ALLEN CENTENNIAL GARDEN
2023 Annual Report
Our theme this year at Allen Centennial Garden was Seeds of Change. This guided our focus on ways we could sow change and on seeds themselves. Quite literally, seeds bring change. Saving seeds, year after year, is a slow process that embraces slow changes. Each year, saving seeds from the plants that are best suited to this place is a commitment to growing alongside the plants we steward into the future. We work with nature to create plants that are better suited for here than anywhere else. Together, we create experiences that deepen relationships among people and plants.

In our work with plants, seeds can’t be ignored, but paying attention to seeds changed both our programs and our gardening techniques. In the spring, hoping to highlight less commonly grown landscape plants, Isaac, our horticulturist, expanded our effort to grow plants in the greenhouse from seed. In the spring, we seeded the Wyman Kitchen Garden and dye garden for the first time, but we also paid close attention to weed seeds, prioritizing removing the plants most likely to cause the biggest future outbreaks. In the summer, we worked to fulfill our first seed contract, growing seeds that could be sold. In the fall, we worked closely with student Badger Volunteers to save seeds from across the Garden to exchange with our community and use at ACG in years to come. Our second Harvest Folk Festival became the perfect venue to celebrate and share these efforts.

Sowing change happened in metaphorical ways too. I believe that creating change requires sustained action in a particular direction. In 2023, our focus was on establishing our direction for the next three years and beyond by creating a new strategic plan. We now know that everything we do contributes to making the Garden a place for educational experiences that expand our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. This reinforces many projects we have continued to work on throughout the year, like planning a new English garden revision and the pre-planning for an Islamic garden. Work on both of these projects was slow and sustained but not completed in 2023. However, plenty of projects made their debut in the garden in 2023, and this report is full of stories of these successes from colorful intern projects to a multicultural harvest. Changes may be just beginning, but there’s already plenty to celebrate!

Reba Luiken, Ph.D.

Director, Allen Centennial Garden
The Garden Mission

Allen Centennial Garden creates garden experiences that deepen relationships among people and plants.

Vision

To seed and sustain thriving and connected communities within Madison and UW-Madison

Values

We are neighbors who support and depend on local human and non-human communities.

We are stewards who create beautiful gardens by being attentive in our approach to garden care, programs, and partnerships.

We are educators who create learning experiences that facilitate deeper connections among diverse people, plants, and ideas.
In early June, we gathered students and staff from the Native American Center for Health Professions, our community partners (Rita Peters, Claudia Irene Calderon, and Yusuf Bin-Rella), and our staff to plant vegetables from around the world in our new Wyman Kitchen Garden for the first time. After many years of slow progress we were finally able to fill the freshly tilled soil with Ho-Chunk corn, beans, squash, and sunflower seeds. In another bed, celosia, fish peppers, and collards were just some of the African Diasporic plants working together to feed our community. The third wedge of the garden became the place for tomatillos, culantro, and other Central American highlights.

As the season warmed, interns watered almost daily amid drought and smokey air. The plants kept growing, vining across the willow arbor, pulling down the bean trellis with their weight. Fruit plants joined the mix in a new raised cranberry bed and alongside the grape trellis. Maybe next year we’ll finally get to taste those sweet efforts. In the meantime, the plants we’ve grown in the vegetable gardens have fed students through the campus food sheds, been gifted to elders by Indigenous students, and become the raw material for multiple local chefs cooking for ethnic and immigrant communities.

The Wyman Kitchen Garden has quickly become one of our best ambassadors, welcoming visitors into Allen Centennial Garden. It’s a special garden because its plants are so recognizable and immediately relevant. These aren’t just beautiful plants, they’re things that can nourish us and keep us alive. And, if you aren’t originally from Madison, the kitchen garden might just have something that reminds you of home.
Our Team

Reba Luiken - Executive Director
Ryan Dostal - Programs and Events Lead
Isaac Zaman - Horticulturist
Pearl Pincus - Education and Programs Intern
Katarina Sehgal - Floriculture and Programs Intern
Josh Nisleit - Horticulture Intern
Laura Bettenhausen - Horticulture Intern
Connie Zhao - Horticulture Intern
28 display gardens in 2.5 acres open 365 days a year for FREE

