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, medicine, and other 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 to tell the story of 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 that lie ahead in successfully feeding our growing populations. With ever more people living in urban areas, understanding agriculture through an urban lens can provide 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 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, 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

The United States Botanic Garden and the American Public Gardens Association are partnering to support public gardens and their partners in facilitating urban agriculture, community gardening, and other food-growing programs. For 2021, the Urban Agriculture Resilience Program seeks to promote public garden community collaborations that address food security challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and that combine food growing and education. Awarded programs will share lessons learned through their programmatic collaboration.

Is your garden or organization already involved or interested in:

- An urban agriculture collaboration between a public garden and a partner organization(s)? Partners may include nonprofit organizations, local parks and recreation departments, housing authorities, small businesses, other public gardens, educational institutions, or other qualified organizations.
- Combining urban food growing and educational programming?
- Facilitating public engagement in urban food growing?
- Addressing community food security challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Building capacity in urban agriculture within and beyond the public gardens community?
If so, please consider applying for an Urban Agriculture Resilience Program award.

Learn more about your eligibility for the Urban Agriculture Resilience Program, see a complete list of criteria and access the application form on the Association website. Award amounts range between $10,000 and $20,000.

Applications must be received by 11pm ET/8pm PT May 19, 2021 using the online application form on the Association website.

Key criteria for applicants:

- Must be a public garden in the United States or a nonprofit organization partnering with a public garden in the United States on urban agriculture programming.
- Must use award funds to support urban agriculture or other food growing programming in urban/metropolitan areas; programs must include food growing and education components.
- Must be able to clearly describe the budget and anticipated impact of the funds received. All phases of this program are specifically designed to be easy-to-complete, equitable, and timely.

Please contact info@publicgardens.org with further questions. If you need additional information to assist you in preparing your application, please join a Q&A session on May 4th at 3:30pm ET.

About the 2020 Program:

The U.S. Botanic Garden partnered with the American Public Gardens Association (the Association) to offer immediate support to urban agriculture and other food growing programs at public gardens affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In June 2020, the USBG and the Association established the Urban Agriculture Resilience Program to grow capacity, prevent shortfalls, and gather best practices from established programs across the U.S. public garden community. The partnership made awards to 28 public gardens across the United States to help sustain urban agriculture and community food growing during this challenging time.

With the assistance of these funds, participating gardens in 19 states and Washington, D.C., grew and distributed produce, especially to communities with food access challenges; maintained and expanded urban agriculture and other food growing education programs; and promoted wellness and nutrition by educating the public about growing and consuming fruits and vegetables. Beyond offering immediate support, the Urban Agriculture Resilience Program will provide insight into successful approaches and strategies for public gardens to improve food access and advance food and agriculture education in urban communities.

See the awardees and learn more about their work:

Learn more at www.USBG.gov/UrbanAgricultureResilience

Training Veterans in Urban Farming as a Career

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 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. 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.

Upcoming workshops
Baltimore, MD - postponed to 2021 [new date TBD]
Previous workshops: 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. This collaboration is providing hands-on, practical support for public gardens and their partner organizations interested in developing or expanding urban agriculture programming. Based on feedback from other gardens, the collaboration has designed and offered three-day intensive urban agriculture workshops for public garden professionals and their partners.

The workshops 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. Participants have firsthand experiences on urban farms and learn about tools and resources developed over nearly two decades of the Chicago Botanic Garden's work in urban agriculture.

Upcoming workshops
Check back for future workshops
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 new or existing greenhouses for programming. The manual clearly and concisely lays out a basic understanding of greenhouses, how to integrate them into lessons, and 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.

Download the manual as PDF >

Upcoming trainings
Check back for future trainings
Learn more about this partnership and manual

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, 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 educational programming.

Download the report [PDF] >
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