

JANUARY / FEBRUARY
/ MARCH 2015



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NEWS FROM

THE URBAN GARDEN CENTER



600+ Fifth Graders @ The UGC, Oh, My!

How do you spell energy? On Friday the 13th of Feb. 2015, over 600 Fifth Graders descended on The UGC from the Radford and Moanalua School Complex for the CTAHR 2015 Agriculture & Environmental Awareness Day. The day started with cloud cover and the students were rained on during the Welcome Address, but that did not dampen their youthful enthusiasm.



This event was co-sponsored by the City & County of Honolulu and UH-CTAHR. Individual classrooms of students from @ nine elementary schools spent the morning going from one exhibit tent/area to the next. Among the exhibits they visited was one from the Hawaii Ag. Research Ctr., The USDA's Natural Resources & Conservation Services, CTAHR-4H's Tropical Fruit Exhibit, a very interactive exhibit from the Board of Water Supply, and CTAHR exhibits of a lovely goat family (mom & two kids!) and the tasty chocolate treats from CTAHR's Cacao Research.

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Dedication of the Soka Peace Garden Theater

Visitors to The UGC may have noticed a series of terraces with boulders and turf & other new plantings at the entry. This latest improvement to the Peace Garden was due to the efforts of many in the business community, The UGC Staff and volunteers. A dedication ceremony was held on 19th January with music and hula. A 'Certificate of Recognition' by Councilmember B. Elefante was presented and Dean Maria Gallo, UH-Manoa, CTAHR and Mrs. Yumiko Kasanuki of Soka Gakkai International ("SGI") Women's Division made remarks. Mahalo to UH's/M.G. Jeannie Lum for coordinating this effort. Take time to visit, contemplate and view the commemorative plaques.



Lunchtime Oasis

Visitors to The UGC can take advantage of the peace, tranquility and shade! of the Peace Garden Theater. Perhaps these visitors will also contemplate the SGI principle of promoting the protection of nature and the environment.

Music and Dance Calm the Soul

The SGI Youth Hula performed for the visitors at the dedication of the Soka Peace Garden Theater. Musical accompanist was Pue'o Kane.

SGI strives to contribute to peace, culture and education for the happiness and welfare of all humanity. Mahalo!





International Year of Soils

The Natural Resources and Conservation Services ("NRCS") provided a Soil Health class to commemorate the International Year of Soils at The UGC on 24th January.

Coordinators/presenters were: Susan Kubo & Bernadette Luncford of NCRS, Aiea, Amy Koch, NCRS, Hilo and Dr. Koon-Hui Wang of UH, CTAHR-PEPS. There was a mix of indoor classroom and exterior field demos. to the class.

The classroom portion included topics on Soil Health Basics, Soil Biology & Food Web, and Soil Health Planning Principles.

The training continued outdoors in two

different UGC 'fields' for 'Testing for Soil Health'. We recognize the work of M.G.s Brian and Mhel Cyr, as well as others who have worked the soil in Quadrant 3 of The UGC "Herb Garden". The soil tested there definitely passed the Soil Health test. The second test site of a fallow section of the AAS garden did not fare as well and will need work before it is planted.

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Hawaii Youth Challenge Volunteers

During the first quarter, 2015, new volunteers visited The UGC from the Hawaii Youth Challenge ("HYC") group. In February, HYC volunteers split into two groups with one assisting the Fruit Hui in mulching the orchard. The 2nd group assisted in the Rose Garden; tilling and amending soil. HYC volunteers were back in March and assisted again in the Orchard, Rose Garden and amended soil near the Gardenia Garden. These activities gave the HYC volunteers a hands-on experience in "Healthy Soil" principles. Mahalo to these volunteers!

Second Saturday at The Garden Resumes

The SSAG events for 2015 commenced on 14th February with a Mini-Plant Sale with plants propagated by The UGC Sprouts, succulent dish gardens made by the Xeriscape Hui and roses offered for sale by the Honolulu Rose Society (“HRS”).



The M.G. Plant Doc Booth offered advice & sold UH seeds and the HRS offered information to those interested in rose gardening. Gusty winds and rain did not dampen the enthusiasm of the garden visitors. Gardening Valentines were sure to be pleased with what The UGC had to offer.

February SSAG Workshops and Exhibits

Following Friday’s Agriculture and Environmental Awareness Day, several exhibitors returned and participated in this SSAG with hands-on sessions and exhibits. Additionally, M.G.s Brian and Mhel Cyr presented a workshop on building healthy garden soil.