3 FTE staff supported by 6 interns

165+ Garden events including the 2nd annual Harvest Folk Festival

200+ pounds of food donated from the multicultural Wyman Kitchen Garden

2,275+ volunteer hours

1,200 plants given away during Plant Adoption Day

more than 650 student visits from courses in 19 departments

**FY2023***

Annual Budget: $350,000

Income:
- 65% Endowment
- 15% Earned Revenue
- 8.5% Donations
- 6.5% Grants
- 10% Gifts

Expenses:
- 71% Staff
- 9% Interns
- 10% Administration
- 9% Education & Events
- 6% Facilities
- 1% Collections

*July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023
The title of “intern” can mean a lot of things. Here at the Garden, we aim for something more than making copies or pulling weeds. Our goal is to train future leaders by empowering our students to problem solve, building their interpersonal skills, and mentoring them through challenges. Many of our interns continue their connections with the Garden even after the summer ends, helping out with other projects or even meeting with us for practice interview sessions when they’re trying to land their first post-graduation jobs.

This year, Kat stepped up to become our first Floriculture intern, playing a major role in developing a new suite of programs by figuring out the best way to use plant pigments to dye fabric. In addition to leading programming for children and adults, crafting social media posts, and tending our new dahlia garden, Kat constantly had something brewing. Through trial and error, she managed to transform indigo, walnut, and weld into colorful creations.

As a graduating senior, Kat already had strong skills when she arrived at the Garden, but together, we focused on creating experiences that would have the greatest impact on her skill development. This included creating the planting plan for the cutting garden, hosting a workshop in Spanish, and independent project management. The result was that Kat helped to create the foundation of a dye program we will build on for years to come.
2023 Garden Supporters
Institutional & Departmental Donors

African Studies Program*
Badger State Dahlia Society
CALS (College of Agriculture and Life Sciences) GLOBAL*
Center for Culture, History, and the Environment*
Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures*
Demeter
Department of French & Italian*
Department of Plant and Agroecosystem Sciences
Driftless Seed Supply*
European Studies Program*
Fiskars
Friends of Allen Centennial Garden
Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Studies Program*
Seed Savers Exchange*
Sunset Garden Club
West Side Garden Club
Wisconsin Daylily Society, Inc.
Wisconsin Green Muslims
Wisconsin Hardy Plants Society
*Harvest Festival Support

Grants

Brittingham Wisconsin Trust
Madison Area Master Gardeners
National Geographic (Explorer)
Wisconsin Humanities (Major)*
Wisconsin State Arts Board (Creative Communities)*
*Harvest Festival Support

Community Partners

Badger Volunteers
Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures
Mai Zong Vue/The Hmong Institute
Native American Center for Health Professions
Occupy Madison
Rooted
Shabazz High School
Wisconsin Green Muslims
Yusuf Bin-Rella/Trade Roots
Garden Stories: Harvest Festival

When is learning a new pesto recipe more than a chance to up your cooking game? At this year’s Second Annual Harvest Folk Festival, conversations about unconventional pesto recipes from across Italy were one of my highlights. With the help of their professor, Grazia Menechella, first year students created posters about regional Italian food cultures, and they shared them in intergenerational exchanges with Harvest Festival visitors. It was an amazing opportunity for students to apply their learning in the real world.

That was just one part of the Garden’s most dynamic event, which brought together Peruvian music and dance, Hmong courting games, and American fiddle music alongside a seed exchange and flower crowns. The Harvest Festival is designed to be a full body celebration of the season’s produce, created through the collaboration of people and plants. Combining the flavors of the Electric Eats food truck, the rhythms of African beats, and the smells of our favorite fall flowers, makes for an unbeatable opportunity. To have a bountiful harvest means everything to our human survival, and learning about the traditions of each others’ ancestors offers us an entry to reimagining our relationship with the natural world by reconnecting with other ways of being.

