coa foodies

• community garden • edible botany •
• projects for peace •

editors
Mel Steinberg
Sarah Lee Maness
Cornelia Brabazon
Maria Escalante
• table of contents •

2 • editorial

3 • harvest dinner

4 • what’s goin’ on in the community garden

5 • queen of the weed lovelies

6 • urban agriculture through projects for peace

13 • edible botany

16 • apple festival

18 • csa: climate-smart agriculture

20 • farm to school

22 • recipes
Welcome to the first issue of the fall 2014 Sustainable Food Systems Newsletter! As the fall term begins, there are many new and exciting projects getting started, as well as many great continuing projects in the realm of sustainable food systems here at College of the Atlantic. This issue will take a look at what is happening with the Urban Agriculture Projects for Peace, the COA community garden, the farm to school program with Conners Emerson School, and Nishanta Rajakaruna’s Edible Botany class. We’ll also hear about another kind of CSA (climate-smart agriculture) and celebrate student poetry and recipes. We hope that you enjoy this issue and look forward to future issues and updates on what is happening in the world of sustainable food systems!
Our first sustainable food systems event! The Harvest Dinner took place at Peggy Rockefeller farm and allowed many to visit the farm for the first time. Students enjoyed a dinner of chicken/vegetable stew, vegetable/goat cheese turnover and muffins! A great big thank you goes out to Ken and all of our kitchen helpers, as well as B&G for making it all possible! We hope to see you all come spring harvest!

Photo Courtesy of Sarah Maness
What's Going on in the COA Community Garden
By Jasmine Bourgeois

The community garden at COA has existed ever since the college began offering classes. Its function has slowly shifted over the decades from a kitchen garden supplying fresh herbs and produce to TAB to a space that students and the larger community of MDI can share. Today, students, faculty, and community members alike can manage plots within the garden. Though students and locals can apply for a space to grow their own produce during the spring and summer, some plots are reserved specifically for classes. Suzanne Morse teaches a phenomenal hands-on organic gardening class each spring, so for those of you who want to get down and dirty keep that in mind!

The community garden provides a unique link between the college and the wider public. The involvement currently taking place is fantastic - but there is always room for more! The window for discussion about the purpose, goals, and practicalities of the community garden is always open. Its maintenance during the summer months is currently being discussed. Once students leave in June, just a few individuals carry on the responsibilities of the classroom plots, which involves arduous work. More importantly, come late summer and early fall too much produce has disappeared. The garden is used to grow food, and food is grown to be eaten. However, finding a way to fully respect the work of people who manage plots in the community garden might be harder than it seems.

The garden is also home to the college's composting operations. During the school year, food leftovers from both the dorms and the kitchen are composted in a designated area within the garden with the help of work-study students.

Composting in the community garden is done by “hot” composting, meaning that the pile is turned often and aerated. This method of composting can produce internal temperatures of over 1100 F and produces usable compost in about 1-3 months.

Last spring, Suzanne Morse offered a class titled Composting: From Waste Management to Resource Creation, which emphasized the importance of composting in both the COA community and the broader communities we belong to. Students in the class worked to maintain the composting system already established and developed new ways to improve and sustain the process.

The community garden is just one way for students to get involved with sustainability and food systems at COA. Anyone interested in getting involved should contact Suzanne Morse.
queen of the weed lovelies

Hurry!
Hurry!
back to the knotweed
to find myself
slipping
fingers deep
jumping
on my shovel
penetrating
soil
for my little
sandy nuggets
of woody
moistened
roots of orange
gradient
mustard yellow
crooked grainy
backhanded
nutrient mama
flood my cellulose!
take me home!
extract
my goodness
and bottle me up
slurp.
slurp.
Have at me ticks!
Have it!

