

## **Gardening in College: Living with Plants**

*Program Directors:*

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### **Overview of the Program:**

In the Organic Gardening program, members will learn how to grow and maintain plants (flowers, common cooking herbs, decorative plants, etc.) indoors during the fall semester and during the spring semester, will learn how to grow outdoors plants (garden flowers, vegetables, etc.). We feel that educating our members about growing one's own plants is a fun way to encourage a healthy and sustainable lifestyle and embrace the benefits of living surrounded by nature. By living together, we hope to encourage growing techniques and practices of farming and gardening through books, documentaries, such as "Natural World – A Farm For The Future" or "The Future of Food", and guest speakers, such as Vermush. We hope to have a common room full of indoor plants so that members can be responsible of taking care of and learning about each plant together as a community.

### **Learning Objective One:**

Members will become familiar with and be able to identify many different types of flowers, herbs and other plants. In addition to knowing some common herbs that are used in everyday cooking, common flowers, and herbs used for medicinal purposes, members will also be welcome to explore uncommon plants and educate the rest of the program members on the plant, flower or herb. (This will be ongoing throughout the year.)

We want our living area to be abundant with plants, and plan to use part of our budget to accomplish this. By being surrounded by plant life, members have hands on and direct access to learning about and experiencing plants.

### **Action steps:**

**a.** During the beginning of the semester, members will get acquainted with basic knowledge of common plants and herbs. If they choose, they can also research and educate the program on plants that are not common (i.e. not indigenous to America, rare in America, rare/not indigenous to Vermont, only bloom once every 50 years, etc.) Research will be done through books and films, primarily, though members are encouraged to research in other means as well (articles, internet sources, interviews, etc.) To get acquainted with the program itself, we will focus on a few documentaries, some books, as well as other related material that we find and continue our exploration of plants. Two documentaries we find education and relative are "Natural World – A Farm for the Future" and "The Future of Food."

There are many books available in Bailey-Howe Library relating to plants, herbs, sustainable growing, and organic food. We plan on going to the library as a program to have a designated time for research on finding a subject that interests the members. We hope to use our funds to purchase some books that members can reference in the suites, some that we had in mind are:

"The Complete Herb Book" by Jekka McVicar.

"The New York Times 1000 Gardening Questions and Answers" by Leslie Land, Dora Galitzki,

and Linda Yang.

“Indoor Plants: The Essential Guide to Choosing and Caring for Houseplants” by Jane Courtier. We hope that direct access to these books and films will help members to become familiar with what our programs goals are, teaching us and how we can create a sustainable environment and understand the benefits of growing and eating organic food.

**b.** Part of our budget will be used toward buying plants that require minimal upkeep to maintain indoors. Examples of these would be Jade, Cactus, Aloe, and Spider Plants. We hope that each member can recognize the importance of keeping these plants alive, without having to be overwhelmed with maintaining them. We recognize that students are very busy, but want to give them a sense of what it is like to be responsible for living plants. In addition to indoor decorative plants, many herbs can be easy to maintain. Many herbs have medicinal uses, and some are used for cooking. Basil, for example, is an herb that many people grow inside with little effort except for proper water and sunlight and that we can use towards our final demonstration. Herbs that we grow will be used as a community building activity to cook a program supper using what we have grown ourselves. Having an intended outcome will help members work towards collectively maintaining the plants and herbs.

**c.** A different member of the program each week will be in charge of gather information on a plant of their choice. Demonstrations of any sort will be welcomed—a powerpoint, a documentary, a hands-on presentation, a food demonstration, short stories, etc. as long as they informative. We feel that with the right amount of encouragement and engagement with members, they will all be eager enough to come up with a sufficient amount of informative material. We want this activity to be fun, not overwhelming but still demonstrate that the member has put thought into researching their plant. They will educate the rest of the program on this plant, and other knowledge of the ‘plant of the week’ will be encouraged to be shared by the rest of the members as well. This will hopefully provide inspiration for more in depth research for an individual member. We hope that this on-going project will be engaging for each member and they that they will be able to have fun with it, as well as gain knowledge—we feel that this will strongly encourage each member to actively participate in our program all year long.

