

# *Rock Creek Learning Garden*

Sowing Seeds | Growing Minds | Cultivating Community

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## *2014 Annual Report*

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*Portland Community College  
Rock Creek  
Sustainability Office*

## Executive Summary

In 2005 a part-time PCC Rock Creek Sustainability Coordinator was hired with funds generated from the Dean of Students. The PCC Rock Creek Learning Garden roots were established in 2006 by a Portland State University graduate student, Karen Cox, who focused her thesis on a therapeutic garden. The same year an Oregon Department of Environmental Quality grant was received for a large worm bin. In 2010 the first Learning Garden master plan was drafted by Lango Hansen Landscape Architects. Campus administration and money from The Green Initiative Fund (TGIF), student fees dedicated to funding campus projects that reduce the college's impact on the environment, funded infrastructure. In 2012 a call for art was put out to faculty and students enrolled in PCC art classes spring term. Student artists and several classes now have their work permanently installed in the Garden.

Today the 3.6 acre Learning Garden consists of a 65-tree fruit orchard, 32 large raised beds and approximately ½ acre of row crops for campus food and flower production, grapes, kiwis, blueberries, and cane fruits, solar-powered irrigation, student-built cob tool shed and earthen oven, green roof, rain water catchment, 8 beehives, and a number of mason bee homes. There are 16 raised beds for PCC community garden stewards (staff, faculty, students, departments and offices) to grow their own food. In 2014 we received a Tuff Shed from the childcare center that was moved to the garden after the childcare center was suddenly closed. The garden maintained a special area just for the children to plant, visit and grow food and flowers year round. The former children's garden area is slowly being transitioned for class projects, community-based learning and student research plots.

During the 2014 season, the Rock Creek Learning Garden focused efforts in three primary goal areas: education, production, and community. In all of these areas, the Learning Garden worked to be as sustainable as possible, incorporating equity, economics, and environment. The Learning Garden engaged 24 courses in the garden, led 32 sustainability tours, and had over 1,000 contact hours with students. While engaging in valuable formal and informal teaching, we also managed to produce 5,358 pounds of produce that was donated to the cafeteria and our fantastic volunteers. To build community at the Garden, we hosted approximately 10 events during which we fired up the earthen oven for baking; hosted four lunch n' learn workshops, participated in the annual fall harvest festival, where we provided pumpkins grown in the garden to community members; and hosted weekly volunteer days open to students, faculty, staff, and community members.

With the intent to work toward financial self-sufficiency, the Sustainability Office set-up the Learning Garden Growth Fund through the PCC Foundation, raising \$2397.08 through donations, Flowergrams and pilot farm stand sales. In the fall of 2014, the Learning Garden was awarded grant money for six projects that support education, production and community. These projects include the construction of raised beds in a hoop house structure, a welcome kiosk at the garden entrance, two hydroponics systems, a grape and raspberry patch, 35 new fruit trees, a new beehive setup and beekeeping and honey harvesting gear, and development of a regular on-campus farm stand.

Finally, work continued on the development of components for a sustainable agriculture program for PCC Rock Creek. A key partnership with Portland's Beginning Urban Farmer Apprenticeship program supported this work, as did support from expert faculty and staff from around campus. A certificate program that will train leaders for sustainable agriculture is on the horizon as a result of this work.



## Mission and Vision

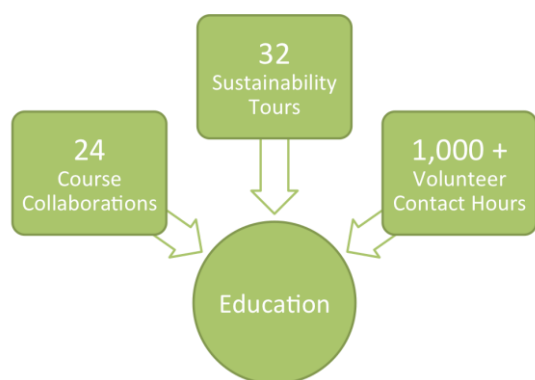


*Mission: The Rock Creek Learning Garden promotes interdisciplinary academic achievement, leadership development and sustainable food systems. The Garden provides experiential education and life-long learning opportunities for PCC students, faculty, staff and community members.*

