites, and retain soil moisture.

In the face of climate change, restoring balance is no longer optional, it’s essential.

“We want salmon in the river,” Baker said. “We want pollinators in the gardens. And we want our community to feel like they live in a healthy place.”

That’s what stewardship really means.