

Okeover Community Garden

2010 Annual Report

Dr Matt Morris, UC Sustainable Practices Co-ordinator

1. Introduction

The Okeover Community Garden was established in 2002 by University students in association with the UC Sustainability Office. It functions as a relaxed space for university staff, students and locals to come together, learn about organic gardening, gather fresh food and as a quiet study/meeting/relaxing place to be. Community gardens are increasingly common in universities, particularly as they model a positive way that the university can interact with the community around it.

In 2010 the Sustainability Office developed a monitoring and evaluation pilot for the community garden. Information was gathered anecdotally during the year to provide context, and during October participants of the Friday afternoon working bees were surveyed. This was a busy time of year for assessments and would normally have taken place in September. The survey was delayed as a result of the Canterbury Earthquakes.

2. Number of UC Sustainability Office activities that are part of the garden

- Weekly working bees in the community garden, Fridays 2-5pm (except when raining) (25 people)
- Weekly meetings of the UC Gardening Group on Wednesday lunchtimes during term-time (see Gardening Group Report). (130 people)
- 3 Eco-living workshops held in the garden (approx. 15 people)
- 3 events utilising the pizza oven (about 100 people)
- 3 Eco Office Network meetings (approx 15 people)
- 3 Canterbury Community Gardens Association meetings (approx 15 people)

We estimate that about 300 people were involved in events at the garden that were organised by the Sustainability Office.

3. Time and resources put into the different activities that are part of the garden

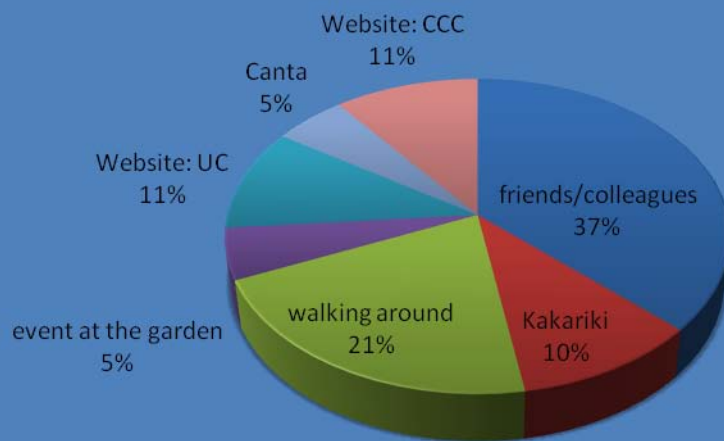
- One casual staff member: Volunteer Co-ordinator (3-4 hours p/w)
- Most of the programmes at the garden run by the office are part of the Sustainable Practices Co-ordinator's role.

- Seed orders amounted to \$161.50 (King's Seeds), \$120.60 (Koanga Gardens) and \$20.00 Southern Seed Exchange membership. Total: \$302.10
- Most other plants and materials were donated.
- A community garden DLE flyer was produced at the start of 2010.

4. Individuals from New Zealand and overseas

Information collected anecdotally suggests that the garden is utilised by many international students and staff, particularly in the first semester. Our October survey showed that a minority of participants were international students.