Anonymous

Photo courtesy of Anonymous
Over the past summer, COA students went out into the real world to pursue projects on urban and community agriculture. Alumni Ana Puhac and Boglarka Ivanegova spent their months in Bratislava building the first rooftop garden of the city. Maytik Avirama and María Alejandra Escalante went back to their homeland of Bogotá, where they were joined by their Colombian friends Natalia Londoño and Esteban García, and started up the first eco-classroom in one of the most marginalized neighborhoods of the city. All were able to carry on these projects with grants awarded by the Davis Project for Peace Foundation. Each year, COA students are encourage to submit their proposals to the Davis Foundation and take real, direct action to foster peace and understanding anywhere they choose. Read more about this year’s experiences and stories—there is so much to learn about community-based action and development in urban gardening!

For more information on the Davis Project for Peace Foundation visit http://www.davisprojectsforpeace.org
The goal of the project was to build a publicly accessible rooftop community garden and use it to facilitate societal conversations on food (food security and urban agriculture); people (civic engagement, youth and minorities); and space (sustainability of architecture and the quality of public space).

We encountered two great challenges at the beginning of the project; but overall, we believe that overcoming them made our project a lot more successful and resilient. The planned location of the project, the rooftop of the modernist Tesco building on Kamenne námestie, didn't work out. Tesco unexpectedly cancelled our mutual agreement to use the rooftop of its building for our garden project. The other unforeseen issue was that one of our initial project partners, Zuri Camille de Souza, decided to leave the project. The failure of the Tesco agreement and our project partner leaving set us back at first, but these challenges were beyond our control. The determination of the rest of the working group to continue with the project pushed us forward. Our daily meetings produced more (and more diverse!) activities than we had planned at the beginning of the project, effectively spinning off new ways to implement the objectives of the project, such as installing hydroponic vertical gardens in popular youth cafes and briefing emerging social entrepreneurship support communities.

We created a “garden hub of herbs and vegetables” in one of the Courtyards of the Primate's palace (which dates back to 1650) with a group of young enthusiasts, where we organized public debates and regular community meetings. Each debate had a topic pertaining to civic and local identity. We talked about the crises of capitalism, the fall of the Communist regime, the European Union and European nationalism, the demise of colonialism and neocolonialism, feminism and gender stereotypes, neofascism and religion. The location of the garden hub was as important as the student activities: the central placement within the Municipal Office allowed us to challenge stereotypes about urban gardening with the decision-makers, as well as their assumptions those about student engagement.

On weekends we facilitated public workshops at the local farmers’ market. During these we made recycled modular planters, built a hydroponic window garden, talked about the ethnobotanical background of the most common vegetables, raised awareness about urban microclimate and the importance of plants in cities, and measured the food miles of tropical fruits and created an interactive foodmap with children.

Communication with the stakeholders in this project was very successful; this was extremely important at the first stages of the project. That communication effort — both personal interactions and material we produced such as flyers, posters and brochures — ultimately helped the project. In late June, we were allowed to build our community on the terrace of the iconic inverse pyramid building of the Slovak National Radio. It has long been the interest of the urban community in Bratislava to revitalize these premises, but this was thought to be unfeasible because of the rigid nature of the public broadcasting institutions. However, thanks to the cooperation of the new generation of leaders in Slovak television and radio, we are able to use more than 20,000 square feet of the terrace to create a multifunctional rooftop garden.

So far, our project has directly benefited approximately 50 high school students who participated in debates and work parties, young families who attended our workshops, and approximately 20 neighbors who planned the community garden with us. The creation of the garden has benefited from interdisciplinary support. Architects, urban activists, social workers, youth parliaments and neighborhood organizations came together for the common cause of revitalizing the roof. Volunteering and in-kind contributions such as donated goods, services and barter were important parts of the project and allowed us to build informal, friendly relationships within the neighborhood.
The project is receiving a lot of public attention and we believe that our efforts will bring benefits to a much larger audience. There are approximately 500 employees in the building who will have access to the garden. What’s more, there is a primary school, three secondary schools and the Slovak Technical University campus in the immediate neighborhood of the radio! We have been offered a long-term contract with Slovak Television and Radio and we are planning to use the space even in the winter, for Christmas markets.

