



2021

UMASS PERMACULTURE ANNUAL REPORT

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Last volunteer day of the season

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to create innovative and nationally renowned permaculture gardens that provide student education and leadership training, community engagement opportunities, and fresh, local, organic produce to the UMass campus and local community.

After what felt like the long hibernation of 2020, UMass Permaculture Initiative emerged in 2021 to fill more heads, hearts, and bellies than ever before. Fortunate to have an outdoor classroom, we were well prepared to bring back our practicum course in Spring 2021, even while most classes remained remote. The semester proved to be deeply satisfying for all students involved. The joy of working together to grow food in community was palpable. One student remarked, “The class was the highlight of my week, each week. I wish every young mind at UMass could take this class.”

That hunger for connection among students continued into the Fall semester. We were able to re-instate the Student Farmers’ Market after a year’s hiatus, and from the tremendous turnout we had each week, it was clear just how much students treasure having this space. Our gardens thrived throughout the 2021 growing season with the many volunteers and practicum students who helped to create a truly beautiful, fertile, welcoming landscape.

There’s no doubt that in these times of social polarization, mental health crises, and looming climate catastrophe, spaces that provide solace, community, connection to place, and meaningful work are as essential as ever. We continue to embrace these contemporary challenges and turn them into opportunities.

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW



OUR GARDENS



Handmade Olla irrigation pot crafted by UMass student, Mike Madeiros



Practicum students process our first ever rice crop



In our **11th growing season**, our gardens produced a bounty of crops. We **harvested 1,806 lbs** from **87 different species** of fruits, vegetables, nuts, mushrooms, and medicinal herbs. The **total value** of our harvest exceeded **\$12,000**.

Our food was utilized throughout UMass Dining and the greater community. **Worcester DC** received more than any other Dining Common with 388 lbs. 400 lbs was sold through the **farmers' market**. We also donated 150 lbs to the **Amherst Survival Center**.

We experimented with several new and unusual crops this year including Achira (*Canna edulis*), grain amaranth, and fresh ginger.

Our **highest yielding crop** was napa cabbage, which was utilized by students in the Permaculture practicum to make their own kimchi.



Recycled Jean Planters being filled and planted

2021 saw the production of our **first ever rice crop**. We transitioned our pond to a rice paddy and planted it with two heirloom rice varieties adapted to northern climates. With a successful first harvest, we plan to continue with another crop in 2022.

Most of our fruit this year was processed into jams and jellies that were made available at the Farmers' Market. This includes currant jelly, strawberry jam, cornelian cherry jam, and more.

We harvested approximately 50 lbs of honey from our three bee hives in the Franklin garden.

Students made the gardens even more beautiful with **additional art installations** throughout the year including recycled jean planters, handcrafted clay irrigation pots, murals, and a wind chime.

"This garden is such a wonderful refuge. Imagine if the whole campus looked like this? Thank you to everyone who maintains this land. It's so hope-giving...a much-needed reminder that nature persists even in all this messiness"

-Anonymous student, Franklin Garden Journal

OUR FARMERS' MARKET

After a year-long hiatus we returned with a series of 4 pop-up markets in Spring 2021 and 5 weekly outdoor markets on Goodell Lawn in the Fall. We intentionally reduced the number of outdoor markets in the Fall to ensure higher participation at each individual market, which, indeed, turned out to be the case. Our Fall outdoor markets were more heavily trafficked than ever before.

We had a total of 33 unique student vendors join us during the Fall market season. They offered everything from handmade jewelry to customized poetry.

Farmers markets featured a variety of special offerings including cider pressing, a collaborative mural, and a bicycle-powered smoothie station.



Waste Sorting Game at the Fall Farmers' Market

"Touring campus and discovered this amazing garden. It will be my happy place if I choose UMass."
- Anonymous student, Franklin Garden Journal

"I learned so much about nature and gardens that I've never known before and this class has inspired me to want to learn more."
-Permaculture Practicum student, Fall 2021



Cider pressing at the Farmers' Market

“Your love for permaculture was infectious to the point where every member of the class surely went home and detailed the day to any housemate who would listen. I know I did. And I never would have thought mushroom inoculation to be so freaking fun and fascinating.”

-Permaculture Practicum student, Spring 2021



Student makes a tea blend at the Handmade Holiday Gifts event

OUR EVENTS

UMPI returned to hosting in-person events in the Fall with a lineup of 7 unique events. Time-tested events such as our Fall Foraging Workshop and Handmade Holiday gifts returned with great fanfare.

We also hosted several new events, such as a Sukkot gathering in the garden and a workshop on Breathwork.

Along with other members of the Sustainability department of UMass Dining, the Student Farm, and the UMass Sustainable Food and Farming program, we coordinated the 4th annual Diet for a Cooler Planet event. This year's focus was on food waste reduction.



A student weighs their food waste during the Diet for a Cooler Planet event



Our annual Fall Foraging Workshop

OUR CAMPUS & COMMUNITY IMPACT

We offered 19 class and community tours of our gardens in 2021.

Our volunteer sessions brought in 88 unique volunteers throughout 2021. Our Fall sessions were some of the busiest we've ever experienced, regularly bringing in 20 volunteers or more.

We continue to prioritize engaging with the community beyond the boundaries of our institution. Our summer garden crew offered two workshops on growing food and herbs to Amherst Middle School as part of their Climate Carnival. We also partnered with the People's Medicine Project, a community apothecary, to donate our medicinal herbs through their free medical clinics.

On campus we started a new partnership with a group of Masters in Sustainability students to build a solar dehydrator for the gardens. The dehydrator is meant to serve as an example of appropriate and carbon-reducing technologies.

Our gardens and programs continue to be a focal point for student enrollment. In 2021 we hosted Family Weekend tours for parents as well as hosting Stockbridge's Open House in the Franklin Garden.



Our donated medicinal herbs being offered at a clinic with The People's Medicine Project



A visit from our sister project, Wild Wes, from Wesleyan University



Raised bed planter made during the Climate Carnival



Students making wreaths with campus-sourced materials during our “Handmade Holiday Gifts” event

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

We continue to evolve our programming to fit student interests. Given the demand for the practicum course, we will be expanding the number of members in the practicum from 20 to 24 per semester. This will allow more students to immerse themselves in our community and educational offerings.

After a delay brought on by the pandemic, the expansion of the Franklin Garden will continue in 2022. We plan to increase the size of our garden by 1/8 acre to enable more opportunities for engagement and food production.

Student projects continue to play a key role for the Permaculture Initiative. In Spring 2022, Daniel Bensonoff, UMPI program coordinator, will facilitate two undergraduate independent studies on “Wild Edible Plants on the UMass Campus” and “Food Preservation & Jewish Culture”.

“This class taught us how to grow food, how to prepare food, how and what wild plants are beneficial to us, and the importance of giving back to nature.

-Permaculture Practicum student, Fall 2021