



## **California State University Northridge Northridge, California Farming/Garden**

### **SCHOOL**

California State University Northridge, public, 4-year, ~36,000 students, Northridge, California.

### **ABSTRACT**

The CSUN Organic Food Garden was founded in March 2010. It started with five raised beds and has grown to include a woolly wall, vertical gardening structures, compost bins and pallet gardens. We have plans to build an outdoor classroom for holding workshops, and we have extended our goals to implement experiential learning by building and experimenting with different types of urban gardens. A diverse group of people from all over the University are involved in the garden, including students, faculty, staff and administrators, and community members. The approximate initial project cost was 2,000 dollars and we have ongoing expenses of about 1,000 dollars per year.

### **GOALS AND OUTCOMES**

#### **Goals**

The purpose of the garden is to educate students and the community about sustainable food gardening techniques and healthy food choices, and to promote direct community involvement and service-learning opportunities to students. Our initial goals for the project were to acquire land on campus and to build raised beds, install an irrigation system and mulch the area to prevent weed growth. We also wanted to hold garden workdays throughout the semester, which integrated workshops on organic gardening methods and sustainability. We worked with a local Master Gardener program to connect with a master gardener to offer these workshops. We also developed a website to feature garden updates, a calendar, forum, media and resource pages. A student assistant was hired through the Institute for Sustainability to help maintain the garden, promote garden events, and to secure donations. Our goals for the next two to three years are to build a fence along the border of the garden made out of pallet gardens, create a class seating and workshop area, a greenhouse, an edible succulent garden, an herbal spiral, and to expand the compost area by adding bins.

#### **Accomplishments and Outcomes**

Dr. Erica Wohldmann applied for a grant from a local nonprofit to fund the garden project. When she received the grant she was asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement from the funder, however since Cal State Northridge is a public institution this was not allowed and Dr. Wohldmann did not accept the donation from this corporation based on ethical reasons. She then donated \$3,600 to start the garden and another \$2000 to an organic farmer to serve as a consultant. The Provost of the University also donated funds for startup costs. Acquiring the land was a difficult task and members of the garden working group held many meetings with administration to obtain the piece of land. After a location was agreed upon, the University provided a large space to work with. The lumber for the beds and materials

for the irrigation system were purchased with those funds and everything was built during garden workdays, by students, staff, and faculty members.

The land acquired is 13132 square feet. It is located on the North East side of campus and is directly behind a high school and close to the campus dormitories. Garden workdays were scheduled regularly during the Fall and Spring semesters and include workshops on sustainability and organic gardening methods. During the garden workdays the area was mulched, seeds were planted and seeds from subsequent crops were saved for later planting. To date, four crop cycles have been planted and harvested. A woolly wall was donated by the Marilyn Magaram Center for Food Science, Nutrition, and Dietetics to determine the feasibility of growing plants in a pocket garden in the southern California climate, and to determine the best growing conditions for the cultivation of food plants. The garden

fence border project began in August 2012 and will continue throughout the Fall semester.

Twenty pallet gardens are needed to complete the border. The garden student assistant obtained donated pallets from Associated Students Campus Recycling Services. The herbal spiral will be completed in Fall 2012 by student volunteers. Two grant applications were written and submitted in Summer 2012 to request funds to expand the garden and add a seating and workshop area, edible succulent garden and greenhouse.



### **Challenges and Responses**

Some of the challenges we encountered were acquiring the land, retaining student volunteers, and maintaining the garden during the summer. To deal with these challenges, a Garden Chair was appointed by the Institute for Sustainability. This is a faculty member on campus who is on the Garden Working Group, but has a more active role in ensuring the success of the garden. In order to retain student volunteers we reached out to professors interested in the garden and whose classes include sustainability as it relates to food. They have promoted workdays in their classrooms and offered service learning opportunities to students, which has brought 30 or more students to the garden workdays. We also made a flyer which was distributed throughout the campus to advertise garden workdays and events. We also have a garden listserv where we send out notices about garden related events on campus however, this has not yielded a high number of student volunteers. Also, since student schedules change each semester, it is a difficult to schedule workdays that match student schedules. In order to see that the garden was being maintained a student assistant was hired by the Institute for Sustainability in Sept 2011 to ensure maintenance of the garden and organize and promote garden events and workdays and to seek donations. In planning for future projects, more collaboration between

the garden assistant and garden chair would be beneficial to the success of the garden. We have attempted to partner with campus clubs and groups to hold workdays with them, but there has been a lack of communication. Communication has been one of the most stressful aspects of the project and has sometimes hindered tasks from being done. However, we have started planning earlier in the school year for the following semester so that we do not have the same communication issues as we have had in the past.

