

COARC Research Garden and Learning Center 2011

Karen Gentry, Marvin Butler, Linda Samsel, and Rhonda Simmons

Introduction

In 2011 Oregon State University (OSU), Central Oregon Agricultural Research Center (COARC) in Madras opened its Research Garden and Learning Center to the local community at large. The Research Garden was established in 2008 on a half-acre parcel of land adjacent to the southeastern entrance of the research farm. The garden includes a diverse community of woody ornamental, herbaceous perennials, ornamental grasses, fruit trees, vegetable garden, and native plants to Central Oregon. We continue to develop and maintain a living collection of plants to support teaching sustainable gardening practices which have their foundation in research-based information. In addition, a plant records data base has been created for the garden. Plant records are an effective and consistent means for compiling data on all plants in the living collection. Each plant in the collection is assigned an accession number, botanical name, date of planting, and place of origin. This information can be easily accessed and made available to our garden visitors and landscape professionals that are interested in knowing how plants perform in the Central Oregon High Desert growing conditions.

2011 Classes and Workshops

Growing Up Wild: Exploring Nature with Young Children

Growing Up Wild is an early childhood education program for ages 3-7 that builds on children's innate sense of discovery about the natural world around them. The curriculum, developed by Project Wild and the Counsel for Environmental Education, correlates to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Standards and the Head Start Domains. The Growing Up Wild mission is to provide an early foundation for developing positive impressions about the natural world and lifelong social and academic skills.

Growing Up Wild was piloted at COARC in 2011, offering monthly programs at our Research Garden and Learning Center from May to September. Children and their parents from the local community were invited to participate in the program. Each program was designed to connect children to nature using developmentally appropriate math, language and literacy pieces and encouraging scientific inquiry. Programs offered included Rainbow on My Plate, Blooms and Butterflies, Plant a Pizza Garden, Seeds Needs, and Looking at Leaves. Attendance to each of the monthly programs varied from 8-15 children.

Jr. Master Gardener 4-H Afterschool Club

Junior Master Gardener program was designed by Texas A&M University for Children in grades 3-5, modeled after the successful Master Gardener program nationwide. JMG offers horticulture,

environmental science education, and leadership skills. The program is committed to helping students become good gardeners as well as good citizens. Students make a positive contribution to their community, school and family. The Junior Master Gardener program is run in partnership with Jefferson County 4-H program in Madras. Monthly classes are held at the Central Oregon Community College Campus (COCC) as a 4-H afterschool club. On completion of the eight core classes and participation in one leadership/community service project student will be certified with the national JMG-Kids.

Community Education Opportunities

The COARC Research Garden and Learning Center offered several Community Education Workshops this growing season. Workshops included: Spring into Gardening, Bee and Butterfly Gardening, Garden Design with Color and Texture and the Edible Landscape. Classes were instructed by OSU-Extension Horticulture staff and Master Gardener Volunteers. Workshop attendance ranged from 10-35 students per class.

Advanced Training for OSU Master Gardener

In August the garden hosted 25 OSU Master Gardeners for two workshops on Advanced Plant Diagnostics. The demonstration garden and learning center provided an outdoor classroom setting to study plant identification, and diagnosing insect/disease issues of woody and herbaceous ornamentals.

Plant Clinic

The Jefferson County Master Gardener Plant Clinic was relocated to the Central Oregon Agricultural Research Center this fall. OSU Master Gardeners volunteer their time in the plant clinic during the growing season. The mission of the plant clinic is education and assisting clients with recognizing and diagnosing plant problems. Providing them with management options and emphasizing prevention. Clients (homeowners/green industry professionals) from Jefferson county and surrounding areas are welcome to call or walk in with their gardening questions.

Jefferson County School Program

The COARC team held an all-day field trip event in the spring for 150 Buff Elementary students. A variety of learning stations were developed to help reinforce science concepts of Ecosystems and Ecology for 5th grade level. Stations included: Tour of the COARC facility, Weather, Noxious Weeds, Vegetable Garden Planting, and Ecology.

Future Goals

Our goal for the 2012 year continues to be aligned with the mission of the garden. To provide educational opportunities for the public through hands-on learning, exhibits, agriculture and gardening experiences.

Adult Learning Opportunities

Vegetable Gardening Basics, Garden to Table: Food and Preservation, Fruit Growing in Central Oregon: Selection and Maintenance, OSU Master Gardener classes. Classes through the Oregon Open Campus Community program will also be developed.

Student Learning Opportunities

Continue partnership with Jefferson County School District to provide emersion field trips for elementary aged children, focusing on 2nd and 5th grade science standards. Oregon State Education Standards and benchmarks will be supplemented with classroom instruction and hands-on leaning at the Research Garden as we develop, design and install a wildlife habitat garden in the spring of 2012. The habitat garden will be certified with the National Wildlife Federation.

Research Garden and Learning Center

Additional plant material will be installed to enhance the Edible and Grazing Garden. Grape and blueberry varieties will be selected for the Central Oregon climate.

Plans for 2012

Garden Open House in the summer of 2012 will invite the local community to participate in educational classes, tour the facility, meet the COARC staff, and enjoy the Research Garden in full bloom.

Additional botanical signage will be installed and a tri-fold brochure with map will be available to provide visitors with a self-guided educational experience. Signage will include information on topics of plants selected for Central Oregon, native plants, water-wise/sustainable gardening, and general cultural information. Interpretive panels and posters will be developed by staff and installed inside the Learning Center. Panels will depict the mission and history of COARC, current research projects, plant nutrition, horticulture, water, soil health and nutrition.