CULTIVATING COMMUNITIES | PROGRAM FOR SOUTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY GARDENS

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences

PROGRAM GOAL

In response to increased grant funding to address food access and equity through community gardening, Clemson Extension developed the online training course "Cultivating Communities." The course aims to help new and beginning community gardeners acquire the essential skills and knowledge needed to create, sustain, and care for a community garden, from planning to planting to harvesting.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, participating gardeners will be able to do the following:

• Develop a garden team and assess the needs and skills of the community
• Evaluate potential sites to determine suitability and design a community garden space
• Explain raised bed gardening vs. in-ground gardening and describe irrigation options
• Plan a year-round vegetable garden
• Identify beneficial insects and common pest species
• Explain how to harvest, handle, and store vegetables safely
• Implement practices for garden maintenance and management
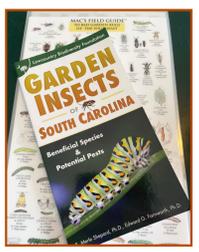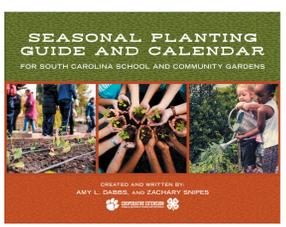• Identify individuals and resources to support community garden development

LEARNING MODULES

• Welcome & Getting Started
• Introduction to Community Gardening (M1)
• Soil Preparation, Raised Bed Gardening & Irrigation Basics (M2)
• Vegetable Gardening, Crop Selection & Planning (M3)
• Integrated Pest Management for Gardens (M4)
• Vegetable Harvesting, Handling & Storage & Community Garden Management (M5)
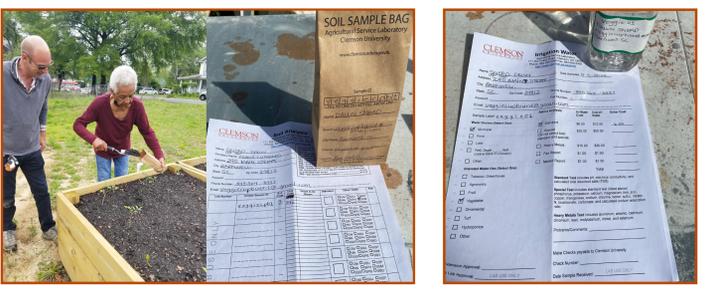
PROGRAM MATERIALS

Each Community Garden Team received a food grade harvest washing basket containing the following course materials:

• (5 copies) Dabbs, A., & Snipes, Z. (2021). *Seasonal Planting Guide and Calendar For South Carolina School and Community Gardens*. Clemson University Press.
• (5 copies) MacGowan, *Craig. Mac's Field Guides to Southeast Garden Bugs* (Mac's Field Guides). 1st ed., Mountaineers Books, 2000.
• Shepard, B., and E. Farnworth. *Garden Insects of South Carolina*. Lowcountry Biodiversity Foundation, 2017.
• (1) Clemson University Lab Soil Test
• (1) Clemson University Lab Irrigation Water Test
• (1) Pack each cool season and warm season vegetables, herbs, and pollinator seeds
• (1) Set of plant tags & waterproof markers
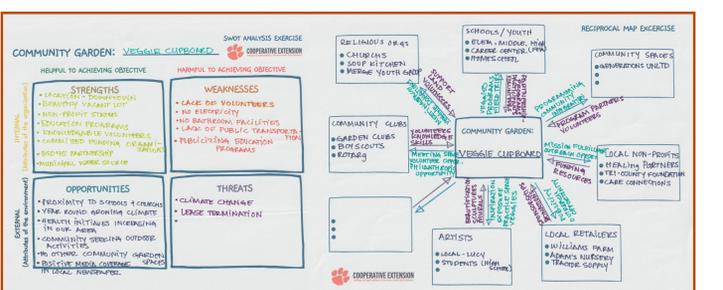• (1) Garden rain gauge

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Participants learn through engaging instructional videos and demonstrate learned skills by completing a minimum of three practical planning activities that aid in community garden development. Activities were submitted for review and feedback from Extension agents.
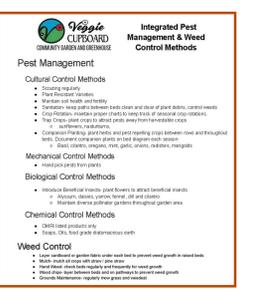

1. Collect and submit a soil sample
2. Collect and submit an irrigation water sample

3. Conduct a S.W.O.T (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis and Reciprocal Mapping exercise with the garden team

4. Develop a year-round garden plan
5. Meet with one or more Extension agents in person or via Zoom

6. Create a community garden binder, newsletter, or other communication tool
7. Develop a pest and weed control policy

Sumter County Master Gardeners met with Chase Smoak, Sumter County Horticulture Agent to submit soil samples and discuss community garden plans

Giany Guedjo, Executive Director, Carolina Human Reinvestment, and another community gardening grant recipient discuss composting (L) at the CHR flagship garden in Pawley's Island, South Carolina (R)
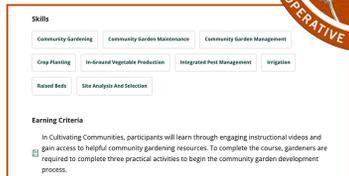
OUTCOMES

Over **80** participants enrolled in the April 2022 pilot cohort funded by the South Carolina Association for Community and Economic Development (S.C.A.C.E.D.).

The organization awarded **$3,000** to 21 community garden grant applicants.

DIGITAL BADGES

Clemson Online issued **68 interactive digital badges** to community gardeners who completed the training. They gained access to Credly, a digital credentialing platform, and the ability to share their verifiable learned skills with their professional networks.

EVALUATION

A Qualtrix post survey found that 95% of responding participants (n=20)...

• Stated it likely (25%) or very likely (75%) that they would:
  • Recommend this course to a friend of community member
  • Take another course from Clemson Extension
• Agreed (40%) or strongly agreed (55%):
  • The course was engaging and informative
  • They felt more prepared to engage in a community garden
• Agreed (35%) or strongly agreed (60%) the course was practical and beneficial

What participating gardeners enjoyed most...

"Having valuable information directly related to gardening, weeding out extra info not needed, having an agent to guide you, and access to others who can offer advice or tips. It was nice developing a network."

"The course offered many opportunities to learn more about farming, gardening, and many unanswered questions that were much needed to be successful in Community gardening."

"It filled in the gaps for me as a community organizer."

"I enjoyed each video being very detailed and having access to an agent to guide us through the process."