



## Dominican University

River Forest, Illinois  
Farming/Gardening

### SCHOOL

Dominican University is a private 4 year college, consisting of approximately 4,000 undergraduate and graduate students, located in River Forest, Illinois.

### ABSTRACT

In May of 2011, a community garden was started at Dominican University. Volunteers consist of faculty, staff, and students, along with members from the surrounding community and even children from the daycare facility at the university. Currently it is an ongoing educational and recreational project, which is blooming before its volunteer's eyes each day. It is watered each morning by volunteers, and in the afternoon, shift leaders take a day or two each week to be present to teach others about gardening. Organic methods are used; compost (coffee grounds and eggshells) are collected from staff lounges weekly and dispersed around the garden as needed. As produce ripens, volunteers can take what they will use, and what is left over is brought weekly to the local food pantry. The garden itself is aiding in reducing carbon emission by providing oxygen and the produce is locally grown and given to those who need fresh food locally, reducing the need to use produce shipped a great distance.

### GOALS AND OUTCOMES

#### Goals

In starting this garden, its founders wanted to create an all natural garden for educational purposes, and to highlight methods of gardening and composting. In addition, produce would be available to volunteers and those in need in the community. Another goal was that new friendships would develop along with gardening skills; people would then take these skills with them beyond this garden & share their enthusiasm and skills elsewhere. A standing relationship with the local food



pantry is another goal. In the coming years, our goals are to annually keep the garden growing & producing fresh vegetables for local consumption; improve the soil by adding natural composting material recovered from university operations (diverted from the landfill); increase participation by increasing the number of garden partners; encourage faculty and students to utilize the garden as a part of their learning process; and possibly add a natural prairie plant habitat to encourage bee and insect life. One additional goal is to establish our garden as a "Herman's Garden" in order to be eligible for heirlooms seeds in the coming years: (<http://www.seedsavers.org/hermansgardenletter.htm>).

Our formal mission and vision statement follow:

*The Dominican Vegetable & Herb Garden is a collaborative effort between students, faculty and staff, designed to create an outdoor teaching and learning laboratory for promoting sustainability, local food sourcing and community building. Its vision is to grow and share fresh food with its garden partners; promote healthy food issues in our communities; raise awareness of hunger issues; and share excess produce with the local community in need through established existing venues.*

### **Accomplishments and Outcomes**

Within a short period of time, not only have the vegetable plants grown, but relationships and a solid community has developed around this project as well. Descriptions of harvest coordinators and watering responsibilities were developed to communicate expectations. A group of team leaders was created to help manage the garden and numerous runs to the local food pantry with bags of fresh produce have been delivered.

### **Challenges and Responses**

Many people verbally supported the idea and put their name on a mailing list, but only a fraction of those individuals would regularly show up to assist with gardening. Numerous emails and reminders had to be sent out to remind people of the garden and when they can stop by and help out. When it was expressed that even a half hour of their time was greatly appreciated, that every little bit helps, then more volunteers seemed to be come by. We need to have a garden planning process prior to May next year, with enough leaders to organize. We also need to find additional ways to make this a turn-key operation so it is easy and fun to stop by and help. This will increase participation as will the buzz after the harvest in the fall.

### **Commentary and Reflection**

Once the vegetable plants really started blooming and garden partners saw their hard work actually pay off, the whole project was deemed a success. That is the key encouragement of this project- that you get to enjoy not only learning and working in a garden & meeting new people, but the food reward is wonderful too! The four main outcomes that were positives were the naturally grown produce, the education of gardening without pesticides, building a sense of community and giving back to those in need.

## **ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

### **Leaders and Supporters**

The leaders for the garden are part of the campus Sustainability movement, 4R Future. The group consists of faculty, staff, students and community members. At a brainstorming session, the community garden idea was brought up and originally supported. One member of 4RFuture became the overall leader, and then after that subgroups were created. To gather volunteers, get people excited and train non-gardeners, an opening garden party was hosted. Attendees were encouraged to sign up to assist with the garden. Since the start, the Goedert Center (children's daycare) has also been involved, using it as an outdoor learning lab for students about vegetables and gardening. The children researched the plants growing in the garden with their teachers and drew pictures of the herbs and vegetables for paint stick signs in the garden. A nutrition and walking class was invited to walk to the garden, discuss what was growing, and walk back to the main campus. One summer environmental course conducted a soil

sample of the garden soil as part of their class assignment. Student who lived on campus for the summer have also been contributing, as well as faculty, staff and members from the community.

### **Funding and Resources**

The majority of the startup budget came from the Physical Plant department. The money went toward fencing for the garden, and an outdoor storage bin for supplies. Many seedlings and plants were donated by the local community garden. A seed exchange in another local village gave us access to additional seeds to plant. Garden partners donated marigolds, watering sticks, garden benches and a table, sprinklers, seedlings, tomato cages, a bat house, & stakes for plants. The rest was volunteering of time.

### **Education and Community Outreach**

An announcement and a call for volunteers were sent out about beginning the garden. Flyers were put up near water coolers and in offices as well. The local paper did an article and took pictures as well.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

#### **Contacts**

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### **MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL**

#### **Campus Sustainability History**

Currently Dominican University is launching a task force team for Sustainability on campus and in the community. 4RFuture is comprised of faculty, staff, students and community members who all have a common goal of helping Dominican become as green as it can be. In addition to the community garden, a bike sharing program called “bikeDU” is in full swing, construction projects on campus are keeping green products in mind as well as weatherizing older buildings. Recently a position of Sustainability Coordinator was created to help push Dominican in the greenest direction it can. The students have a club, the Eco Club that conducts numerous events throughout the year promoting sustainability and green ideas. The Sustainability website has more information, <http://www.dom.edu/about/sustainability/>

**Image credit:** Kristen Peterson