

UC Irvine Ants in Your Plants Garden

Challenges and Progress

Alexander Lou, ASUCI Garden Commissioner (2019-2020)
Erick Ballesteros, GFI Garden Fellow (2019-2020)

Mission

In partnership, the GFI Garden Fellow and Garden Commissioner for the Associated Students of UC Irvine, led a group of passionate, Earth-conscious students in maintaining a community garden aptly named the Ants in Your Plants Garden located in Arroyo Vista, one of UCI's Housing communities. In addition to general maintenance, the garden team formalized the process for donating produce to the FRESH Basic Needs Hub, our campus resource center that promotes equitable access to basic needs and addresses issues such as food insecurity. In programming, the team engaged students in topics ranging from current food systems to sustainable agriculture to self-sufficiency.

In AY18-19, we laid the groundwork for a Garden-To-Pantry policy document outlining procedures such as health and safety standards to make donation possible. In collaboration with garden stakeholders, we worked to gather the materials, create the volunteer training protocols, and begin the planting season to meet policy compliance. Additionally, we worked to increase the student garden's visibility and sense of community, making the space more accessible and building stronger partnerships.



Partnerships

The garden is a collaboration among campus stakeholders such as the Sustainability Resource Center (SRC), FRESH Basic Needs Hub, UCI Housing, and the ASUCI Sustainability Project and Garden Commission. Representatives meet on a regular basis to strategize and share resources. This year, we worked with Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) to finalize the Garden-to-Pantry Policy.

We enlisted the help of ASUCI's Media Commission to create a brief training video for volunteers. The training video is paired with a quiz in order to formalize participation and ensure that volunteers have proper health and safety knowledge.



Project Goals and Outcomes

The Garden-to-Pantry Policy lists many steps to integrate safety and rigor in our garden process. Milestones for compliance included ensuring organic/chemical free pesticides/fertilizers, installing an outdoor sink for produce and hand washing station, and procuring food safe harvesting containers. We utilized a \$2,000 budget to purchase supplies such as a sink, irrigation equipment, seeds, mulch, a composter, mesh nets, wire fences, harvesting containers, scales, and cleaning/gardening supplies. UCI EH&S approval in early 2020 ensured our compliance with food safety protocol.

Witnessing the amount of time and effort our garden team and volunteers put into the garden was truly amazing. We held many service-learning events such as seed-sowing workshops and building raised garden beds. We were also to raise our base of volunteers to over 180 registered students!



Results

The newly recruited student volunteers helped with garden maintenance, bed prepping, sowing, weeding, pest management, and harvesting. Collaborators are beginning contributions to an online database that captures planting information, garden bed maps, volunteer logs, and photos as well as harvest weights and times.

We are just getting started with the planting season, but we have harvested a total of 65 pounds of produce, for distribution to FRESH or to student volunteers directly.

We have additionally composted a total of around 280 pounds of coffee grounds, landscape trimmings, and food scraps from students.



Future Goals

Plans are in motion to capture the progress of each plant variety we propagate in an online database, including pictures at each stage of the plant development, tips for optimal growth, growing seasons, harvest seasons, things to watch out for (i.e. potential threats to the specific plants), and best companion plants.

Recently, we started working with the environmental group CALPIRG on their Save the Bees Campaign. We are in the process of getting UCI Bee Campus Certified from Bee Campus USA, an initiative that promotes the development of urban pollinator sanctuaries.

UCI Housing recently helped to purchase two seed libraries that will be placed around campus. The bins made from refurbished newspaper racks will hold free supplies for students to take and grow from home.

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- Daniela Romero – ASUCI Internal Vice President



Garden Website:

<https://www.asuci.uci.edu/ants-in-your-plants-garden/>