

COARC Research Garden & Learning Center and Agricultural Education Outreach, 2015

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Abstract

The Central Oregon Agricultural Research and Learning Center is an ongoing project in its 9th year of activity. The garden provides a hands-on teaching location for local outreach, community programs, and K-12 science field trips. In addition to local programming, the garden provides an opportunity for local OSU Master Gardeners to work and provide services to the local community.

Introduction

The Central Oregon Agricultural Research Garden and Learning Center was established in 2008 on a half-acre parcel of land located at the entrance to the Central Oregon Agricultural Research Center (COARC). The garden provides an opportunity for COARC and Central Oregon Extension programming to extend services and opportunities to the local community in addition to the agricultural community. The garden includes woody ornamental, herbaceous perennials, ornamental grasses, fruit trees and raised garden beds. Garden signs throughout the garden display specific plant species and other information, including: common name, botanical name, plant height, width, water usage and sun/shade needs.

Events and Activities

Seeds of Science

As part of an ongoing partnership with the Jefferson County School District and Oregon Open Campus, COARC hosted over 400 fifth-grade students from the Jefferson County 509J and Culver School Districts, as well as a large Central Oregon Homeschool Group. Students were provided opportunities to learn about Honey Bees and the importance of pollinators in agriculture, Soil and Nutrients, Plant Pathology, Animal Science and Forests and Ecosystems, at individual teaching stations located in the garden. In addition, students participated in planting a vegetable garden. Staff at COARC maintained and harvested the vegetable garden, donating over 400 pounds of vegetables grown to local charities.

Pruning Class

During spring of 2015, COARC hosted a two and a half hour pruning class. The class consisted of one hour of classroom instruction and one and a half hours of hands instruction in the garden. In the classroom section, participants learned why and when they should prune along with basic pruning principles. During the hands on section, participants split into small groups and actively pruned and observed pruning techniques for ornamental trees and fruit trees along with berries, shrubs and low growing plants under the guidance of Master Gardeners and COARC staff.

Corn & Pumpkin Patch

COARC staff planted a half-acre pumpkin and corn patch to enhance community learning and outreach opportunities. In the fall of 2015, Jefferson County 4-H held their first annual kick-off party at COARC in the learning garden and all youth attending had the opportunity to choose a Halloween pumpkin to take home. In addition to 4-H, multiple groups of youth, including the Little Red Schoolhouse Preschool, had the opportunity to visit COARC for learning opportunities and to pick a pumpkin. Leftover pumpkins were donated to local food bank groups.

Kids Club

COARC hosted Jefferson County Kids Club summer agricultural camp participants for a field trip. During the fieldtrip, COARC staff presented information about the research center, agriculture equipment, worms and composting, the on-site weather station and honeybees. In addition to the summer camp, COARC faculty offered a garden club on-site at Kids Club to present children hand-on learning opportunities with an agricultural basis.

COARC Summer Science Academy

In 2015, COARC hosted their first annual Summer Science Academy. The academy was open to youth entering grades 6-8 from across central Oregon. Youth applied to the academy by completing an application and essay. Faculty from OSU Extension and the Research Center lead daily activities each day covering different topic areas including: plant pathology, soil science, local farms and bees, animals and rangeland and local agribusinesses. The 2015 academy hosted six students.

Master Gardeners

The Central Oregon Master Gardener program serves Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson Counties. This gives Jefferson County the benefits associated with a tri-county Master Gardener Program, including increased participation from Master Gardeners from outside Jefferson County. The Master Gardener Program is a voluntary, educational program which trains volunteers in the basics of designed botany and entomology; integrated pest management and pesticide safety; soils, fertilizers and composting; ornamental, herbaceous plants and woody plants; vegetable, indoor and container gardening; sustainable landscaping; and plant pathology.

Master Gardeners are available at the Central Oregon Agricultural Research Center weekly throughout the spring and summer months. Volunteers are available to provide informational and technical assistance and to answer questions from the local community in gardening and horticulture. Additionally, volunteers identify insects and diseases based upon sample submissions from the community. For those interested in volunteering or for more information about the Master Gardener program, more information is available at:

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes/horticulture/mg>

Future Plans

Goals

During 2016, COARC will continue to develop the Central Oregon Agricultural Research Garden and Learning Center as an outdoor laboratory to engage in teaching, research and conservation. COARC plans to offer two gardening classes and will host two field trips during 2016, including the Seeds of Science field trip which is planned for expansion to Metolius and Warm Springs schools and to additional home-school groups. In addition, during 2016 COARC will continue to partner with the Jefferson County Kids Club to continue educational offerings on-site and at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds Garden. This will allow youth to learn about local and regional agriculture along with gardening and the inputs that go into both. The garden will continue to provide educational opportunities for the public through hands on learning, exhibits and classes in addition to other agriculture and gardening experiences.