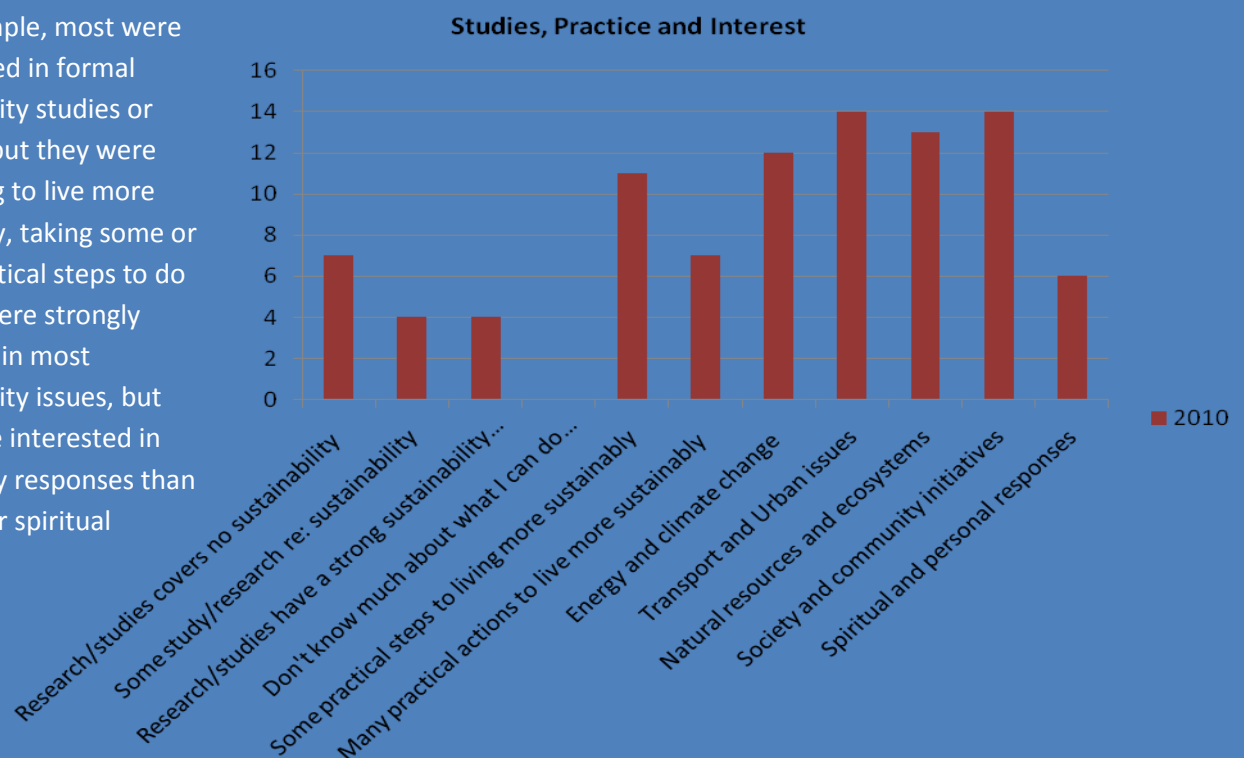
5. How people found out about the Okeover Community Garden



19 people were surveyed in October 2010. Most people who gardened at Okeover found out about the garden through their friends or colleagues. A fifth discovered it by chance, walking around.

6. Studies, Practice and Interest of participants in sustainability

Of our sample, most were not engaged in formal sustainability studies or research, but they were attempting to live more sustainably, taking some or many practical steps to do so. They were strongly interested in most sustainability issues, but were more interested in community responses than personal or spiritual matters.



7. Level of gardening confidence

We found that on average our participants had a moderate to low level of gardening confidence. On a scale of 0-5, participants ranked their level of gardening confidence against five aspects of gardening, from the specific to the general. The mean responses are as follows:

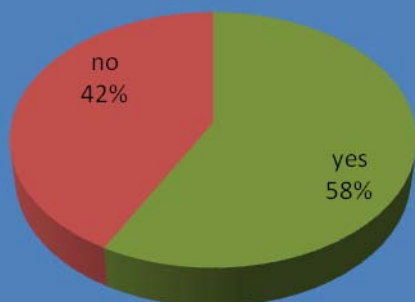
- Propagation of tomatoes: 2.2
- Waste management (e.g. composting) 2.9
- Weeding: 3.8
- General gardening: 3.2
- Garden maintenance: 2.9

8. Connectedness with sustainability initiatives on campus



We asked our participants about their knowledge of 'sustainability' oriented groups on campus. Less than half of the sample felt they had an excellent knowledge of the community garden, which was surprising, and overall the results of this question show a low level of connectedness with sustainability groups on campus.

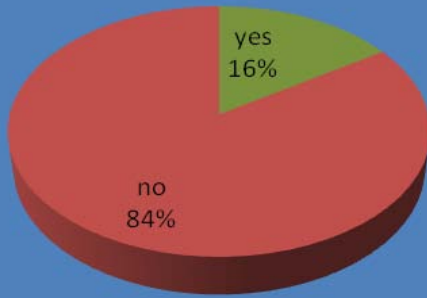
9. Involvement with sustainability-related projects off campus



Over half of the community gardeners were also involved in sustainability-related projects off campus. However, a large proportion – more than 40% - said that they were not.

Given the results of Q.8 above, it is safe to surmise that the Okeover Community Garden was the only sustainability-related project many of the community gardeners were involved in.

