

Highlands Urban Garden: Demonstrating Modern Sustainable Agricultural Practices

Description

The Highlands Urban Garden, or Project HUG is revitalizing underused land near the tennis courts at Virginia Highlands Park, and illustrates how otherwise fallow spaces can be transformed into productive land that builds a vibrant ecosystem. The small-scale HUG will demonstrate modern sustainable agricultural practices such as modular, low-impact design principles, sustainable water management practices, and incorporate smart technology to collect agriculture metrics.

The volunteer team of Arlington neighbors built the base of the garden in the fall of 2020, and added a series of 3 foot diameter galvanized metal rings with space in between for three 120 gallon water tanks. The symmetrical design of the space is meant to echo the feel of a hug. By November, a cover crop had been planted to build up the organic material in the rings. This mix of grasses, nitrogen fixing plants, and deep rooting vegetation protected the organic garden mix and helped to develop a community of healthy and beneficial soil bacteria that would be a great growing medium for vegetables.

Breaking down the cover crop and allowing it to decompose right on the soil will help to retain water and provide some tasty material for earthworms and other beneficial garden critters. The variety and placement of seeds selected for this project is just part of the garden’s experimental design.

Many of the garden’s vegetables, including basil and a wide variety of lettuces and leafy greens, were grown by students at Marymount university specifically for the HUG. Planting started in April. By early May, we were ready to install the water tanks, drip irrigation system, and trellising that would make garden management more efficient.

The three large tanks installed in the garden will make watering easier for volunteers and have some neat features. An adjustable timer will be programed to water the garden at specific times of the day using drip irrigation, a system of tubing that targets the plants and efficiently waters the rings while wasting very little water.

Support structures for the HUG include galvanized steel cattle panels that will be used as a trellis archway between rings for beans, tomatoes, and other climbing vegetables. A – frame structures were

built on site out of two inch bamboo that was cut and donated by a local homeowner. Bamboo is invasive in our area, but it makes a terrific lightweight and sturdy support for our growing plants.

In addition to being a demonstration garden, the HUG is a production garden. Produce grown here is donated to Plot Against Hunger, which is supported by Arlington Friends of Urban Agriculture. Plot Against Hunger is a network of community and home gardeners that donates fresh produce to a network of food pantries here in Arlington to help our neighbors in need. The HUG's first donation of mixed greens weighed in at 13 pounds. We're looking forward to seeing production increase as the seasons progress.

Project HUG is a collaborative project with Livability22202 sponsored by the National Landing BID and Arlington County Department of Parks & Recreation.

For more information about the HUG, including how you can volunteer, visit https://arlingtonurbanag.org/project-hug/



Category

1. Project HUG

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