Urban Agriculture

Urban Agriculture at the U.S. Botanic Garden

Agriculture is the cornerstone of human survival. The more than 7.8 billion people alive in the world today depend on plants for food, clothing, shelter, energy, and critical resources. Since the U.S. Botanic Garden’s creation 200 years ago, one of the Garden’s primary functions has been growing and demonstrating plants, agriculture and economic plants to the public.

Connecting people and agriculture is a critical need given the lack of exposure to agriculture and food production for most Americans today and the great challenges in successfully feeding our growing populations. With ever more people living in urban areas, understanding agriculture through an urban lens can provide an educational opportunity.

Using its urban setting and building on its long history of growing plants and educating people about them, the USBG is working to promote science and environmental learning through sustainable agriculture in urban settings; support health and wellbeing in urban communities by increasing food access through local food production; and foster community engagement through meaningful connections with food and agriculture. By building a network of organizations helping with food production and education at the community level, the Garden is strengthening people’s capacity to transform their lives, institutions, and communities through engagement in urban agriculture.

Read below to learn more about the U.S. Botanic Garden’s urban agriculture work.

Urban Agriculture Resilience Program

Community collaborations in urban agriculture are receiving support through a partnership between the United States Botanic Garden (USBG) and the American Public Gardens Association (Association). Under the third year of the Urban Agriculture Resilience Program, 24 urban agriculture collaborations between public gardens and community partners across 19 states are receiving $440,800, the largest amount awarded through the program to date.
The collaborations will support food growing and education activities in urban communities experiencing food insecurity and strengthen their capacity to engage in urban agriculture. In 2022, 73 organizations will participate in the program, representing a wide range of community partnerships including botanic gardens, arboreta, public school districts, universities, parks and recreation departments, youth organizations, community centers, food banks, health centers, urban farms, community gardens, faith-based organizations, and small businesses.

The Urban Agriculture Resilience Program began in 2020 as a way for the USBG and the Association to help public gardens continue urban agriculture and food growing programs facing funding and capacity challenges due to COVID-19. Learn about the 2020 Urban Agriculture Resilience Program and the 2021 Program.

Public garden and community partner collaborations awarded 2022 funding include:

Alaska
* Alaska Botanical Garden, in collaboration with Bowman Elementary School Georgeson Botanical Garden, in collaboration with Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation Districts, University of Alaska Fairbanks Office of Sustainability, and University of Alaska Fairbanks Vegetable Varieties Program

Arizona
* Desert Botanical Garden, in collaboration with Unlimited Potential, TigerMountain Foundation, Orchard Community Learning Center, and Roosevelt School District

California
* Guadalupe River Park Conservancy, in collaboration with UC Master Gardeners of Santa Clara County, and City of San Jose Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services
* Olivewood Gardens and Learning Center, in collaboration with Mundo Gardens

Colorado
* Denver Botanic Gardens, in collaboration with Sun Valley Kitchen and Community Center

Connecticut
* Connecticut College, in collaboration with FRESH New London

Delaware
* The Delaware Center for Horticulture, in collaboration with Food Bank of Delaware and Kingswood Community Center

Florida
* Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, in collaboration with Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Illinois
* Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance, in collaboration with Garfield Park Community Council and Chicago Park District

Kentucky
* Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest, in collaboration with YouthBuild Louisville and Urban Conservation Corps

Michigan
* Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum - University of Michigan, in collaboration with Cadillac Urban Gardens (Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision), Oakland Avenue Urban Farm, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network D-Town Farm, and Keep Growing Detroit

Minnesota
* Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, in collaboration with Carver County Health and Human Services, Scott County Public Health, and River Valley Health Services

Missouri
* EarthDance Organic Farm School, in collaboration with Ferguson-Florissant School District, All Among Us Women's Care Center, and Blessed Teresa Of Calcutta Food Pantry