10. International Students

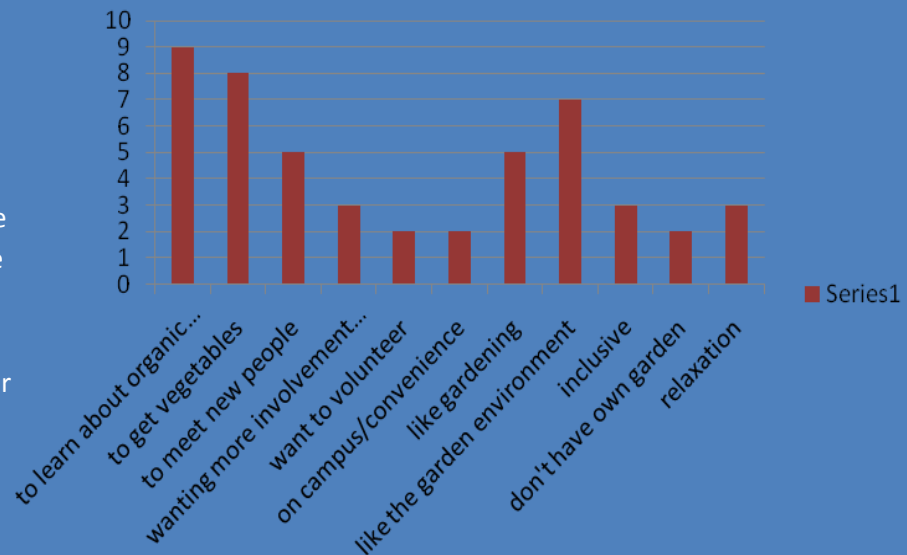


Most of the participants in the community garden surveyed were not international students.

The survey was of all participants in October, including staff, local residents, and workers from a social service agency, and not just students. With this in mind, it is clear that the community garden does serve as a place where people from a mixture of backgrounds can come together and participate in a collective enterprise.

11. Why participants wanted to be involved in the community garden

In an open-ended question, participants expressed a number of reasons why they wanted to take part in the garden. Wanting to learn about gardening, getting free vegetables and just liking the environment of the community garden were the most often stated reasons for joining in.



Some of the specific comments we received in answer to this question were:

'Organic farming is a good thing to learn about. I get vegetables and to meet new people who have similar interests to me.'

'I enjoy gardening. It's a positive thing to have a garden. More people can learn/share ideas, especially at university, and it's nice to take home produce if you forgot to grow it [at home]. I like the layout. It's a beautiful philosophy, organic, different types of veggies and fruit trees.'

'I was interested in volunteering. I'm an international student, and it's close to campus. I'm using this experience as part of a [research] project. It's open to all volunteers. You keep what you harvest. It's right on campus – convenient.'

'I like gardening very much. I come from a rural background, close to the land/soil. It's a miracle to grow things. I like it very much.'

'I like being in the natural environment of the garden and to improve my gardening skills. Like hanging out and getting my hands dirty. I saw it when I was still in Perth on the [University] website, and that was a plus for the [Canterbury] University when I was still planning. It made it [the University] look nice.'

'I enjoy it and it's something positive to do... It has a nice feel to it.'

'To learn how to be involved. It's a relaxing thing to do. To learn more about gardening – I'm wanting to start my own garden.'

12. Conclusions

Participants came from a range of backgrounds, drawn to the gardens because they wanted to do practical sustainable actions, meet like-minded people and because they enjoyed the garden environment. Most had a moderate to low level of confidence in doing gardening tasks and this was a major motivation for them to become involved in the first place.

It is obvious that the garden has a low profile in the University, with over half learning about it through their personal connections, or by chance as they explored the University on foot.

We believe the Okeover Community Garden is a genuine asset for the University of Canterbury, and that it is one very tangible way that the University models sustainable practice. It is a valuable meeting point and education site, and captures the imaginations of locals and the campus community. For these reasons, and the low running costs overall (indeed, we believe the garden *saves* the University money as it is mostly taken care of by volunteers rather than paid Grounds staff), the Sustainability Office has actively sought out and located a second community garden site on the Dovedale Campus. This will be a major new development during 2011, drawing on the experiences and resources generated through the Okeover Community Garden.