A.J. Muste said that “There is no way to peace, peace is the way.” Peace realizes itself in the moments when people communicate with the highest regard for each others’ vulnerability, and when they work together to try to improve each others’ well-being. Daily commitment to better and more thoughtful communication among team members was what defined peace in these three months of work. Peaceful communication at group meetings was crucial for bringing the project (the garden) to the next, more tangible phase. Peaceful communication was also integral in our outreach to the public. We tried as hard as we could to make the garden as inclusive and participatory as possible. Although our initial proposal envisioned us doing peace-building with the community in the garden in a more intentional way through organized discussions and World Café while we were there, that kind of peace-building will happen in the near future and stay a long-term part of this newly designed space. The garden on the roof of the Radio building is already coming together through participatory design, and that too is another tool for peace-building.

Although it is hard to measure the worth of this project in one way, the project did bring one great value to Bratislava community: we opened up a physical space for the public to use as ‘commons.’ The endeavor to build this project brought us not only new skills in public event organization, graphic design, botany, gardening, negotiation and contract-writing, facilitation, and place-based education; but it has also helped us to define each of our roles in the path toward ‘professional’ activism.

To get in touch with the Rooftop of Eden visit Na Streche - Urban Farm - Community Centre on Facebook
https://www.facebook.com/nastreche?fref=ts

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Empowering Local Initiatives: building food sovereignty from the social tissue

by Ana Maytik Avirama, Maria Alejandra Escalante, Natalia Londoño, & Esteban Garcia

The goal of this project was to revitalize a vacant public lot on the bank of the river Fucha in the Bogotá neighborhood of San Cristobal, by initiating a community-based effort to use the land and strengthen the social tissue from the core. It was also our goal to use this plot as the first eco-classroom in Bogotá and as a meeting space for community members and groups working towards river re-naturalization and rooting life in the city.

In addition to the Davis Projects for Peace award, our project was supported by Casa Nativa, a collective that partnered with us to facilitate garden construction and bring youth participants into the project; Mesa de Agricultura Urbana (MAU) de San Cristobal, a local urban agriculture grassroots organization which supported us with knowledge and camaraderie; and the Rochester School of Bogotá, which donated several trees and compost for the garden.

This project was conceived and executed by four minds. Maytik Avirama and Maria Alejandra called on Natalia Londoño and Esteban García, close friends who are currently finishing their majors (in sociology and anthropology, respectively) at the Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá. For over a year, Natalia and Esteban were the local links who established the foundations of what our project would become. When the four of us reunited in Bogotá, we became a synchronized group of young minds that will continue to develop similar projects in the city. Besides the four of us, we had the luck and privilege of help and support from many volunteers who, encouraged by our project, invested their time and energy in the garden transformation.

Initially we thought that our project was going to support MAU’s vegetable production efforts, but soon we realized that encouraging such an endeavor was beyond us because we had limited knowledge of markets and finance and our budget would not allow us to buy enough land. Instead, we became more interested in addressing a second issue that interested some of the MAU members: passing down traditional knowledge of working the land to younger generations. This transfer of knowledge and experience became our motto.

At this point in the project, we realized that we lacked sufficient contact with youth in the neighborhood because most of our contacts were elders in MAU. Also, we realized that if we wanted to reach out to the community, we needed to go out of our MAU comfort space because our real challenge was to involve people who were not already interested in urban agriculture. We started to do some networking and discovered that there were multiple initiatives focusing on social transformation in San Cristobal.