### **Learning Objective Two:**

Members will learn how to grow plants indoors. We will explore and share different techniques in order to grow plants in harsh environments (such a Vermont) and in a space that is shared by many people. We will all work together to establish a sense of cooperation and unity in which we can all share in helping one another raise and maintain plants. Educational aspects of this learning objective include learning which plants need sunlight, how much water each plant needs, how to plant seeds, how to rid a plant of dead leaves or buds, how big the roots will get and, thus, how big the planting pot should be, and what the soil should look like and feel like. This objective will be an ongoing process, however, the primary educational aspect (learning

how to maintain, grow, etc.) will take place during the fall semester. Then, as the year goes on, we can take what we have learned and apply it to every aspect of the program. Together, we will choose plants or seeds to buy that we all agree would be both fun and challenging to learn about. We will do our research and find out how each plant needs to be cared for and, as a program, keep the plants alive. We want this to be a learning process for the members of the program. This means that if members don't take responsibility for the upkeep of the plants and herbs, they will see first-hand consequence (the plants will die). Of course, as program directors, we want our plants to live, but we also feel it is important to teach the importance of maintenance.

### **Action Steps:**

**a.** Members will learn to grow indoors through hands on experience in our residential area. We want to turn our common rooms into indoor gardens (within reason, of course.) We will have both decorative plants as well as plants and herbs that help sustain a healthy body (such as aloe vera and chamomile). During the time in which we plan to pick out plants to buy for the program, we will present the opportunity in which each member can choose a medicinal herb (chamomile, aloe vera, mint etc.) that help sustain a healthy body. This will be more or less "their plant" that the member will strive to take of, among the other plants in the suite. The purpose of this is to have members remain enthusiastic about the upkeep of all of the plants in the suite. The purpose of this is to have members remain enthusiastic about the upkeep of all of the plants because they will, we predict, be continuously concerned with keeping their own plant alive. We feel that being in college is a prime time to learn about how to sustain a healthy body naturally. We plan on using a variety of our herbs to make tea as well as learn other ways to use these herbs that help maintain a healthy body. More research will be done and as the semester goes, with the help maintain a healthy body. More research will be done and as the semester goes on, with the help of our program advisor, we will present and share information regarding plants and herbs to the rest of the program.

**b.** We plan on inviting guest speakers to talk with the group about, for example, strategies for improving the health of indoor plants, as well as their benefits for us and how to use them. Vermush is a Vermont company that is dedicated to growing gourmet mushrooms on a log. They do demonstrations in the Burlington area and we will contact them and hopefully have them come speak to us about growing our own mushrooms. We feel this would be educational for our members because one of the main goals for this program is to encourage healthy eating. It is essential, if you want to eat healthy, to know where your food comes from. In addition to this, Vermush has a product called a Bondai Mushroom Log that has medicinal benefits as well. Neither program directors know much about this, so it will be fun and informative to have Vermush come to talk to us about the benefits of growing your own food. In addition to this, and hopefully another guest speaker, we plan on collaborating with Active Minds on campus to discuss the ways in which plants and herbs can help with mental health issues such as depression. We feel strongly that plants can be very headlining both physically, emotionally, and mentally. We've found that even having greenery in a living situation can be

very soothing. An article from Psychiatric News explains that “working with plants or exposure to nature has a very therapeutic power.” Mental hospitals have, for a long time, used horticulture as a way of therapy. To spread awareness of mental health and to educate on ways to reduce the risks of poor mental health is the mission of Active Minds. We hope to work them to encourage people to recognize the health benefits of plants and nature.

c. At the end of the semester, we plan on presenting a showcase of plants to the Living/Learning community. We will also prepare a dinner with the herbs that we grew ourselves and share them with the rest of the L/L community. This will involve both a slide show where members can demonstrate what they have learned about their plants, as well as physical examples of these plants that we have grown ourselves as a community. This presentation will demonstrate the importance of sustainable living and organic plant growing, and we will show how beneficial plants can be to one’s health. Samples of the food we prepare and this demonstration will be held in the FPL and will be open to all of L/L. We want to encourage the whole community to eat healthy as well as promote home-grown herbs and vegetables as a way to improve health. Members will be responsible for putting together the demonstration as well as preparing the food that we will distribute. This will be during the end of the first semester, so we can also stress the fact that it is important to keep your body healthy and stress-free during a very stressful finals period. This will be an opportunity for members to showcase everything they have learned this semester. By then, they will be experts on the basics of how to grow and maintain plants and knowledge as to what plants are beneficial in what ways. They will have the chance to encourage other members of the L/L community to learn about the importance of home-grown, healthy food.

