

His green thumb print dots a land of blue

Perea and his staff are the painstaking landscapers of Dodger Stadium and its centerpiece botanic garden

By Sam Farmer

Tens of thousands of people walk in and out of Dodger Stadium on any given night, paying scant attention to the trees, plants, and other foliage surrounding it on all sides. Chaz Perea made his peace with that a long time ago.

“Getting to Dodger Stadium is not a small thing,” said Perea, 41, the stadium’s landscape manager. “You’ve got to park in this monster,” he said, motioning to the acres of asphalt around him, “and then go find your seat in that monster.”

For the past 17 years, Perea and his four-person crew have been responsible for every bit of stadium landscaping that isn’t the field itself. That’s roughly 300 acres, encompassing the parking lots, the hillsides meeting the I10 Freeway, and 149 concrete planters nicknamed “martinis” for their glass-like shape. The planters are original to the stadium’s 1962 construction, and many had crumbled badly enough over the decades to need painstaking repair.

The landscaping isn’t just about plants and planters. Behind a fence beyond the iconic orange 76 ball in the parking lot once sat a hidden garden. Its centerpiece was an eight-foot-tall stone lantern given to then-Dodgers owner Walter O’Malley by Japanese sports columnist Sotaro Suzuki and his wife, Toku, who had attended the stadium’s grand opening in 1962. Suzuki commissioned the 3,921-pound Kasuga-style lantern, which arrived in five pieces in late 1965 and became the centerpiece of a garden that also featured a small wooden bridge and a collection of rocks.

“For years, it was maintained by our gardener with great pride,” said former Dodgers owner Peter O’Malley, Walter’s son. “But it was remote, and fans couldn’t really get up there easily to see it or sit in the garden. And it got neglected for a few years. Some years later, I forget how many, we had to fence in the whole property.”

In 2024, shortly after the Dodgers signed two-way sensation Shohei Ohtani, the club moved the lantern to a place of prominence outside the top-deck gates, overlooking the downtown skyline. The move was an elaborate, delicate production. Bundled and boarded up, the lantern inched across the parking lot on the back of a flatbed truck that climbed a ring road steep enough to cause concern.

“It was like they were moving the Ark of the Covenant,” Perea said.

No one exhaled until the cargo was unloaded, unswaddled, and confirmed to be in one piece.

Perea’s crew works out of a large metal shed at the far end of a parking lot, a shop they affectionately call “the Oasis.” Much of what’s inside was retrieved from a dumpster, or scavenged before it landed in one. Perea, who describes himself as a bargain shopper, is passionate about repurposing whatever he can; many of the succulents at the stadium came from his own clippings.

“My general philosophy is I don’t treat the Dodgers like I’m salaried management,” he said. “I treat them like I’m a contractor that they don’t want to get rid of. So I manage the expenses and the labor as such.”

He doesn’t have much interaction with players and executives, though he’s occasionally been called to their homes to help with landscaping problems. One visit stands out.

“Vin Scully is the coolest one I’d stake a claim to,” he said of the legendary play-by-play man. “He was an unbelievable class act. He had a tree issue. He had us out, and was so attentive and appreciative, it was just stunning to me.”

On the hillside above the shop is an open-air lunch area, its seating made from wooden bleachers salvaged from the old right-field pavilion. Peek through the bushes and the stadium is visible in the distance. Inside the shop, the walls are lined with neatly organized shovels, pickaxes, and ladders. Above them hang paintings, art being another of Perea’s passions, most of them made by his friends.

Perea freely admits he’s an odd fit for the job. He’s



CHAZ PEREA, center, is the landscaping manager of his crew, from left, Adolfo Hinojosa, Jose Sandoval, Octavio Suarez, and Jose Perez.



DODGERS FANS walk past giant agave plants outside the center-field area of iconic Chavez Ravine.



PEREA clips sunflowers to give to visitors on the 90-minute tour of the botanic garden at the stadium.



VIBRANT plants line a pedestrian path. Perea cites the venue as “the last unpainted canvas in Los Angeles.”



A GROUP visits “Agave Island,” planted with nine palm trees to represent nine players on a baseball field.

not a baseball fan; he prefers beach volleyball and mixed martial arts. He had a rough upbringing in Arizona, dropped out of high school, and got by on \$6.75 an hour doing golf-course maintenance, supplementing it with landscaping gigs he ran out of his pickup truck before eventually returning to school.

He came back to the classroom with a purpose, not only finishing high school but going on to earn multiple advanced degrees and, ultimately, a Ph.D. He’s now a professor of horticultural science and co-chair of agricultural science at Mt. San Antonio College.

But it’s his day job that draws clusters of Dodger fans willing to pay \$52.25 each for his 90-minute botanic garden tour of the grounds. They explore “Agave Island” near the main entrance, a wedge of land planted with nine palm trees to match the number of players on a baseball field, and the planters outside the club-level entrance, where the crew grows chilies (jalapeños, serranos, habaneros), along with basil, mint, tomatoes, onions, and garlic. That garden spawned an annual salsa competition, in which club employees harvest their own ingredients from the planters, make salsa at home, and bring it back to be judged. Perea and his crew make handmade tortillas and quesadillas for the event.

Two more planted islands are devoted entirely to tequila agave. It takes nearly a decade for the plant to mature, and about 110 pounds of its core to yield a single liter of tequila through processing. Perea and his crew hope to eventually try making some themselves, as an in-house project rather than a commercial one.

The landscape looked very different before Perea arrived. He describes the old look as Disneyland-esque: heavy on lawns and flowers, constantly in need of replacement, and thirsty for water. About two years into the job, he began swapping annual flower beds for drought-tolerant succulents. When one executive noticed and ordered the flowers put back in a particular spot, Perea complied there, then made the same swap a little farther down the hillside, out of view.

Turnover among executives and ownership gave him repeated openings to make wholesale changes, a shift that coincided with California’s drought crisis. Within a few years, he had planted 10,000 cuttings and stripped every flower bed from the property.

“A lot of people look at this as the last unpainted canvas in Los Angeles,” Perea said.

Chaz of Chavez Ravine, perpetually painting the corners.