### **Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint**

We are affiliated with the CSUN Institute for Sustainability, which was founded with the goal of implementing greater energy efficiency and promoting sustainable practices on campus. The role of the CSUN Organic Food Garden is to educate the CSUN community and the surrounding residential community about the advantages of establishing home and community gardens for growing food. In this way, we are contributing to reducing the carbon footprint of the community by promoting locally grown food and putting water and nutrient resources into growing food plants, rather than lawns. Although the garden itself is not of a large enough scale to have an impact on the university's GHG emissions, the cumulative effect of gardens planted by students and community members educated through this project will have a significant effect.

### **Commentary and Reflection**

Before starting a project like this it would be extremely useful to connect with an entity on campus that understands the needs for a campus garden to exist. It would also be useful to partner with faculty who share a similar vision and want to see a food garden on campus. Do your research. Look at other campus models and see what they are doing and what is working and not working for them. I have been in contact with students who are involved with gardens at other universities and they have been extremely helpful. If this is something you are passionate about and want to see realized on your campus do not give up! People are realizing the value of gardens and how they can add value to life. They understand the need to be connected to the local food movement. If they don't know, you do right? So never stop sharing this information. Outreach is crucial. You want people to know that your garden exists because sometimes it gets put in a spot on campus that no one may readily see. Most people only know food in the grocery store and you want them to change the way they see food and sustainable food systems. This has been done successfully many times. Do not let the small hurdles hold you back. I may not agree with everything Margaret Mead has said but this quote certainly is true "*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*" - Margaret Mead

## **ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

### **Leaders and Supporters**

Dr. Erica Wohldmann, a faculty member at CSUN is a part of the Green Core Team that aims to green the campus by partnering with campus departments to implement sustainable practices. It was in this committee that Dr. Wohldmann suggested a food garden be established. A sub-group was then established to develop this campus garden. The Garden Working Group was established in July of 2009 and worked with campus staff and administration to get permission to have a food garden and obtain space. The working group partnered with Randy Thompson, a Master Gardener, who attended many garden workdays and was hands on, taught workshops and helped install the irrigation system. Jean Porter is a staff member and a member of the garden working group and coordinated meetings. Wendy Birky, the current garden chair and a faculty member, has provided service learning opportunities to her

introductory biology class, which has also provided the amount of students needed to complete large projects. Community members from the surrounding area have offered their time and volunteered on garden workdays as well. Some community members have stopped by to view our garden to learn about our raised beds, the square foot gardening method, woolly wall and pallets gardens.

### **Funding and Resources**

Initially the project cost \$2,000 to get started. Tools and other accessories for garden work days also needed to be purchased and have totaled approximately \$1,300. Initial funding was provided by Dr. Erica Wohldmann who donated the funds from a class she taught. The university Provost has also been a great source of funding for this project. He provided funds for the water hook up in the garden which totaled \$750 and for tools and supplies.

### **Education and Community Outreach**

As previously mentioned, we created a flyer that was distributed around campus. We have had several professors offer service learning opportunities to students that involve coming out on workdays and this has been extremely successful. We also have a listserv where interested campus/community members sign up to receive notifications about our garden workdays, workshops and related events. In order to reach our local community we are making plans to connect with our neighborhood council and get on their calendar of events so that people in the community that do not attend Cal State Northridge can find out about the garden.

### **National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program**

The campus ecology program provided educational resources for our garden assistant.

When our student assistant was hired to manage the campus food garden it was recommended to her to go through the case studies on the NWF website that specifically dealt with farming/gardening to see what could be learned from other schools and applied to our food garden. Email blasts were also helpful.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

### **Contacts**

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- Wendy Birky, Garden Working Group Chair, 818-677- 4482, wendy.birky@csun.edu
- Erica Wohldmann, Garden Founder and former Working Group Chair, 818-677-6676
- Jean Porter, Garden Working Group Founding Member, 818-677-4556, jean.porter@csun.edu

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## **MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL**

### **Campus Sustainability History**

The CSUN Institute for Sustainability Institute was established in 2008 with the goal of greening the campus. The overall objective of the greening project was to develop a portfolio of initiatives that, together, help green the CSUN campus. Broadly, four initiatives were initially conceived and make up the current campus sustainability activities. The establishment of a Sustainability Institute anchors the Greening Project, providing a fulcrum for research activities and acting as a center for campus sustainability-related resources. The second involves the development of an ecological "state of the

campus protocol” that will begin the process of carbon footprinting the campus, with the ultimate objective of moving CSUN to a carbon-neutral state. This has taken the form of multiple student-faculty projects, all working cumulatively to reduce the carbon footprint of the campus. The third involves shifting the curriculum toward a stronger recognition of emerging global change processes to include a minor in Sustainability, a Graduate Certificate program, an interdisciplinary sustainability Program, and a General Education concentration in the area of sustainability. The fourth project was the establishment of a stakeholder group, Core Green Team, that considers functional practices both within the academic and the facilities domains, and generates a set of projects that move the campus toward a more sustainable mode of operation. [www.csun.edu/sustainability](http://www.csun.edu/sustainability)

Image Credit: Sarah Percle