### **Learning Objective Three:**

Once the weather gets warmer, members will learn about planting outdoors and the benefits for the environment and wildlife in Vermont. (Spring Semester). Unfortunately, the outdoor gardening season starts in late May/early June This is just after we leave for Summer. However, we still feel that we can learn about outdoor planting. The fact is however that the ground will be too frozen to do any outdoor planting. This will not, however, interfere with the educational aspect of this objective. We will pick up in the Spring semester by researching the methods and techniques that gardeners in Vermont use to sustain a plentiful garden. Members can choose to research techniques that gardeners in Vermont use to sustain a plentiful garden. Members can choose to research a specific plant that is typically grown in a garden. This will be more broad as before since gardens include vegetables, flowers, and herbs. Members will research this plant and become experts on it. Meeting with our program advisor, we will learn ways in which a professional horticulturist maintains outdoor plants. We hope that members will become comfortable enough with their plant (and hopefully other plants as well) that they would feel confident in planting it in a garden of their own. Our idea (and of course there is no way to enforce this) is that members will go home and use what they have learned to plant a small

garden of their own and maintain plants that we have learned about. Our intended program advisor, Colleen Armstrong, is the director of the UVM greenhouse. With her help, we would like to work in a collaboration with the green house to learn about outdoor plants as well as how a greenhouse is used and operated. Since we will not be able to plant a garden of our own (for there will be no one here during the summer to maintain it), we hope to educate ourselves on the plants in the greenhouse.

### **Action Steps:**

**a.** An extremely nutritious food item is sprouts. There are numerous different types that we can get and they are very easy to grow. All that is needed is a mason jar, cheese cloth, and water. This will be fun for members to grow and be able to eat. It is also very healthy and will be promoting one of our main goals---growing our own food. We hope that this action step will be encouraging for members because it is fun and easy to do. With the basic knowledge of how to grow sprouts, members can grow their own as much as they would because they are a yummy snack and very good for you!

**b.** We plan to collaborate with the preschool on campus to help grow a garden or other greenery they feel would be most beneficial (a small vegetable garden, a tree, shrubbery, etc.) We see this as an excellent educational opportunity for the children at the preschool—with the help of the members of the preschool, we hope to expose the children to textures, colors, and smells of flowers or other plants. Plants such as mint or lemon balm are fun for kids to learn about, because of their delicious smell. We hope to encourage healthy eating by presenting them with tasty herbs like mint, parsley or basil, while educating the children about the benefits of all plants. We think the kids would enjoy planting a seed of their own (mums.) We can teach the kids how to put the seed in the soil and explain that they need to be watered in order to grow. We hope to get the preschoolers excited about planting their own flowers and eating organic herbs and vegetables and teach them some basic techniques to growing and maintaining.

**c.** Since we will not be able to plant flowers directly into the ground, we can plant starter seeds which we can grow inside. We have to respect the laws of nature and not try to work against them. This means that if the weather does not permit outdoor growing, we simply cannot do it. However, there are ways in which we can grow outdoor plants inside and still educate ourselves on the plants. We envision having each member start their own bean seed and being able to take the sprout home and plant it in the ground when the weather gets warm. Our program advisor will hopefully be able to help us learn how to plant starter seeds and how, when they're ready, to transfer them into the ground.

### **Community Service:**

We will look into businesses such as the Salvation Army for example, that may not have the funds to plant their own garden or window boxes for them. This will include basic things-- soil, boxes, and flowers. Members will learn how to take a plant and put it in soil, being careful of the roots. We could also plant these window boxes around campus for place like the Counseling

Center or the Women's Health Center.

In addition our collaboration with the preschool will be educational for both us and the preschoolers and will get young children excited about growing plants. At the end of the year, we would also like to plant an apple tree for the L/L community.

**Program Advisor:**

We sent an e-mail to Colleen Armstrong, the Director of the UVM Greenhouse in hopes that she will be our program advisor. We got an automatic message back saying that she will not be responding to emails until after her vacation.

If she chooses to be our program advisor, we hope to meet with her twice a month. Every other week, we were hoping we could get together as a program and have her talk to us about whatever she chooses to (propagation, cultivation, growing, maintaining, etc.) and perhaps engage in some sort of demonstration that will get members working hands-on with plants and gardening. Once we talk with Colleen more about this, we will know some more definitive plans.