

# Aiken Solarium Changes

**Interns: Noah Weller, Suma Lashof**

**Mentor: Colleen Armstrong**

The Aiken Center solarium is a cornerstone of the University of Vermont's campus. It is an important stop on many campus tours and an ideal late night study spot. The naturally lit space on the southern side of the Aiken Center houses a large variety of plants which create a beautiful and creative space to work. This semester our team of Noah Weller, Environmental Sciences '20, and Suma Lashof, Environmental Sciences '18, have and will continue to oversee and maintain multiple renovation projects that aim to maximize energy efficiency, provide a calm and aesthetically pleasing haven for the community, and also improve and preserve the overall health of the plants that live in the solarium.



We have many goals to achieve during this semester, some with higher priority than others. Our number one priority is revitalizing a space in the western corner of the solarium. We have brainstormed many uses and improvements we can make for the corner niche and have taken preliminary steps such as removing the rotting bench. We have plans to replace the bench, preferably with a bench made locally from sustainable materials. Additionally, we are also going to (with the assistance from the art department) design some type of colorful hanging piece in this otherwise dark corner to brighten it up and provide some life to the area.

Another goal for the semester is to characterize the climate in the solarium by taking temperature profiles at three different heights. From this information, along with soil testing we will determine what plants might thrive and what plants currently are not doing well in order to modify the composition of plants in the solarium. Another goal we are working on with Colleen Armstrong (director of the greenhouse) is testing different fertilizers for the solarium and determining what might be best for the area. We are also in charge of maintaining the plant beds by watering, trimming, and removing dead plant tissue. Lastly, we are finalizing an Aiken solarium management plan with Colleen's help.

We have accomplished quite a bit since we started working on this project six weeks ago. As a group, we have consistently followed our watering schedule. We removed the banana tree and some other unhealthy plants to make room for some new ones and freshen up the look of the plant beds. Suma has revised the plan for the corner niche, and as a group we removed the rotting bench from the corner to make room for the new one. The two of us have also done a lot of brainstorming with Colleen about how to best go about accomplishing our goals. We have taken preliminary soil tests to identify the weak spots in our soil and what types of nutrients we need to increase.

In order to complete our goals, we have a lot of work to do. At the top of our list of things to do is present our ideas for the corner niche to the Dean of RSENR, Nancy Matthews. The proposal we will send to her will contain information on possible bench and colorful display ideas along with price points for every option. We also need to continue to compile the temperature data and condense it into easy to read graphs. From this data, we can then create a list of plants that will do well in the solarium, preferably ones with some color to brighten up the area. Another important step is purchasing the different types of fertilizers and begin testing their effects on the soil and on the plants overall. Lastly, we will continue to maintain and upkeep the solarium to keep it in good condition.