The Harvest Festival brings together campus and community members of all ages to celebrate diversity, horticulture, and the magic that happens when we bring these things together.
Teaching in the Garden in 2023

Agroecology
Bolz Center for Arts Administration
Chicano and Latino Studies
Community and Environmental Sociology
Counseling Psychology
Design Studies
Earth Partnership UW
Entomology
Environmental Studies (Nelson Institute)
Folklore
French and Italian
German, Nordic, Slavic+
History of Science
Kinesiology
Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning
Pharmacy
Plant and Agroecosystem Sciences
Religious Studies
Spanish and Portuguese
Garden Stories: Clock Garden

In 2023, our plan for the orientation garden at the entrance of the Garden started with a question...is it possible? We wanted to know if we could recreate a garden that Carl Linnaeus dreamed up in 1751. You might know Linnaeus as the man who created the Latin naming system we still use for living things today. And he was—but he was also fascinated by plants. Like many naturalists of his time, he had a keen sense for noticing differences among plants and their behaviors. Those differences became the backbone of his system of classification, but they also inspired him to dream up a flower clock.

A flower clock? Is that even possible? Does it translate from Sweden to Wisconsin? This was our investigation. The theory behind the clock seemed solid. There are many plants that respond to the time of day by opening or closing their flowers, and Linnaeus had compiled a list. Our horticulturist, Isaac, got to work sourcing the right plants and laying out a clock.

This is where the problems began. It was impossible to find most of the plants at local suppliers, so they would need to be started from seed. Seeds were difficult to find too and needed to come from unusual sources in Europe. Then, 2023 marked a bunny outbreak in the Garden, and they found many of the clock garden plants especially tasty. So in the end, we had an answer to our question...no, it’s really not possible. But that doesn’t mean there aren’t lessons to be learned. In particular, despite being rooted in place, plants are constantly responding to the world around them. We just have to pay attention! We also got a lesson in the importance of having a display garden. It’s the perfect place to try something new each year. So goodbye clock garden, hello fire and ice!
How do plants tell time?

Similar to our sleep and wake cycle, plants in the Clock Garden have an internal rhythm that tells them when to open and shut their bloom throughout the day. As you move right to left across this garden, plants open or close later in the day.
Support the Garden

Become a Friends Member
The Friends of Allen Centennial Garden is an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit organization focused on providing enhanced programming, outreach, and fundraising support. When you support the Friends of Allen Centennial Garden, your support extends beyond the garden gates:

- You are supporting meaningful learning experiences for our entire community.
- You are recognizing and supporting a dedicated and exceptional crew of volunteers.
- You are providing opportunities for immersive and engaging internship opportunities.
- You are creating a rich calendar of events and educational programming for learners of all ages.

Volunteer Your Talents
When you become a volunteer at the Allen Centennial Garden, you have opportunities to grow and share your passion for gardening, connect with people of all ages, and explore new ideas as you support educational programs. Whatever your interest or talent, we will explore opportunities for you in the Garden’s volunteer program. Consider joining our volunteer community!

Make a Donation or Planned Gift
The Allen Centennial Garden is funded entirely with private gifts. A variety of permanent named opportunities are available for individuals who choose to pay tribute to their relationship with the University or to honor and recognize someone special in their lives. For inquiries about making a contribution to the Gardens or to name a garden, contact Jodi Wickham.

Jodi Wickham
UW Foundation
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Early in the strategic planning process, we were asked to picture what we want Allen Centennial Garden to look like five years from now. I thought back to a sticky note that I keep with three goals for the Garden: diversify the Garden; more sustainable financial structure for the Garden; each garden tells a story. What could this look like in the Garden?

I hear regularly that Allen Centennial Garden is special because of its size and its diversity. Where else can you see so many different styles of horticulture in such a small space? This is a strength we need to recognize and cultivate. We must continue to create gardens that showcase the most recent trends in horticulture and ones that welcome and connect with our campus neighbors from around the world. In five years, some areas of the Garden may be utterly transformed, but more importantly, every corner will be maintained according to its own style.

Financial support is something that happens behind the scenes, but it translates into a garden that is structurally sound in terms of physical infrastructure and staff management. As Allen Centennial Garden matures, it will continue to need updates to walkways, retaining walls, lighting, and more. While these changes may be obvious in five years, financial support also drives consistency in both staff and decision-making. I hope familiar faces can become some of the Garden’s key assets.

Why focus on stories when plants can’t talk? Stories are our best tool to develop experiences that partner with emotions to create lifelong gardeners, environmentalists, and community leaders. In the Garden, we feature some stories on signs and tell some in programs, but we want to be a place that inspires people to imagine their own stories. The story might start with recognizing a plant from home, whether that’s in Wisconsin or halfway around the world. Perhaps it is learning that a plant comes from the same country as your grandparents, or comforting a friend on a bench as he cries. More stories don’t mean more signs. Stories develop when we welcome people into the Garden and give them opportunities to be curious, be creative, and make connections.