One of the people who we met was Hamid Nativo, a man who works with a collective called Casa Nativa and guides a social service program for a group of 30 youth from a local school. Their two-year-long work has focused on the re-naturalization of the Fucha river, one of the main water resources of Bogotá. The river used to be a social and ecological center of the city but is now ignored and greatly polluted by the urbanization process. Thus far, Casa Nativa has focused primarily on cleaning up garbage on two public terraces by the riverside. After meeting Hamid and sharing with him our visions of our project, he opened up the possibility of using one of those terraces as our community garden. At first, we doubted whether this was the right direction for our project because the space is public. This required us to change the focus of the project and take the MAU members out of their comfort space. At the same time we saw potential for connecting the work of the young activists with the elders, and to include the objective of re-naturalization (meaning understanding changes of the land over time due to urbanization and consciously repairing damage). Additionally, the idea of revitalizing a center of waste and violence into a place of life and harvest was very appealing.
Therefore we designed and built an eco-garden, a public park where people could hang out, work the land, and learn about native species of trees and shrubs while enjoying the river and the ecological path. In the short term we aimed to create a bridge between different generations, built upon practical work and a shared objective—the transformation of a space. In the medium term we aimed to strengthen the network of environmental, social, and agricultural activists around Bogotá; so we organized a festival called Escucha al Río en Tí where different groups from the city could see our work and then talk about and celebrate their own work. In the long term, the whole community of San Cristobal will benefit from this space, the first ecological garden along the Fucha River. Local political leaders have told us that there is interest in replicating our work at several other strategic points along the Fucha. We also consolidated a strong network of volunteers from different universities in Bogotá who will continue supporting Natalia and Esteban in further development of the project. Bringing people from different socioeconomic backgrounds to work together and learn from each other is also an important achievement of this project. Members from MAU, Casa Nativa and volunteers have committed to continue work to transform the space and produce a documentary about their experiences on the site.

Peace can be defined as the fighting of fear while filling the emptiness with elements that allow making a space where love can be shared, explored and expanded. Our project was relevant for peace building in the short term because we transformed a space dominated by fear and violence into a fertile garden where trust and collaborative work are needed in order to succeed. In the long run, we hope that reclaiming public space as a place to share, celebrate and harvest strengthens the community’s resilience capacity.

This project showed us that social empowerment exists beyond theory, but to make it tangible there needs to be a constant commitment to every step of the process. This commitment is expressed by accepting that initial plans will always fluctuate, and that such changes should be accepted with flexibility as an inherent part of working within complex networks of human relationships. Because of their fragility and fluidity, these networks require constant care and attention; and when cultivated can become powerful tools for enacting social change.

Recognizing that these tools operate by their own rhythm becomes paramount in understanding the speed, evolution, and magic of working with people and their environment. In order to sustain healthy interactions, it is important to understand others’ needs. Exchange and reciprocity are at the base of love and success.

To get in touch with Proyecto Escucha el Río visit Proyecto Escucha al Río - Community https://www.facebook.com/proyectofucha
Sustainable Food Systems courses here at COA

by Abby Plummer
COA M.Phil Candidate

If you want to know where your food really comes from...start by taking Edible Botany! Nishanta Rajakaruna's course Edible Botany would do well as a prerequisite for anyone interested in sustainable food systems. From the history of agriculture to plant biology to uses of plants around the world and the current threats to plant-human relations, Edible Botany provides invaluable scientific, historical, cultural, and ecological background to the study of sustainable food systems.

Interested in growing food or teaching the science of agriculture? Through hands-on activities like identifying plant parts by eating your way through a 50-fruit salad and learning plant families by exploring the Community Garden, Edible Botany will introduce you to the basics of plant morphology, anatomy, physiology, and taxonomy. Concerned about food security and food sovereignty? Edible Botany introduces you to botanists focusing on plant-people relations at places like Avena Botanicals Herbal Apothecary and Gardens, and provides background on the history, present, and future of edible plants—crucial knowledge in solving today’s global food crises.

Although I had experience on a highly diversified organic vegetable farm and in teaching gardening through Farm to School programs, I did not have any formal education in botany or the science behind agriculture before taking this class. As a graduate student studying farm-based education, I realized that in order to effectively teach children about sustainable food systems, it is imperative to be competent in every aspect of a food system; and it all starts with understanding botany.

