

The Hidden Hands that Worked this Soil

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Master's of Environmental and Sustainability Studies Program: Stono Student Garden

Introduction to the Project: A Teaching Garden in Sustainable Agriculture

At the College of Charleston's property located on the Stono River, the Master of Environmental and Sustainability Studies is developing the "Hidden Hands" garden, to commemorate the profound influence of Native American and African/African-American laborers (the "social" leg of sustainability thinking). These agriculturalists imparted cultural knowledge crucial for the sustenance of generations of South Carolinians, and for the development of sustainable agriculture in the United States.



One of the planned thematic stations for this teaching garden will highlight the cash crops that these laborers tended, which contributed to the wealth of antebellum Charleston (the "economic" leg of sustainability thinking). But the Garden can also incorporate lessons on the adaptation of cultivated crops to different environments (the "environmental" leg of sustainability). Many of the vegetables we associate with Lowcountry cuisine were introduced by enslaved peoples and their provision beds, such as okra, black-eyed peas, and millet. By showcasing heirloom varieties, the garden will open a conversation about the departure of today's crop cultivars from their wild forms (such as maize versus corn).

Through exposing visitors to the impact that African and Indigenous traditions have had on the development of the Lowcountry, the Hidden Hands Garden will open an interdisciplinary discussion on the social, economic, and environmental implications of this history, and inspire us to draw on their innovations for future sustainable agriculture.

Methods to Create the Demonstration Gardens

1. Using a sustainable agriculture framework (Gliessman 2007) to highlight alternatives to industrial agriculture.
2. Using approaches of ethnobotany to collect and display information

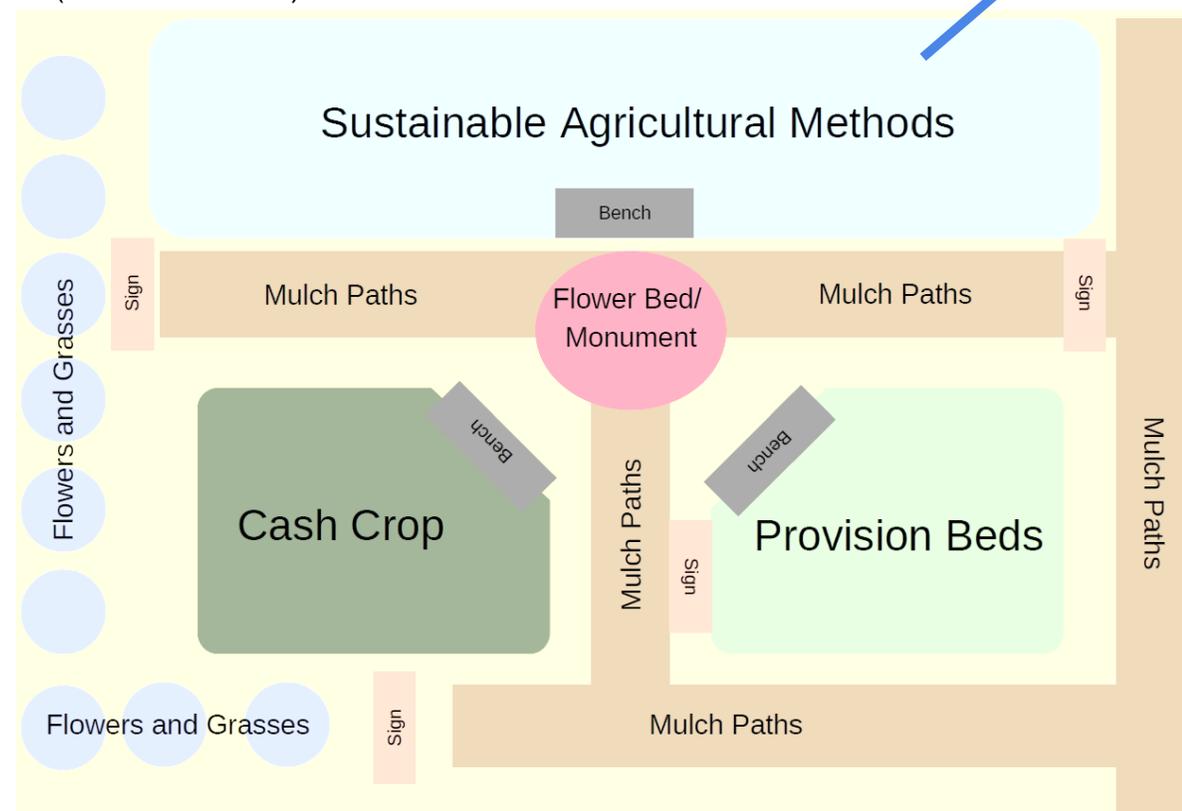
What is Ethnobotany?

The study of the interactions between people and plants (Martin 1995).

Ethnobotanical studies are built around listening to and observing traditional peoples and practices, and results in studies that set out to learn the generations of knowledge being put into practice as cultures have developed relationships with the land that cannot simply be explained (Minnis 2000:14).

Example: Three Sisters Agriculture

The *three sisters* (corn, beans, and squash) were the major staples of Native American agriculture, and demonstrate benefits of companion planting. Corn (a pole for beans to grow and shade), beans (a nitrogen fixer, or nutrient-holder), and squash (whose large leaves help the ground hold moisture) were planted simultaneously to promote healthy growth of each plant (Park et al 2016).



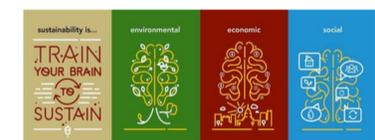
Questions and contact information:

If you would like to volunteer in the design and creation of this teaching garden

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Works Cited

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