

UC Gardening Group 2010 Report

Dr Matt Morris, Sustainable Practices Co-ordinator

Introduction

The UC Gardening Group was established in 2010 following a survey of participants in the 2009 UC Spring Gardening Series. Many expressed a desire to be part of a weekly gardening group for sharing gardening information, cuttings, seeds and plants from their home gardens. The group was developed as a weekly lunchtime group during term time as a trial.

How many workshops and on what topics

By the end of term four, twelve workshops had been run on various, specific gardening topics. The topics were:

- Sowing Seeds for Autumn and selecting
- How to Save Seeds
- Building a Compost Heap
- Sowing a Green Manure Crop
- Carl Pickens on this weeks gardening
- Pruning Fruit Trees
- Propagating Currants, Canes and Vines
- Herb Basics
- Sowing in Trays and Chitting Potatoes
- Preparing the seed bed and cutting green manure
- Companion planting
- Organic Pest Management

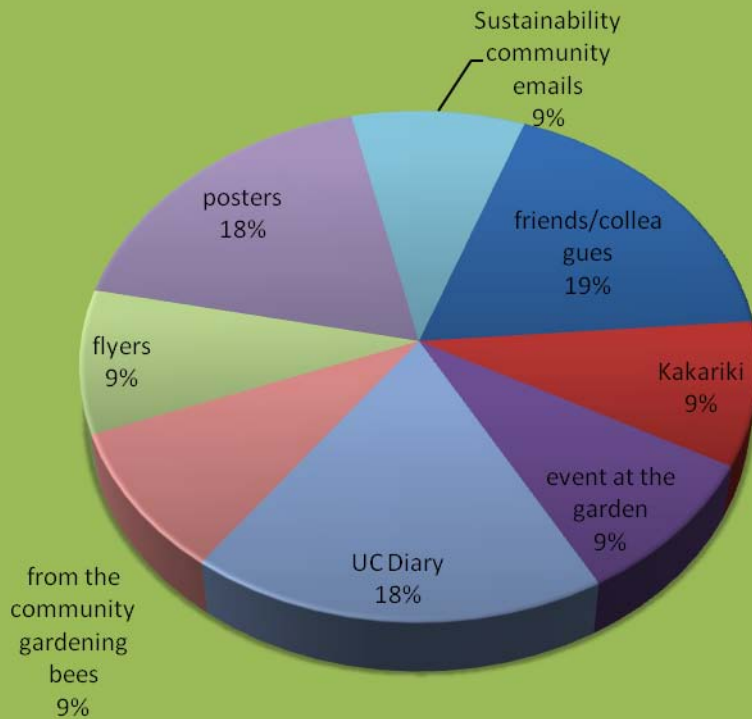
How many 'outside' presenters and at what cost

We utilised two of the most popular off-campus presenters from the 2009 series, Lily White and Carl Pickens, both of whom have a strong local reputation for their sustainable gardening knowledge and practice. Averil Halliday (Administrator, Facilities Management) and Jonny Platt (Okeover Community Garden Volunteer Co-ordinator), hosted one session each. Matt Morris (Sustainable Practices Co-ordinator) hosted four sessions in addition to the above twelve, as discussions and plant swaps amongst the group. Lily and Carl ran ten workshops between them, at a total cost of \$350.00 (excl. GST). The other six workshops and discussion sessions were of no cost to the university. Seeds as giveaways were sponsored by King's Seeds, and plants and cuttings were often given away to participants at from the garden, obviously at no cost.



