

Students Dig into New Campus Garden

The Institute of Applied Agriculture's "hands-on" teaching mission encourages students to get their hands dirty, and what better way to accomplish that than digging into a garden. Thanks to a \$15,000 grant from the University Sustainability Fund, campus is getting a teaching garden.

The north-facing hillside between the School of Public Health and the Eppley Recreation Center, previously considered a hot spot for weed identification, is steadily transforming into the Public Health Garden, a community and teaching garden "demonstrating sustainable agriculture and environmental best practices in support of public, environmental and community health."

Led by Allison Lilly, a MPH student, a garden club formed and the project officially kicked off at Maryland Day this spring. The IAA's first Sustainable Agriculture Certificate student and Garden Manager, Deborah Dramby, along with Lilly, has worked tirelessly to drum up support and get the crops rolling this growing season.

The garden offers a unique opportunity to unite many collaborators in support of sustainable agriculture and already has commitment and involvement from the UMD School of Public Health, Institute of Applied Agriculture, Department of Landscape Architecture, Sustainability Office, Facilities Management, and Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. The Public Health Garden has also received generous support from alumni, notably Alan Richardson of Potomac Valley Brick, and the College Park community.

"It has really been amazing to see the community come together in support of this project. From seeds, to tools, to time spent volunteering, everyone we've reached out to has been eager to get involved and help out", says Lilly.



Master Gardener and IAA Instructor, Ken Ingram, volunteered himself and the students enrolled in Greenhouse Management for the task of early planting in the university greenhouse. Since hundreds of seed packets were donated to the garden project from local nurseries, the America the Beautiful Fund, and national companies, Ingram and his students were able to spend weekly lab periods experimenting with seeds, learning which seeds grow best where and why, and nurturing hundreds of seedlings for the new garden.

Despite delays in site construction, Ingram, Lilly and Dramby found homes for the greenhouse-grown plants. Many tomato, basil and pepper plants were disseminated to Maryland Day attendees and gifted at community outreach meetings. Cucumbers, marigolds, tomatoes and green beans found homes in old pickle and ice cream buckets donated from Dining Services. Quite a few tomato and pepper plants ended up in the first guerilla-gardened bed on site.

The winning design for the site, a product of a healthy competition between students in both graduate and undergraduate Landscape Architecture classes, is being implemented this summer and into the fall semester. Grading for permeable pavers and raised beds in the teaching space of the site is set to begin any day now. Depending on future grants and community



involvement, the club hopes to implement the next phases of the design--which include minimal grading for community beds down the slope of the hill, a butterfly garden and a neighboring orchard--in 2012. Construction on the west-side rain garden, a project and grant awarded to Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering's Allen Davis, should begin this summer.

The thick cover of invasive and unwanted vegetation on the site, once considered the most challenging hurdle facing the Public Health Garden team this season, turned out to be a most successful adventure in publicity. Since the garden aims to meet the highest expectations of sustainability, herbicide was not an option. The club's creative solution was to call in the Eco-Goats, a herd of weed-eaters who have been traveling around forests and properties in Maryland and eating away kudzu, Canada thistle, multi flora rose, English ivy, and any other invasives that stand in the way of native or agricultural plants.



After the goats gobbled up the worst of the weeds, student club members and volunteers met on site twice a week to pull up decade-old root systems and prepare the soil for planting.

"Ken was the first one to get out on site and begin to finish the job the goats started. He was really an inspiration to all of our volunteers who have been working tirelessly in the heat to ensure we have a successful first season. So far, we've harvested nearly 20 pounds of food--just from our containers", says Lilly.

Interested volunteers, sponsors, and/or local experts are invited to visit the official [Public Health Garden blog](#) and to "like" the [Public Health Garden Facebook page](#).