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Volume 1, Spring Issue

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www.austintexas.gov/AustinGrows

City Of Austin Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden Program

Austin Grows

BY THE NUMBERS

Number of existing community gardens in Austin 31

Number of new community gardens under way in Austin 8

Number of jobs generated per million dollars in sales at local farmers markets 13

Tons of greenhouse gases diverted by Austin community gardens and local food production per year..... 1200

Number of pounds of fresh produce generated on Austin community gardens each year 122,000

Greetings farmers, gardeners, and friends

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden (SUACG) newsletter! Our publishing goal is a quarterly newsletter. We'd love to share your stories and events so please send us comments, article ideas, and pictures. Our hope is to serve the urban agriculture and community garden family by sharing information, and to foster a community where Austin Grows!

Austin's City Council initiated the development of a program to support citizens wishing to start a community garden.

The Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden Program has emerged as a resource to help community members navigate the process of finding available public or private land for growing food. If you are interested in establishing a community garden in your neighborhood or need project assistance, visit our website at www.austintexas.gov/austingrows for more information.

Metrics of a Growing Program (quarterly report)

22 presentations to community events

13 new projects/initiatives in progress

63 community queries and consultations

36 community garden and farm site visits

5 Research Collaborations with Universities

11 boards/councils/commission presentations

$6 million dollars in collaborative grant submissions

Ground Covered

Streamlining and Improving City Processes in Support of Community Gardens and Urban Farms

Since its inception, the Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden Program hit the ground running. Here are a few examples of the progress we've made so far:

- Submitted $6 million in collaborative grant solicitations
- Developed a web portal to consolidate local food system information and city resources
- Streamlined access to Austin Water Utility taps and waivers with additional benefits

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Sprouting Projects

With enthusiasm building around local food production across the city, SUACG is working with the community to advance new projects and initiatives that crop up with each passing day. Here is a list of projects 'in the hopper'.

Community Gardens

Cherry Creek Community Garden

Community Courts Community Garden

Festival Beach Community Garden Improvements

MLK Community Garden (SFC)

Oak Hill Community Garden

Dove Springs Food Desert Initiative

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Deep Eddy Community Garden, Photo courtesy of Sari Alvarez

Tips from the Field

Each *Austin Grows Newsletter* will draw attention to Austin's wealth of local community agricultural knowledge. We will feature seasonally appropriate tips from a Farmer or seasoned Master Gardener. If you have some tips worth sharing, or know somebody who fits the bill, contact us!

Randy Jewart, 5 Mile Farm and Resolution Gardens

1. Understand the planting year. If you're just getting your garden going now (April), you're in the middle of the growing year! You can start successfully growing something at ANY time during the year in this region, but Sept/Oct is really the beginning of the year. It will help your long term success to internalize this calendar.

2. Grow small tomatoes. If it's not atypically hot again this year, by the end of June it is too hot (over 95) for tomatoes to set fruit. The heat sterilizes their pollen. You can get more production from cherries, sunburst, and yellow pear varieties.

3. Scatter bay leaves around the stems of your squash & zucchini plants to stop the dreaded squash vine borer from wreaking havoc on the plants.

Support your local food system...

Do you want to support Austin's local food system? Are you looking to support farmers and eat healthily?

For more information about Community Supported Agriculture, visit www.localharvest.org/csa.

Austin CSA's

This is not an exhaustive list, but it should get you started.

Edendell Farms
Finca Pura Vida
Green Gate Farms
Hairston Creek Farm
Johnson's Backyard Garden
Jolie Vue Farms
Munkebo
Scott Arbor Farm
Steele Farms
Tecolote Organic Farm
Texas Medicinals
Urban Patchwork
Urban Roots
Walnut Creek Organic Farm

Ground Covered

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- Established a joint process with Neighborhood Partner Program to provide funding and support for community garden projects
- Established zoning clarification for urban farms and community gardens, expanding the potential for food production citywide
- Developed a single consolidated license agreement to facilitate community gardens on public land
- Established a community garden liability policy through Municipal League
- Consolidated the permitting process for city endorsement of community gardens. Available for download on the SUACG website: www.austintexas.gov/AustinGrows

The SUACG Program aims to create the infrastructure that will support our partners and neighbors as we work to build a thriving, unified local food production system.

Sprouting Projects

(Continued from page 1)

Patterson Park

South Austin Senior Activity Center Community Garden, with St. David's Foundation *(see article, page 4)*

Whole Foods Training Garden

Veteran's Garden and Farming Initiative

Artist designed community garden project in cooperation with Art in Public Places

Multicultural refugee farm project

Multi-city collaboration on food system policy development and best practices

Establishing model for urban agriculture on underutilized land

Climate adaptive farming innovation and programming

Urban farm incubator collaboration project

Developing a model and protocol for growing food in floodplains

School garden endorsement and development

Austin Grows Demonstration Garden

Food is Free Grassroots Garden

Food forest initiative

Exploring and generating funding opportunities for new garden projects

University collaboration for applied local food system research and development

From the Roots

This section will focus on highlighting projects that have caught our eye. If you know of an innovative project or program that you think other people should know about, send us your story!