Survey results

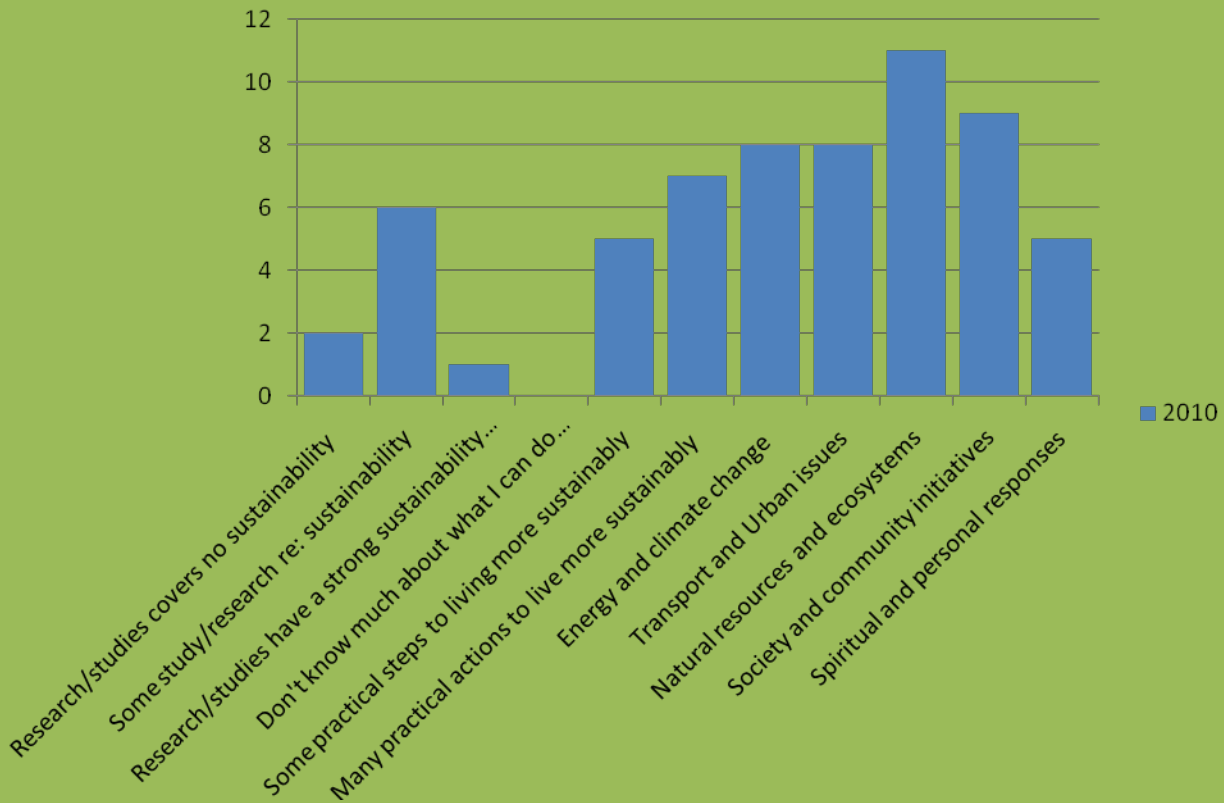
How people found out about the gardening group



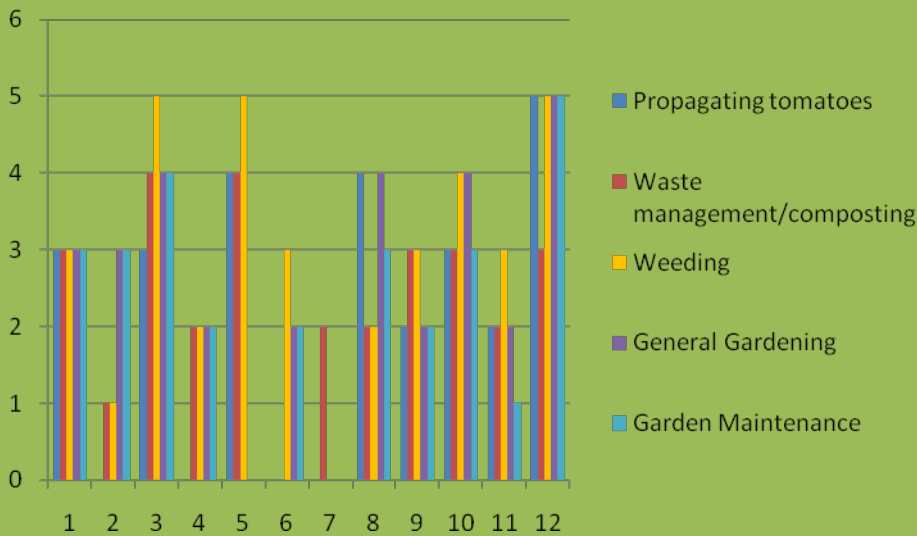
Participants in the gardening group found out about it primarily through their friends and colleagues, through our posters and through the UC Diary.