*Vision: The Learning Garden offers both informal and formal sustainable agriculture education opportunities that prepare students to be engaged citizens, conscious consumers, business professionals, small-scale farm managers, and leaders for food justice. The Garden programming addresses a growing need and desire for experiential learning spaces that allow students to gain hands on experience in a diversity of areas within the food system. Using a state of the art agriculture education facility and the abundance of land on the property, the Garden educates, trains leaders, builds community, and produces food and flowers.*

## Education

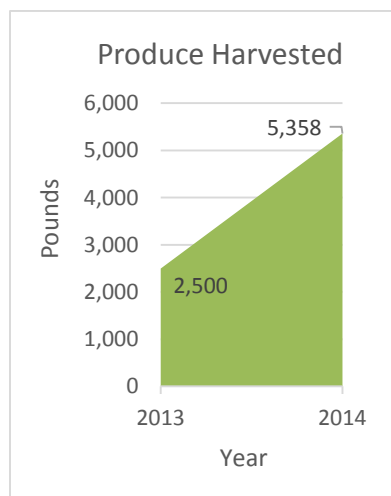
This year, we educated PCC community members through 24 course collaborations, 32 sustainability/garden tours that highlight our innovative closed-loop system, garden workshops, and over 1,000 contact hours during our open volunteer hours. The courses we collaborated with included English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) using the Garden to practice communication skills; a Health, Food, and the Environment course for which students engaged in term long community-based learning (10hrs/student); an Organic Gardening course that used the Garden as a living laboratory; and many more. We facilitated sustainability and garden tours for elementary, high school, college, and professional groups. One of the most exciting tours was when the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education collaborated with PCC to bring a group of 25 sustainability practitioners and academics from North America and abroad to the Rock Creek campus in conjunction with their annual conference. Lastly, throughout the year, our AmeriCorps service members hosted ~15 open volunteer hours each week. During these hours, anyone from the community was welcome to drop in to learn and work in the garden as we provided hands-on experience for individuals interested in sustainable agriculture as both career and hobby.



Our staff team over the year included work-study students, an International Student Ambassador, ASPCC students focused on sustainability, and AmeriCorps service members. These individuals did much of the education for the Learning Garden, but also learned about sustainable agriculture and life skills. Our 2014 team motto was: we can do hard things and we can do them well. Each day we supported one another to strive to achieve this goal.

Our PCC academic leadership team convened a diverse group of interdisciplinary staff and faculty interested in developing a formal sustainable agriculture certificate program at Rock Creek Campus. We developed a partnership with the Beginning Urban Farmer Apprenticeship program (BUFA). Individuals within the BUFA program are interested in expanding their programming to include the Rock Creek campus as a site for their program. We look forward to what this partnership may bring.

## Food Production



This year's 5,358-pound harvest speaks to Nora Lindsey's expertise in farm management. This harvest is more than twice the amount it was in 2013. In 2014 we grew over 60 varieties of food and flowers in our 3.6 acre space, including carrots, tomatoes, peppers, cilantro, beets, winter squash, popcorn, arugula, parsley, spinach, radishes, and basil. Produce was harvested from April into October and the majority of the produce was delivered via bicycle with a metal basket fashioned by our Welding Department students and staff. The produce went to the cafeteria to be used in catered meals and daily cafeteria offerings. Whenever there was a surplus of produce at Rock Creek, the produce was sent to Sylvania campus, which has a larger cafeteria that could always use the extra fresh produce. The average distance from farm to plate in this country is 1,500 miles. We think we're doing pretty well by biking our produce across campus about ¼ mile!