Wherever your interest lies in the field of sustainable food systems, whether you want to be an educator, policy-maker, chef, writer, health-care provider, entrepreneur, or farmer, if you really want to be effective it is important to comprehend the language of botany. To quote the brilliant and infectiously enthusiastic Nishi, “Without plants, you are nowhere!”
On Sunday September 28th, The Community School hosted an Heirloom Apple Festival at Smith Farm as part of their unit on apples. There was an apple press, apple tasting, bobbing for apples, and other apple-related activities and treats. It was a beautiful day and the kids were having a great time. Although this seems like just a fun activity for an elementary school to host for the kids, it was much more than that. In these times of highly processed snacks riddled with excess sodium and sugar, educating children about their food and where it comes from is more important than ever. Instead of nutrient-packed lunches that should energize our students, some schools have gone as far as categorizing pizza as a vegetable in order to meet regulations. It’s no wonder that many schools, such as the Community School, have begun to teach their students about food. Some schools have also adopted a farm-to-school relationship in order to provide kids with healthy, locally sourced produce and meat.

I interviewed Gabrielle Brabazon, a teacher at a Montessori school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to learn more about food in the modern classroom. In Montessori-style learning, food education is incorporated into the everyday routine. Kindergarteners help prepare snacks for the rest of the classroom such as by spreading jam on crackers or making fruit kabobs, allowing them to get more familiar with the food while practicing fine motor skills. Students are also welcome to get a snack anytime they are hungry as opposed to a scheduled snack time; this helps kids listen to their bodies and stay focused. When it comes to picky eaters, children are more likely to try and enjoy the food when they’ve helped prepare it. “Kids who would never touch a roasted beet ate an entire bowl of them because they washed the beets, poured apple cider over them, and watched them put into the oven,” says Gabrielle. All this interaction with food encourages curiosity and allows for discussion to occur at a young age. Where does the food come from? Is it grown locally? Can it be grown locally? Introducing these types of questions at a young age will help the next generation to think critically about what we eat and how we can produce it in a more sustainable manner. Schools that take sustainable food systems seriously will not only keep our children healthy, but will create an educated and aware generation of innovators.

locally? Introducing these types of questions at a young age will help the next generation think critically about what we eat and how we can produce it in a more sustainable manner. Schools that take sustainable food systems seriously will not only keep our children healthy, but will create an educated and aware generation of innovators.
Climate-smart agriculture: not so smart?

by Lara Shirley

In the early morning of Saturday the 20th of November, more than 50 students from COA piled into cars and vans to head down to New York. We were heading to the People’s Climate March on Sunday. Now, as we all know, COA kids are a pretty diverse bunch; and I’m sure we all had slightly different reasons why climate change is important to us. One of the ways that I personally relate climate change to other issues is through food systems—and on my drive down, I had one thought in particular on my mind: something called ‘climate-smart’ agriculture.

‘Climate-smart’ agriculture was originally introduced through the FAO. It is now becoming popular within the UNFCCC, and spawning lots of initiatives all over the place. Climate-smart agriculture (or CSA—beware of misleading acronyms!) claims that it will achieve three things: farmer adaptation to climate change; mitigation (that is, reduction) of greenhouse gas emissions caused by agriculture; and increased yield of food crops. Sounds great!

Not everyone is feeling very positive about this, though. One of the main things adding momentum to the CSA-craze is the Global Alliance on Climate-Smart Agriculture, or GACSA. It was launched by Ban-Ki Moon at the Climate Summit a few days later, on the 23rd. This Alliance is mostly pairing with big industry names: companies that deal in synthetic fertilizer, genetically modified seed and intensified livestock production, among other things. The companies involved in the Alliance include Yara, CropLife, Syngenta, McDonalds, Kellogg’s, and Walmart. Another big fan is CGIAR, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research.

GACSA’s solutions are not going to work the way they promise they will. Adaptation needs to be locally based and flexible enough to adjust to changing circumstances. It also needs to promote crop diversity—again, to help makes systems more flexible in order to respond to whatever environment climate change will create. Synthetic fertilizers and genetically modified seeds are inflexible: they can’t be developed fast enough for specific circumstances, particularly considering how much they cost to develop.

The Alliance’s strategies will also not reduce GHG emissions (mitigation) since producing synthetic fertilizer creates significant amounts of nitrous oxide.

