



ALLEN CENTENNIAL GARDEN

2025 Annual Report

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From the Director

What are we growing at Allen Centennial Garden? Certainly, a lot of different kinds of plants. As a teaching garden, we strive to showcase as many different garden styles and plant types as possible in our small space so that students and visitors alike can imagine the possibilities and find a plant they connect with. From hostas and peonies to our kitchen garden and prairie, we are always updating our collections to make them more relevant to our work and our community.

That’s not the only thing we’re growing. As educators, we seek to develop connections among people and plants as we work closely with interns, UW students, and other visitors to the Garden. This means helping them grow plant care skills, creativity, communication, and leadership abilities as they contribute to a curated natural world around them. We see the Garden as our classroom—one that we share with as many neighbors as we can because we know the benefits of a hands-on, outdoor educational experience. Simply spending a few minutes outside can make someone more relaxed, improve their concentration, and increase their generosity. It’s amazing what a whole summer or semester can do.

In 2025, our theme has been Growing Climate. How do we do that? We grow plants that take up carbon dioxide and lower the local temperature with their shade. We also grow a community that brings together people with different skills and backgrounds in positive ways. As the local climate and environment shapes our gardens and our lives, we can also shape it through our horticultural and social choices. Some things grow slowly, but we can and do have an impact on the future, one plant at a time. Thank you for your continued support of Allen Centennial Garden. We’re grateful to count you as a member of our community.



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.



Garden Stories: Cranberry Lessons

Sometimes in the Garden things don't get done the right way the first time, or the second time, or maybe even the third time. This might seem like a sign of inefficiency, but we see it as a mark of commitment to our value of education. We give students as many opportunities as possible to learn by trying things out, and that often means that things don't go exactly as planned. Our cranberry bog is an excellent example of this philosophy.

This summer, as his intern project, Fernando de la Torre made a third attempt at revitalizing our cranberry patch. Fernando is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Plant and Agroecosystem Sciences, and his research project is focused on crossing cranberry and blueberry plants to create a cranblue fruit that tastes delicious and stores well. Over the past five years, he's built up expertise in keeping cranberry plants alive, and his redesign of the cranberry bog in the Wyman Kitchen Garden keeps this experience in mind. We have our fingers crossed for thriving plants once the snow melts in the spring.

In the meantime, Fernando's project also involved creating a science outreach station to share information about his research. Presenting during the Wisconsin Science Festival and other events on campus, Fernando helped community members understand how density impacts whether fruit sinks or floats. He used hands-on tests with a water tank and wet and dry samples of blueberries and cranberries to compare the fruits. Ultimately, the comparisons and conversations at these events fed back into Fernando's research, inspiring him to create simple figures to better explain density in his dissertation! We're proud to be a place where research, teaching, and outreach can thrive together.



Our Team



Reba Luiken - Executive Director
Ryan Dostal - Programs and Events Lead
Jenny Zinniker - Horticulturist
Ava Jeffery - Education and Programs Apprentice
Lila Becker - Education and Programs Intern
Molly Zimmermann - Horticulture Apprentice
Fernando de la Torre - Horticulture Intern
Mia Homan - Horticulture Intern
Lydia Pulsinelli - Horticulture Intern



ALLEN CENTENNIAL GARDEN

2025 IN REVIEW

28 display gardens in **2.5** acres open **365** days a year for **FREE**

3 FTE staff supported by **6** interns **4** research projects in the Garden

180+ Garden events including the **4th** annual Harvest Folk Festival

2,000+ volunteer hours **6** new and renewed garden spaces

1,200 plants given away during Plant Adoption Day

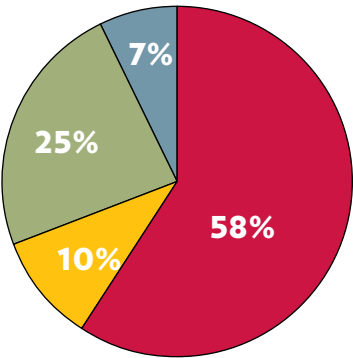
more than **980** student visits from courses in **22** departments

FY2025*

Annual Budget:
\$390,000

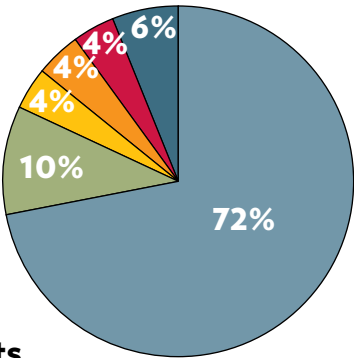
Income:

- Endowment
- Earned Revenue
- Donations
- Grants



Expenses:

- Staff
- Interns
- Facilities
- Collections
- Admin Supplies
- Education & Events



* July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

Garden Stories: Friendly Bok Choy

At the 2024 Harvest Festival, we asked visitors to put pins in a map to show where their ancestors grew food. The largest number of pins was in the United States, but China followed next in line. We took this as a sign that our next kitchen garden feature should focus on plants that would build connections with this part of our community. One of the goals of our multicultural Wyman Kitchen Garden is to include plants that are familiar to visitors from around the world to help them connect with our plants and feel at home in the Garden, and it was clear that for many, China was home.

We were excited to design the Chinese garden in collaboration with Paul Tseng, one of our dedicated garden volunteers who also happens to be a local chef. He suggested a wide range of plants to include from rice, to lotus, to sweet potatoes. For some plantings we had to get creative. We found an upland rice variety that could grow in the kitchen garden and added a lotus plant to our pond.