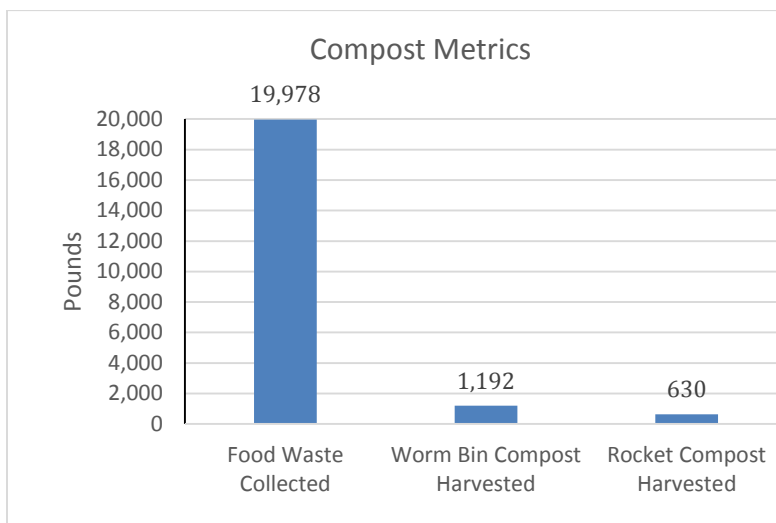


*Popcorn harvest*



*Students harvest greens in the Garden on a sunny day*

Supporting our food production, and promoting sustainability, our compost operation is a major component of our sustainability work on campus. This year we composted 1,821.5 pounds of food waste using our mechanical Rocket Composter and insinkerator along with our vermiculture bin. This harvest was made possible by dining services staff who collected pre-consumer food waste, custodial staff collecting post-consumer waste, faculty and staff who participated in our office compost program, and student staff who did daily compost pickups and processing.



*Delivering food waste to the worm bin*

## Community

In addition to education and food production, we work to create community in the Learning Garden. We do this through pizza parties, bake-offs, our community beds, student centered service events, and our ethic of care and respect in the garden. This year, we hosted ~10 events where we used the earthen oven, 4 lunch n' learn workshops, and one large public event with an estimated 1000 people in attendance.

Members from all corners of the community came out to grow a diversity of crops this season including the Women's Resource Center, Social Sciences and Health staff, students and faculty members form a variety of disciplines. We saw black tomatoes, hops, impressive trellises, and more in the community garden beds this growing season.



The earthen oven brought classes out to practice their English while eating pizza, volunteers who gave 100% effort for some well-earned cookies, and community members having fun with roasted veggies. Our Lunch n' Learn events covered topics from crop planning to flower arranging. This year, we dedicated 16 of our 51 raised beds to faculty, students, and staff interested in gardening. They could elect to steward a 10'x 6' raised bed for the season at no cost.



Although many individuals do engage in the garden, there is room to grow this number. One of the outreach initiatives is to engage a new group of community members is the mobile farm stand, which will attract students, faculty, and staff walking across campus. The Women's Resource Center will also provide vouchers for free produce at the farm stand, in an effort to work toward equity in our food system.

## Flowers



Grow Flowers



Harvest



Deliver

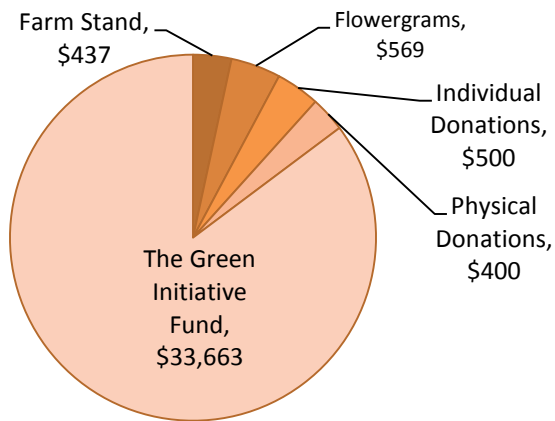
While food production is a big part of what we do, it is by no means all that we do. This year, in an effort to raise awareness about the Garden, provide additional learning opportunities for our community, and raise some funds for our continued development, we started an initiative called "Flowergrams." Here's how it worked: 1) We grew flowers, which also benefited garden aesthetics and local pollinators, 2) campus staff and faculty requested Flowergram deliveries, 3) we harvested flowers and arranged them in a bouquet, and 4) we delivered them with a note to a recipient on campus.

## Staffing



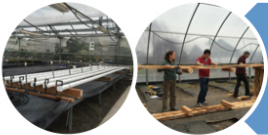
During 2014, the Sustainability Office had a staff team that consisted of one permanent .5FTE Learning Garden Coordinator, one .64FTE Sustainability Coordinator, one full-time AmeriCorps service member, two 11 hour/week work-study students, one International Student Ambassador (12.5 hours/week), and two ASPCC students who support sustainability work for the campus. With the constant work in the garden, every single person in this team is a key component for success.