Those new plant purchases ought to have a welcoming, well-prepared garden bed waiting at their new home. Mahalo to all who participated in this SSAG event.

International Year of Soils

After class and via e-mail, various materials were distributed to the attendees that NRCS would like disseminated to the public. Other resources that are/will be available are: a “Cover Crop Calculator” being developed by UH’s Dr. Ted Radovitch and an “O’ahu Home Gardener Soil Health Card” as well as a “Building Healthy Garden Soil” handout developed by M.G.s Brian & Mhel Cyr. See:

Article: Building Healthy Garden Soil
<http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/uhmg/news/V11-Cyr-HealthyGardenSoil.pdf>

Scorecard
<http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/ougc/download/Oahu%20Home%20Gardener%20Soil%20Health%20Card.pdf>

Brian also recommends reading “Weeds: Guardians of the Soil” (1957).
http://journeytoforever.org/farm_library/weeds/WeedsToC.html.

Please go to the CTAHR website and look for Soil Health and Quality at:
<http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/UHMG/trainin g.asp>

Four Principles for Healthy Soil

1. Do not let soil lie fallow.
 - ~ Think "Dust Bowl".
2. Minimum disturbance of soil.
 - ~ Can use strip tilling or minimum tilling.
3. Plant diversity.
 - ~ Different organisms eat different sugars in plants. Varied 'menu' is best!
4. Cover ground at all times.

~ Mulch OK.

~ Cover crops are preferable (Sunn Hemp is good in dry areas in the Tropics but keep it cut & do not let it re-seed!)

A “Soil Health Card” (business card size) is available in the M.G. Helpline Office @ The UGC. These can be handed out at Plant Doc Booths, as well as other community outreach events.

600+ Fifth Graders @ the UGC, Oh, My!

The students were given a pre-Ag Day ‘test assessment’, which they re-took after their day of learning at The UGC. Based on their level of interest, the students were sure to have improved their scores after their busy day.

The students had a card stamped as they made their way through each exhibit. Once their ‘stamp card’ was filled, they turned it in for an environmentally friendly prize.

Linda Chu Takajama, Director of Economic Development for the City & County of Honolulu, gave the Welcome Address to the students. We hope this hands-on experience with agriculture & environmental awareness spurs the students to explore possible careers in these fields.

Mahalo to all organizers, exhibitors and volunteers who participated in this high-energy event. Consider volunteering for next year’s event!

Changes in the Cacao Plot

For those of you who have wandered into the orchard, you may have noticed a plot surrounded by tall grass as you head for the mangoes. This is a UH test plot of Cacao. This was planted under the direction of UH Professor 'Skip' Bittenbender, who directs the research of the various varieties that are being tested.



Bana grass, a sterile inter species cross (Pennisetum americanum X P. Purpureum (Napier grass)) was originally planted as a windbreak around the perimeter of the Cacao plot. Starting late in 2014, Ag Techs Richard Fisher and Lito Cacho removed the Bana grass windbreak so Dr. Bittenbender could plant a leguminous tree called 'Mother of Cacao' (Gliricidia sepium) instead. The bana grass gets trashy if you don't mow it back and can slowly creep. The Gliricidia can be grown from seed and/or stem pieces like the previously popular wiliwili haole (Erythrina variegata) that was destroyed by the Erythrina gall wasp, an invasive species to Hawaii. Dr. Bittenbender had planned to use the wiliwili but found other, fast windbreaks for his cacao, coffee and kava research.

The 'Mother of Cacao' is a fast growing tree used through tropical America as a shade tree for cacao with leaves that break down fast and whose wood is soft enough to control with cane knife. This particular variety was imported to O'ahu probably 25 years ago or more and Dr. Bittenbender's student Dan O'Doherty found it growing on an organic farm in Waialua. The initial planting of the 'Mother of Cacao' is growing well and has more than doubled in size.

The Cacao has produced harvestable fruits, although there have not been definitive cultivars/varieties identified as 'winners' yet. Dr. Bittenbender has made chocolate from his experiment at The UGC and offered 'a taste of UGC' at the Agricultural & Environmental Awareness Day program at The UGC on 13th Feb..

The harvest of the 2015 crop was done in Feb. 2015. The trees are not yet mature so collecting yield, growth and other information will continue at least through 2016.

We look forward to the final results of this (delicious!) research.

Mahalo to all who contributed to the newsletter.

Please let us know what you think of this format. Do you like having more photos?

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