Despite these unusual additions, it turned out that a relatively unassuming leafy green called bok choy stole the show. As the summer heated up, we overheard visitors to the Chinese garden mention this plant more times than the rest of the plants combined. Sometimes they were saying hello to an old friend. Other times, they were learning to recognize it in a new shape as it bolted and showed off its yellow flowers. In all cases, Bok Choy built connections among people with different backgrounds and the plants we grow. It joined figs and epazote as our most frequent garden ambassadors.



2025 Garden Supporters

Institutional & Departmental Donors

American Indian & Indigenous Studies Program*
Badger State Dahlia Society
CALS Dean’s Office
Center for Culture, History, and the Environment*
Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures*
Demeter
Department of German, Nordic, Slavic+*
Driftless Seed Supply*
Fiskars
Folklore Program*
Friends of Allen Centennial Garden
Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Studies Program*
Office of Sustainability
Shorewood Hills Garden Club
Reilly-Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Endowment*
W & E Radtke
Waunona Garden Club
West Side Garden Club
Willy Street Co-op
Wisconsin and Illinois Rock Garden Society
Wisconsin Daylily Society
Wisconsin Garden Club Federation—Madison District
Wisconsin Green Muslims
Wisconsin Hardy Plants Society
Wisconsin Hosta Society

Grants

Brittingham Wisconsin Trust*
Thriving Earth Exchange

Community Partners

Badger Volunteers
Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection
Midwest Linen Revival
Native American Center for Health Professions
Occupy Madison
REAP Food Group
Rooted
Qwantese Winters
School of Pharmacy
Shabazz High School
Wisconsin & Michigan Green Muslims
Working Draft Brewery

*Harvest Festival Support



Garden Stories: Tiny Trees

Over the past two years we have learned to be patient with our remodeling project in the Carson Conifer Garden. Despite being awarded a grant to revitalize our collection of dwarf conifers early in 2024, we had to wait over a year for the best selection of plants to become available for delivery in spring 2025. Dwarf conifers are also known for their slow growth habit, which makes them a great option for home landscapes and disease resistance. Left to grow over decades, they will mature into large, statement trees, but their breeding means that they only put on a few inches of growth per year.

In the meantime, our new dwarf conifers are a cute and charismatic bunch. Many staff, visitors, and volunteers have remarked about how impressed they are with the plants' diverse colors and textures. Despite our predispositions to dislike what we thought were boring spruce trees, these spunky additions are converting many, leading them to consider them for their own home gardens. And that is exactly the point of the conifer garden. Its new additions make it an excellent display of conifers that are currently available. They're plants that horticulture and landscape architecture students can learn to recommend and gardeners can actually find to add to their collections. This is the power of curation in the Garden. With thoughtful choices, we can introduce visitors to new plants in ways they can connect.





Teaching in the Garden in 2025

- Classics
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Design Studies
- Education Policy
- English
- Entomology
- Environmental Studies
- Folklore
- Gender and Women's Studies
- History
- Integrated Liberal Studies
- Kinesiology
- Landscape Architecture
- Life Sciences Communication
- Plant and Agroecosystem Sciences
- Plant Pathology
- Religious Studies
- Soil Sciences
- Spanish and Portuguese
- Theater
- Urban and Regional Planning
- Zoology

Garden Stories: Evergreen Friends

When Ryan Dostal, our programs and events lead, begins each of his evergreen wreath workshops, he starts by introducing the participants to the plants. Boxwood is full of little leaves that provide texture and fullness. Juniper smells great and has berries if you're lucky, but it can also poke you. Ryan adds in some tips for how to avoid pricking your finger. Pine, fir, spruce, and arborvitae are added to the team that people get to know better as they clip and combine. All come together to make beautiful wreaths while raising important revenue to keep the Garden running and staying true to our educational mission.

The past year has been an exercise in developing more distributed ways of generating revenue to support Allen Centennial Garden, as government and university funding have become more limited. Over the past three years, our creative programs have become established events that people come back to week after week and year after year to make bouquets, wreaths, and other colorful projects. Due to these connections, we saw a 20% increase in the number of wreath kits we sold this year despite a price increase that helped us keep up with inflation!

Our neighbors and community continue to be essential to our success. In order to make wreaths, we first spend a few weeks harvesting greens. Some of those greens come from the Garden, but many more are gathered from community partners, other supporters, and the homes of volunteers. Volunteers and student interns are essential to trimming those branches into smaller pieces and packing them into kits people can build from. Local businesses have become willing partners to host us for workshops and introduce us to their friends. Together, we continue to keep the Garden growing while building connections among people and plants.



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 by visiting our website!

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 Garden or to name a garden, contact Jodi Wickham.

Jodi Wickham
UW Foundation
608-263-2027
jodi.wickham@supportuw.org

At Allen Centennial Garden, we...

Create garden experiences that deepen relationships among people and plants (mission)

Invite everyone to enjoy nearby nature curated to spark delight

Our goal is for our community to...

Participate in learning activities that integrate art and culture with science

Spend time outside

Deepen skills through authentic real-world learning opportunities

So that UW students and community members...

Expand cultural understanding

Develop an integrated understanding of human-plant relations

Develop critical thinking, ethical reasoning, inquiry, and analysis skills

Increase understanding of other perspectives

Become happier, less stressed, and more relaxed

Apply academic skills to the real world

Understand science as a set of practices

Increase academic engagement and achievement

Improve intrinsic motivation and generosity

Improve their concentration and cognition

Discern future careers, hobbies, and life skills

Increase imagination and creativity

So that...Madison and UW Madison are thriving and connected communities (vision)