## Funding



Because sustainability does not only mean sustaining the environment and being equitable, 2014 inspired more creative thinking about financial sustainability for years to come. We established a growth fund through PCC's Foundation, created the Flowergram program, piloted a PCC farm stand, acquired grant funding from The Green Initiative Fund, and solicited donations from the community for food, seeds, baking supplies and tools. We also became pros at reusing materials and equipment found on campus.

**The Green Initiative Fund** provided the Learning Garden with the financial support to develop innovative projects that expand educational, production, and community offerings. This year, the following project ideas were funded. 2015 will be an impressive year for implementation as all projects must be completed by the end of our fiscal year in June.



**Hoop House Raised Beds and Hydroponic Systems** – We will build 12 raised beds and 2 hydroponics systems for extended winter production. These will serve as educational tools, provide additional produce for the cafeteria, and offer a dry oasis for volunteers during the winter months.



**Farm Stand** – We will sell produce from April to October at a weekly farm stand. Anyone in the PCC community will be able to purchase produce at the farm stand. Further, we will be implementing a program in which individuals can get vouchers for free produce when they do not have the means to purchase it.



**Grapes and Berries** – We will add a grape and raspberry patch to the Garden, expanding the produce offerings and educational opportunities.



**Trees and Bees** – We will get a new beehive setup and add trees to the apple orchard for added fruit production, pollination, and honey.



**Welcome Kiosk** – We will build an informational kiosk at the entrance to the garden. This will be a location that anyone in the community can stop by to learn about upcoming events, announcements, and maybe even get some free produce.



## Looking Forward

The Learning Garden and its team continue to grow, dream and explore new ideas and opportunities. The vision we have for our work can be synthesized into these main areas that we will focus on in 2015 and beyond.

### **Improving Space and Maximizing Production:**

- Revising Learning Garden site master plan with landscape architects
- Working with architects to design two structures in the garden
- Developing more perennial plantings and low-impact growing techniques
- Partnering with Landscape Technology to maximize indoor growing space
- Working with Grounds and Landscape Technology to increase bee and other pollinator habitat on campus
- Provide more opportunities for art classes and other creative projects to emerge from the natural and built space of the garden

### **Growing Access and Addressing Food Security within our Campus Community:**

- Establishing a weekly campus farm stand
- Developing a volunteer rewards program to provide garden volunteers with free food
- Working with the college to accept EBT/SNAP (Food Stamp) benefits at weekly farm stand
- Write grants for two AmeriCorps Learning Garden Educator positions
- Support community raised bed stewards to be more engaged Learning Garden users and advocates

### **Expanding Educational Offerings:**

- Partnering with Oregon State University Extension to write a grant to develop sustainable agricultural training and courses on campus
- Continue collaboration and develop new relationships with local high school agriculture programs
- Explore options for dual credit for local high school students studying agriculture
- Broadening existing partnerships with area Master Gardener and Master Beekeeper organizations
- Continue to expand our offerings for interdisciplinary Community Based Learning and other class collaborations
- Foster existing relationship with Office of International Education to bring more international students outside
- Apply to present our innovative programming at national conferences
- Formalizing more educational materials and signage for Rock Creek Closed Loop tour

## **Acknowledgements**

Contributions for this report come from Elaine Cole, Nora Lindsey, Dylan Johnstone, and Lindsey MacDonald. Jeffrey Mailes, the AmeriCorps Learning Garden Educator at the Garden from September, 2013 to July, 2014 did not contribute to the writing of this report, but his impressive work is represented throughout it.

The accomplishments at the Learning Garden would not be possible without the support of PCC's Social Science and Health Department, Landscape Technology, Farm Coordinator, PCC Dining Services staff, Grounds, Fortis Construction, student volunteers, and many faculty/staff who run programs and engage courses out in the Garden.

Special thanks to our Learning Garden Advisory Council, including: Marilyn Alexander, Rebekah Anderson, Mike Bene, Valance Brenneis, Mandy Ellertson, Jim Johnstone, Kevin Lien, Terry Lookabill, Jeff Mailes, Stephanie Monroe-Van Schepen, Thi Nguyen, Darin Rose, David Sandrock, and Linda West for providing vision, a voice of reason, and support.

Photographs have been provided by Elaine Cole and Jim Beriault.