Food is Free

The Food is Free Project grows community and food for free by "transFARMing city blocks into front yard community gardens". Led by John Edwards, neighbors build wicking beds constructed out of salvaged materials. The project and resources are available to any and all hosts interested in offering free harvests to their neighbors, friends and community. This is grassroots gardening at it's most innovative!

EVENTS ALMANAC

3rd Annual Austin Community Gardening Tour ♦ April 28 ♦ 12pm-4pm Free, friendly-to-all-ages, open-house style tour of Austin community gardens. www.communitygardensaustin.org

Farm to Plate ♦ May 10 ♦ 6:30-9:30pm Austin farmers paired with over 25 top chefs to provide a memorable evening at the Barr Mansion. For more information visit: www.sustainablefoodcenter.org

Sustainable Food Systems Networking ♦ May 16 ♦ 5:30pm-7pm at the Black Star Coop, 7020 Easy Wind Dr. An opportunity to find out what's going on Austin's local food system, meet the people who are getting involved and have some fun.

From Floodplains to Farms

SUACG Lays the First Stone Towards Food Production in the Floodplain

The Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden (SUACG) Program is leading the charge to find safe, agriculturally productive, and environmentally beneficial uses for land located in the floodplain.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) estimates that 94 million acres of US land are located on floodplains, a number that will only increase as FEMA redraws federal regulations for land that falls within the 100-year floodplain.

Currently, federal and local government agencies have developed management strategies whose focus is to steer people and development away from floodplains, resulting in a FEMA requirement that local governments buy out floodplain land from community members. These buyouts prove quite expensive for local jurisdictions, as they involve a loss of property tax revenue from the floodplain land as well as subsequent maintenance costs.

The renewed focus by city leaders on local food production offers timely new opportunities to innovate around costly land issues that have traditionally stumped planners and policymakers. Specifically, the SUACG Program is looking to utilize these lands for urban farms and community gardens, making productive use of the land and fostering social and economic development in the affected neighborhoods.

SUACG is working with Watershed Protection to develop a protocol to make productive and sustainable community use of floodplain land.

Meet the Team

Jake Stewart, Program Manager

Sarah Brownstein, Program Assistant

Jake Stewart has over 10 years experience in localized sustainable systems, including renewable energy, climate adaptation, appropriate technology and sustainable food security, in the private, non-profit and public sectors. His background includes work in climate adaptation, sustainability policy in the developing world, founding non-profit organizations and launching the world's first renewably powered sustainable biofuel facility, for which he was awarded the EPA Project of the Year. His international non-profit work helping to organize and empower small farmers in co-ops led him to focus on local food systems as a pivotal portal to localized sustainability.

Sarah Brownstein comes to Austin from Portland, Oregon, where she worked for the Multnomah County Office of Sustainability. Her projects included establishing a Sustainable Jail Project, initiating a thriving compost program internally, and leading a campaign to eliminate the use of county funds for bottled water. Prior to her time in Portland, Sarah lived in Costa Rica, where she owned a coffee shop that was among the few establishments that focused on sourcing food locally and organically. She is motivated to make local food production a sustainable venture and to ensure that local food is accessible and affordable to all Austinites.

Community Garden of Eatin' *Kicks Off at the South Austin Senior Activity Center*

City's first community garden dedicated to Austin's seniors

Saturday, April 21st, marked the launch of the South Austin Senior Activity Center's *Community Garden of Eatin'*. More than fifty people enjoyed the festivities that included planting fruits and vegetables in raised beds and learning about the new on-site composting system. The garden was named by the seniors who participates in activities at the Center. It was initiated by the City of Austin's Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden Program in partnership with the St. David's Foundation's Health's Angels and the South Austin Senior Activity Center.

Participating members of the garden assisted in the design, building and planting of the garden. The community garden has raised vegetable beds at standing height, preventing participants from having to kneel down or bend over. There are trough style raised beds as well, making gardening accessible to participants in wheelchairs.

"Health's Angels is so excited to help cultivate the Community Garden of Eatin,' said Earl Maxwell, CEO of St. David's Foundation. "The raised beds in this garden make it easier for older adults to plant and maintain. As avid gardener myself, I know how much pleasure I get from working in my garden, and I'm thrilled that the folks who come to the South Austin Senior Activity Center will be able to experience the same sort of satisfaction." The Community Garden of Eatin' is the City of Austin's first garden designed based on the input of seniors, for seniors. "This particular community garden pilot project is among the first in Austin to be focused on engaging the energy, creativity and intergenerational wisdom of our active senior population and based on the positive feedback and participation so far, I think it could represent the first of many to come", says Jake Stewart, who leads Austin's Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden Program. The lessons garnered from this garden will guide the planning of future gardens at other Senior Activity Centers across the city.

DID YOU KNOW?

It is estimated that Austin's Community Gardens currently produce over 122,000 pounds of fresh local, organic produce for Austin residents each year!

The Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden Program (SUACG) was created by Austin City Council in 2009. SUACG seeks to connect the dots between all of the efforts that make up the City of Austin's local food system, catalyzing partnerships to build community around local food production and food security. SUACG's broader goals include providing leadership, education, policy analysis, and project development support for the City of Austin's community-based food system.

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We're on the web!
www.austintexas.gov/AustinGrows

The Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden Program was featured in the Austin American Statesman's Food & Life section! Click here to read the article.