New Jersey
* City Green, in collaboration with Clifton Recreation Department

New York
* Mary Mitchell Family and Youth Center, in collaboration with New York Botanical Garden, Morning Glory Community Garden, La Finca del Sur, and Castleton Community Garden
The USBG and the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) have partnered to create week-long Armed to Urban Farm sustainable agriculture trainings for veterans and their farm partners. Armed to Urban Farm gives military veterans an opportunity to experience sustainable, profitable small-scale farming enterprises and learn about urban farming as a career. Armed to Urban Farm, which is based on NCAT’s popular Armed to Farm program, combines engaging classroom sessions with farm tours and hands-on activities. Participants learn about business planning, budgeting, recordkeeping, marketing, urban soils, land access, vegetable production, and more. Participants gain a strong foundation in the basic principles of operating a sustainable farming enterprise. In addition, attendees join a nationwide network of supportive farmer-veterans and agricultural advisors.

Training Veterans in Urban Farming as a Career

Previous workshops
Baltimore, MD - September 2021
Cleveland - September 2019
Washington, D.C. - September 2018

Learn more about the Armed to Urban Farm program
Building Urban Ag Capacity at Public Gardens

The U.S. Botanic Garden has partnered with Chicago Botanic Garden's Windy City Harvest, an established urban agriculture program within the public gardens community, to develop a train-the-trainer program and urban agriculture toolkit. This collaboration is providing hands-on, practical support for public gardens and their partners interested in developing or expanding urban agriculture programming. Based on feedback from other gardens, the collaboration has designed and offered agriculture workshops for public garden professionals and their partners. Information and resources from these workshops is compiled in Building Capacity for Urban Agriculture Programs Toolkit.

The workshops and toolkit incorporate topics such as designing urban agriculture programs, developing community partnerships, selecting and establishing urban farm sites, cultivating donors and identifying funding opportunities, and evaluating and communicating program successes.

Upcoming workshops

- 2021 Virtual Workshop: July 2021-December 2021.
- Previous workshops: New Orleans - March 2020, Chicago - August 2019

Greenhouse Manual and Trainings for Educators

The U.S. Botanic Garden, the National Center for Appropriate Technology, and City Blossoms recognized the emerging need for user-friendly guidance on operating educational greenhouses and maximizing their potential in the school setting. To that end, the partners developed an introductory manual for educators wanting to better use greenhouses for programming. The manual clearly and concisely lays out a basic understanding of greenhouses, how to integrate them into lessons, and developing greenhouses in classroom curricula and out-of-school activities.

The manual includes lesson plans as well as basic information on layout and operations of a greenhouse, growing plants (especially during the school year), seedling nutrition, identifying and treating diseases, pest management in greenhouses, basic budgeting, and succession planting.
This useful resource will help facilitate transformative learning experiences in schools nationwide, while cultivating students' appreciation of the importance of plants.

Report: The Role of Botanic Gardens in Urban Agriculture

The U.S. Botanic Garden (USBG) and the American Public Gardens Association undertook this study to identify viable urban agriculture program models that are self-sustaining and environmentally, socially, and economically enriching, and to better understand how public gardens could achieve meaningful impact. The Association used a three-pronged research approach to evaluate the state of urban agriculture at community-based nonprofit and for-profit organizations, government agencies, universities, and public gardens. Insights were gained by exploring literature, surveying the community of practice, and interviewing practitioners and experts about urban agriculture initiatives and related educational programming.

Online Food and Agriculture Programs

As part of our ongoing educational programming, we offer periodic online programs about food and agriculture, including programs specifically focused on the urban environment. Find upcoming programs at www.USBG.gov/OnlinePrograms

The USBG Kitchen Garden

The USBG Kitchen Garden demonstrates food growing in an urban setting, with tours, tastings, workshops, and children's activities. The fruits and vegetables are used for educational classes and cooking demonstrations, and excess produce is donated to local community-based hunger relief organizations.

Find the Kitchen Garden in Bartholdi Fountain and Gardens

Source URL: https://www.usbg.gov/urbanagriculture