After pondering all of these aspects of our work, I realized that our work is creating a garden that is undeniably alive. Allen Centennial Garden is an oasis packed with opportunities to not just learn about plants but to understand them—and each other. As a garden, we run the risk of being nothing more than green wallpaper. People using the Garden? That’s a good thing. But we want to be a place where people realize plants are essential to their lives. Plants keep us alive. Plants bring meaning to our lives.

I want Allen Centennial Garden to be the place that is prepared to share that story.

Reba Luiken, Ph.D.
Introduction

This strategic plan is a reflection of two priorities for Allen Centennial Garden—plants and people. A garden is nothing without its plants, but those plants need people to care for them and to care about them. The Garden has some fantastic collections, but a garden is only as good as its gardeners. As a result, you will notice that much of this strategic plan focuses on ways that staff of Allen Centennial Garden can better sustain our work.

This plan reaffirms that Allen Centennial Garden is indelibly a part of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It is our reason for existing and will always be our main audience. As a result, our work must fit within the work of the University. The University of Wisconsin-Madison’s current strategic framework calls for us to “Strengthen educational outcomes, career development, and the college experience for all students.” Fortunately, this is exactly where Allen Centennial Garden’s immersive approach shines. Each year we welcome thousands of students to relax and connect in the Garden, hundreds to learn through hands-on experiences, and a few as interns to grow their skills and expand their possibilities for future work. We’re poised to respond to the Chancellor’s recently announced initiative to expand immersive Sustainability Education Opportunities by 2030.

At the same time, we embrace the Wisconsin Idea, and our work on campus spills over into the local community, providing opportunities for Madsonians and all Wisconsinites to better understand plants, each other, and themselves. Plants are our partners as we imagine ways to grow a more sustainable, more just, and more connected world. Although we may sometimes transform from gardeners into artists, educators, or community connectors to do this work, the Garden and its plants remain at the center of all we do. Plants are our ambassadors, and we simply can’t survive without them.

This work can only continue if the Garden can retain and develop its expert staff, maintain its direction, and develop financial resources to support our efforts. In its first thirty-five years, Allen Centennial Garden has remained vital and alive through many changes. This is our chance to help prepare it for the changes it will surely face in the next thirty-five...and beyond.

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Goal 1: Vital to UW-Madison

Establish ourselves as a vital and integral part of UW-Madison.

**Neighbor:** Deepen pathways for diverse community input
- Establish official Garden advisory board
- Create an Islamic Garden
- Document relationships with community partners & other organizations with whom we work

**Stewardship:** Be a voice for valuable and endangered campus resources
- Work with campus partners to develop a plan to make the Agricultural Dean’s Residence a vibrant campus space

**Education:** Reinforce our role as the teaching garden for UW-Madison
- Communicate Allen Centennial Garden’s mission directly with the Department of Plant & Agroecosystem Sciences, all CALS departments, and departments and programs across UW-Madison
Goal 2: Economic Sustainability

Expand our economic model to sustain Garden operations.

**Neighbor:** Build mutually beneficial relationships with units across campus
- Identify internal UW-Madison funding sources that align with our mission and can support our operations.

**Stewardship:** Create opportunities for people to understand and financially support our work
- Launch an annual fund campaign
- Establish a plan for a future capital campaign

**Education:** Curate programs to best showcase and utilize Garden resources
- Streamline and prioritize income-generating programs
- Organize program supplies and storage to improve care, inventory, and access
Goal 3: Organizational Continuity

Strengthen strategy and operations for organizational efficiency and durability.

**Neighbor:** Clarify relationships with our closest partners  
· Develop a system model that clearly deliniates the Garden’s roles and relationships with regard to the Department of Plant and Agroecosystem Sciences and the Friends of Allen Centennial Garden.

**Stewardship:** Create a clear plan to prioritze activities that support our mission  
· Determine our main metrics for succes and develop a plan to measure them  
· Create a collections plan that includes management plans for individual collections, program descriptions, and a structure for record keeping  
· Create a Theory of Change to succinctly communicate our work to all stakeholders

**Education:** Grow institutional memory of income-generating educational experiences  
· Develop and implement documentation processes for booked events and programs