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ROW BY ROW: UGArden acquires acre for planting site

Dallas Duncan Jun 9, 2010

Students break ground on the first campus community garden. Aided by Athens Master Gardeners, they planted vegetables and herbs on the South Milledge Avenue site. PHOTO BY EMILY KAROL.

Budding gardeners at the University finally have a place to grow their own zucchini, tomatoes and beans — and community relationships.

“We just started being able to have [garden workdays] because we just got an acre of land,” said Mary Carlson, a junior from Atlanta.

Carlson and junior Jenny Brickman are co-presidents of the student group UGArden, which began working toward building a sustainable campus community garden in the summer of 2009. The dream finally came true June 3 as the group hosted its first workday at the garden site.



Andrew Douglass, a senior from Atlanta, is UGArden’s garden manager. Originally, the group looked at several different sites to build the garden and finally chose a location on South Milledge Avenue near the horticulture greenhouses, he said. Because the property is owned by the University, the organization did not have to purchase it, he said.

“It was the perfect place,” Douglass said, citing the closeness of resources such as water and bathroom facilities as reasons for choosing the spot.

The group plans to have workdays every Wednesday, Saturday and possibly every Monday during the summer. Douglass spent three hours at the

garden during the Wednesday workday, checking drip tape for irrigation, staking tomatoes and setting automated timers for watering.

“Things we seeded are up today and look really good,” Douglass said.

Carlson said the garden would use sustainable methods and would follow organic production guidelines, but added UGArden does not have plans to seek organic certification.

“We’re using organic fertilizers and we’ve added a lot of lime to make the Georgia red clay less acidic,” she said.

Only one-third of the garden will be used at a time to encourage crop rotation and nutrient replenishment.

Summer crops at the garden include tomatoes, cucumbers, okra, peppers, eggplant, watermelons and herbs, Carlson said.

Douglass said gardeners included University students, faculty and staff as well as members of the Athens Area Master Gardener Association. He said most of the seeds and garden tools were donated by participants or bought with money leftover from the horticulture department's budget.

Carlson said most of the focus this summer will be on weeding the garden and figuring out how to organize it. She said right now, the garden is a "big mish-mash" of who is planting where, but everyone is taking care of it as a group.

"One third [of the harvest] is going to charity, one third is going into the student organization and one third will go to summer workers," she said. "A big project for fall is to determine who is dedicated enough to grow their own plot."

Big plans are in the works for UGArden. Douglass said members hope to have a booth at the Athens Farmers Market as soon as the garden produces a big enough harvest, but the club might have an informational table before then to raise awareness about UGArden.

"We'll be selling them at like 20 percent above market value so we won't be undercutting the people who are out there farming as a living," he said.

Carlson said she hopes the garden will foster a sense of self-sufficiency and community for participants.

"We wanted to give people who live in apartments stacked on top of each other a sense of place," she said.



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