U.S. Botanic Garden Helps Veterans with Urban Farming
This fall, a group of military veterans and near-retirement active duty soldiers took a close look at sustainable, urban farming careers through the Armed to Urban Farm program presented by the United States Botanic Garden (USBG) and the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT).

For almost 200 years, the USBG has been connecting people with plants. As more Americans live in urbanized areas away from rural spaces, USBG is becoming increasingly committed to bringing the benefits of plants to urban areas. The USBG is working to adapt NCAT’s Armed to Farm training program to create Armed to Urban Farm to teach veterans about urban farming careers.

Veteran participant working at Arcadia Veterans Farm.

The Armed to Urban Farm program was a week-long training opportunity for military veterans that combined classroom sessions and hands-on experience in an urban farming enterprise. Participants visited farm sites at Common Good City Farm, Little Wild Things Farm, ECO City Farms, and Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food & Agriculture. They also joined a nationwide network of supportive farmer-veterans and agricultural advisors.

Responses from veterans participating included that the training program was “very well researched and presented,” and they “absolutely would positively recommend to others thinking about pursuing the industry (veteran farming).”

“A wealth of info and resources as well as connecting with like-minded veterans,” said another. “I have done previous workshops, but the logistics and staff set the bar. Bravo zulu.”

Veteran working at Common Good City Farm.

About a quarter of the participants have already begun their farm operations. Their own farm plans range from urban farms to community gardens and educational non-profit farms. Many are interested in the therapeutic aspects of farming and working the land.

Classroom sessions and lodging took place at the National 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Participants visited farm sites at Common Good City Farm, Little Wild Things Farm, ECO City Farms, and Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food & Agriculture. Instructors for the recent program included NCAT sustainable agriculture specialists, U.S. Botanic Garden employees, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agencies such as Cooperative Extension Service and experienced veteran farmers from other urban settings.

Learning about composting at Eco City Farm.

“The United States Botanic Garden was excited to partner with NCAT to provide this training program for veterans,” said USBG Associate Director Jeffery F. Hefley, USBG executive director. “Urban farming is an important and growing part of our nation’s food production system.”

After this initial success, the USBG and NCAT are planning additional trainings, including sessions in Ohio and California. The USBG is also exploring ways to continue connecting people with plants, especially through this program helping American veterans find success in urban farming.

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