Most participants covered some sustainability in their research or studies, but few had it as a strong focus. Most incorporated sustainable practices in their own lives and all were engaged in the 'big' issues.

Studies, Practice and Interests



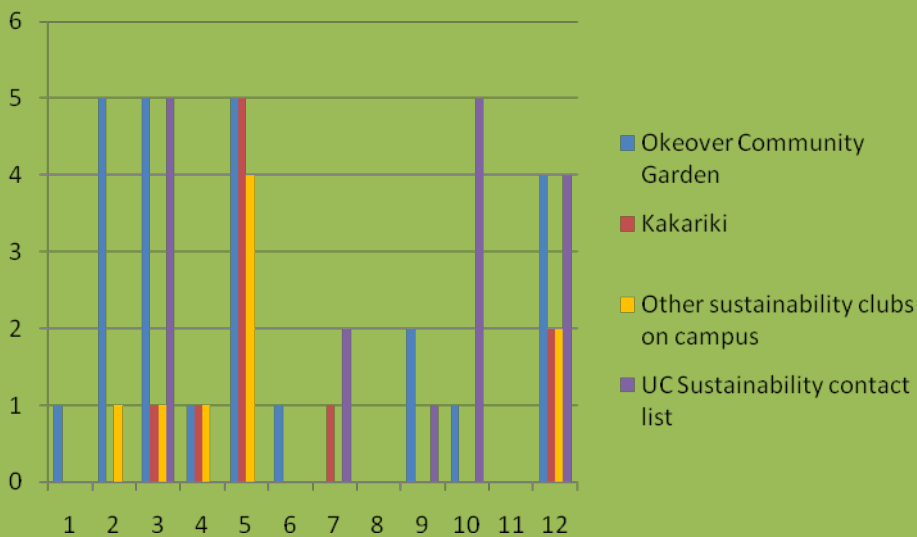
Level of Gardening Confidence



On five aspects of gardening, from the particular to the general, the participants had a wide range of confidence levels. Most had a moderate to low level of confidence in all gardening areas.

Having this mixture was good as it meant group members could learn additional information from other members.

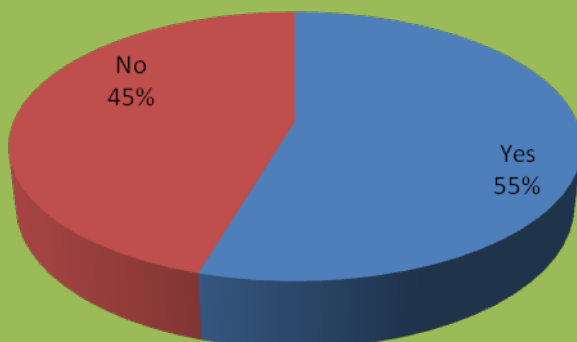
Connectedness with Sustainability Initiatives on Campus



Participants ranked their knowledge of other sustainability initiatives on campus and the results generally showed a low level of awareness of clubs and even the Sustainability Office's Sustainability Community contact list.