In any case, these top-down, one-size-fits-all, industrial approaches don’t match up with food security and sovereignty: they will increase farmer dependence on multinational companies, which is hardly ideal for promoting agricultural development. Not only that, but the initiative could also facilitate land grabs, by promoting the sale of land that is sequestering carbon in the soils in international carbon markets. What has happened with carbon markets in the past is that there is much more supply than demand, causing the price to plummet, which makes it easy for investors to purchase farmers’ land at extremely low prices.

It’s also worth noting that climate-smart agriculture is somewhat slippery because it promotes some agro-ecological, local practices alongside the industrial ones. It’s a little difficult to say that it’s ONLY industrialized agriculture, because it isn’t (even though that’s where the overwhelming influence comes from). The most worrying thing about climate-smart agriculture, in my opinion, is that it is able to greenwash and legitimize its problematic approaches by pairing them with more positive ones.

Climate-smart agriculture doesn’t address the root issues of resilience and development that other approaches—particularly agroecology—are capable of doing. It is a worrisome step towards industrial agriculture, which is the last thing any food system needs... especially when, with a ticking clock like climate change, there isn't much time to make mistakes.

Sources:
COA Farm to School Program  
by Abby Plummer

COA students have been coordinating a Farm to School program at Conners Emerson School in Bar Harbor for the past two years to introduce elementary students to the importance of sustainable food systems through experiential learning. Working once a week with sixth-grade teacher Steve Gabel-Richards, close to fifty middle-school students are learning about farming and where food comes from through fun, hands-on activities and field trips. Some different themes the students are learning about include food systems, Maine agriculture, cooking and food preservation, and the science of gardening. We also are excited to be involved with the construction of an upcoming greenhouse! Students have already been on a field trip to the Common Ground Country Fair and will be taking a field trip to COA’s Peggy Rockefeller Farms later in the fall! The program is being organized and taught by COA graduate student Abby Plummer (Program Director) and undergraduate students Greg Bernard, Maggie Maiorana, Mel Steinberg, Page Hill, Samantha D’Onofrio, and Soleil Pacetti. If you have any questions or would like more information about being involved, please email Abby: aplummer@coa.edu.
Simple Yet Delicious Fall Granola

3 cups oats
1 cup raw walnuts*
1 tsp cinnamon (or to taste)
⅔ c honey

Preheat your oven to 300°F. Combine oats, cinnamon, and walnuts in a bowl. Drizzle honey over the oat mixture and combine it all with your hands! Once your mixture is all one beautiful sticky cinnamon-y delicious mess, you can spread it in an even layer onto a baking sheet (make sure the sheet has at least some sides on it or you will just end up with burnt granola in the bottom of your oven). Bake for 45-50 minutes. It’s very important that you watch it closely toward the end of its baking because immediately once it starts to get golden brown (or even right before) you should take it out and let it cool. It will not be hard like granola usually is, because you have to wait for it to cool to solidify. Once it cools you can break up the bark and FEAST!

*Instead of buying walnuts you could forage for some delicious black walnuts (Juglans nigra). I would not recommend hulling the walnuts by hand (use gloves instead), because the hulls contain tannins that will not only stain your hands but can also cause stinging and burning to your skin.

Submitted by Chelsi Torres
gnocchi di zucca

1.2 kg squash
300 grams flour
1 egg
100 grams grana
100 grams ricotta
salt, pepper, and nutmeg to taste

roast the squash* then with the other ingredients make a mixture. using a teaspoon, scoop small portions of the mixture and drop into a pot of boiling water, cooking for 2-5 minutes. serve with sage butter and ground, toasted sesame seeds.

*squash can be halved, sliced, or cubed and roasted at 400 degrees fahrenheit, 20-50 minutes depending on size of pieces, or until soft when pierced with a fork.

Submitted by Mel Steinberg
Thank you for reading this term’s first issue of the sustainable food systems newsletter!

To contribute to the next issue, please send submissions to sustainablefoodsystemsnews@coa.edu

Photo Courtesy of Marlene Nuart