



University of Houston
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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Cougar Community Garden Provides Living, Learning Sustainable Laboratory

The University of Houston's 1,800-square-foot Cougar Community Garden continues to be a university focal point, drawing visits from students, faculty, staff and the neighboring community. The garden, located near Lynn Eusan Park and Moody Towers, represents a campus living, learning laboratory.

"We knew going into this adventure with a produce garden on campus, that this would be a sustainable learning opportunity for us," said Emily Messa, assistant vice president for university services. "For us this is what the college experience is all about – learning and growing from your experiences. Our staff is very knowledgeable about caring for many varieties of plants. We are now asking them to extend that knowledge base into caring for produce, which is similar but in some cases requires different strategies until the plants mature."

As part of this experience, the Grounds Department recently submitted soil samples from the garden to the Texas AgriLife Extension Service (Texas A&M System), a division of the Texas A&M College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. This was in large part to determine soil composition and if adjustments should be made to the soil. Additionally, since the ultimate goal is to incorporate the produce into the university's food service program, the goal is to ensure the safety of the produce used, said Alex Alexander, director of custodial and grounds.

"The university will establish procedures and policies for the garden that ensure the safe handling of the produce while it's in the garden," Alexander said. "This includes everything from soil composition to monitoring the activity in the garden from the campus community that works in the garden." Initial reports from the soil testing indicate low levels of nitrogen in the soil, which is common in immature soil, said Alexander. The Grounds Department will work with the experts at the Texas AgriLife Extension Service to determine ways to enrich the soil to ensure a soil composition that will be conducive to the produce grown in the garden.

"We knew going into this project that the produce garden would be an experiment in sustainability for us," said Alexander. "It's certainly one that we want to be successful and that's why we've reached out to experts to ensure the garden's success. In many ways our experiences with our produce garden and challenges we face are similar to the university as we learn to grow in new directions. We keep our eye on the goal and shouldn't be afraid to try new things, just to remember to learn as we go"

An Earth Day Garden Work Day is scheduled at the Cougar Community Garden. This event will be 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. April 22, 2009. During this time, Alexander and Messa will be on site to answer questions from the community about the garden and provide a hands-on opportunity for members of the community to work in the garden. For more Earth Day events, please go to <http://www.uh.edu/green>.

About the University of Houston

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