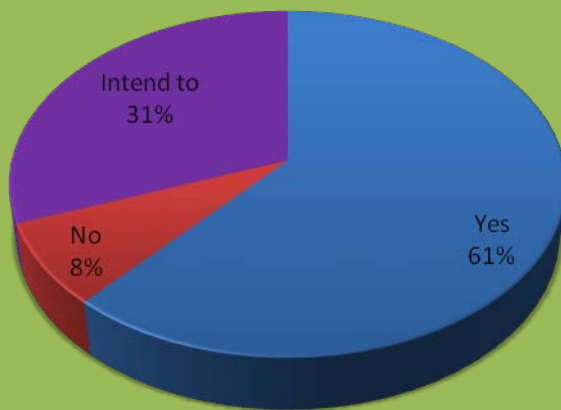
This showed both the value of the garden group as an 'entry point' into sustainability on campus, and indicated the low profile sustainability has at UC.

Involved in Sustainability Projects off Campus?



Participants in the gardening group were often involved in off-campus sustainability initiatives. For a large minority, however, attending the group meetings was the only sustainability-related activity they took part in.

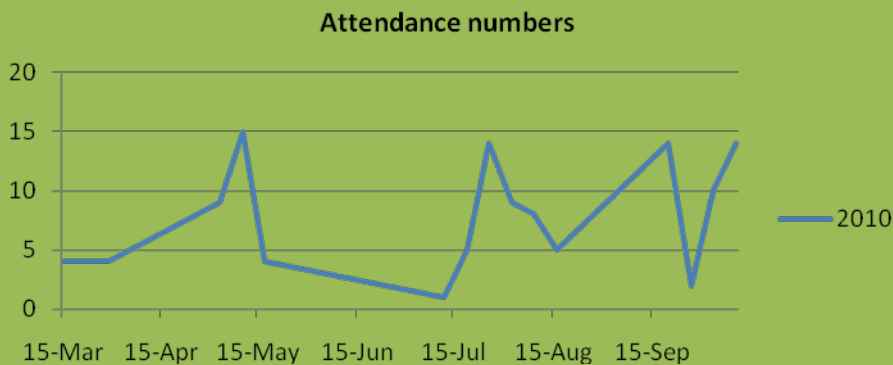
Have you started your own garden at home?



Most of the participants had their own garden at home, as was expected. Surprisingly, however, a third of the participants were 'intending' to start a garden, indicating that the gardening group was useful to them to learn the basics before developing their gardens. It was therefore useful in supporting sustainable behaviour change.

Participants specifically noted that they had applied information at home from the workshops on soil improvement and composting, tree pruning, companion planting and organic pest control.

How many people participated?



Attendance numbers were variable, from a low of one to a high of fifteen. However, throughout the year the gatherings attracted 130 people.

What made the Gardening Group successful?

We asked participants what helped make the gardening group sessions successful, and were told:

'Openness towards newcomers'

'Knowledgeable, friendly, well-spoken people'

'Good speakers/experts'

'Helpful collaboration with others, sharing ideas'

'The plants'

'Knowledge & experience of the talkers – they had done it. Pruning talk – got to see it in action'

'Great leader, great participants – i.e. warm, approachable, friendly with some expertise'

Participants therefore enjoyed the group atmosphere, the sense of being able to learn from an expert but also to collaborate and share, and to learn *in situ*, with practical demonstrations at the relevant times of the year.

What could be improved?

We were told that better use of our website, and the Okeover Community Garden noticeboard would help, and to start ten minutes past the hour.

Conclusions

The Gardening Group is a relatively low-cost project of the UC Sustainability Office. It has attracted new people into the Sustainability Office's work that would not normally have become involved. It is also supporting people to adopt new sustainable behaviours in their own homes, which we believe supports our general kaupapa of developing a sustainability culture among staff and students at UC. The people who participated have a high level of interest in sustainability issues, particularly climate change, but they were involved in little formal research or study in the area, possibly highlighting a need for more courses on this subject to be offered.