

Elvenia J. Slosson Endowment Fund Final Report  
September 18, 2009

**Master Gardener Project to Develop Demonstration Gardens  
in Central Park of Davis, California**

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**Introduction**

This is a final report for work performed from July of 2007 through June of 2009. In July of 2008 we requested and received a one year extension to allow us until June of 2009 to complete the project. We proposed to transform the gardens in Davis Central Park into a demonstration site to support UC Cooperative Extension Master Gardener horticultural outreach programs. The Yolo County Master Gardeners have a unique opportunity to reach a large audience in Central Park because the Farmers Market draws several thousand park visitors every week, many of whom never venture onto the UC Davis campus. The gardens were established in the early 1990s, but they had fallen into neglect over the years. The garden site already had basic pathways, an irrigation system, and structural plants when the project was conceived. The project to renovate the gardens has been able to take advantage of their prominent location in Central Park and pre-existing infrastructure and plants to accelerate the transformation of the site. In accordance with the core values of the Master Gardener program and current concerns about environmental contamination, the gardens have been designed as a demonstration of sustainable gardening practices and regionally-appropriate plants.

**Goals and Objectives**

The goal of the project was to create beautiful demonstration gardens and engaging educational programs that would motivate home gardeners in the region to adopt more sustainable gardening practices. The project plan was heavily influence by a volunteer-conducted survey of Central Park visitors that asked them to rate their interests in learning about gardening in the park. Results from the 119 surveys helped the Master Gardeners tailor the project to use educational methods and horticultural topics that would appeal to the community. In response to strong visitor interest in these learning methods, the Master Gardeners developed a plan to label the gardens, install interpretive signs, and lead informal demonstrations and hands-on workshops. Survey respondents also expressed interest in learning more about several sustainable gardening practices that could be highlighted through workshops in the garden, such as least toxic pest control, efficient water management, and the selection of wildlife-attracting, native, and drought-tolerant plantings.

We requested support from the Slosson Endowment to fund the following seven project elements, and received funding for the first six.

1. Renovating planting beds and adding new plants
2. Identifying plantings with plant labels
3. Interpreting plantings with signage
4. Building an information kiosk
5. Developing an informational brochure
6. Developing a series of informal demonstrations and hands-on workshops in the gardens
7. Acquiring tools for workshops and work days

## Results and Discussion

Key investments in plants and educational materials that were made with Slosson funds have laid the foundation for the development of the gardens. Our work on Slosson-funded project elements has helped to establish a positive reputation for us in the community that has made it possible for us to raise significant additional funds and recruit more volunteers. Slosson funding has truly helped to fertilize and fuel the garden's growth! Our work was recognized in spring of 2008 with a City of Davis Environmental Recognition Award to Emily Griswold for her garden leadership and an official city proclamation honoring the Master Gardeners and other community volunteers who have contributed to the garden renovation project.

The following is a report on our progress on each funded project element.

### 1. Renovating planting beds and adding new plants

Since July of 2007, we have installed over 1,500 plants and have established four new theme gardens using Slosson funds. Master Gardeners have been key leaders during volunteer planting days and have used the work days as informal horticultural training opportunities with the community participants. The new gardens include:

- **Sensory Garden** – a garden of drought-tolerant aromatic herbs and perennial edible plants
- **California Native Borders** – native plants selected for their suitability for home gardens, drought tolerance, and value for wildlife habitat
- **Beneficial Insect Habitat Border** – plants that attract beneficial insects located adjacent to the vegetable garden
- **Waterwise Garden** – a garden of drought-tolerant landscape plants that do well in Davis

A windfall gift from a private donor allowed us to build four new stone raised beds in the Sensory Garden that elevate the plants so they're easier to touch, smell, and taste. The raised beds have also increased informal seating in the garden, making this area a great place to stage gardening workshops.



Figure 1. Master Gardener Mary Tallyn helped some young volunteers at a planting day in spring of 2008.

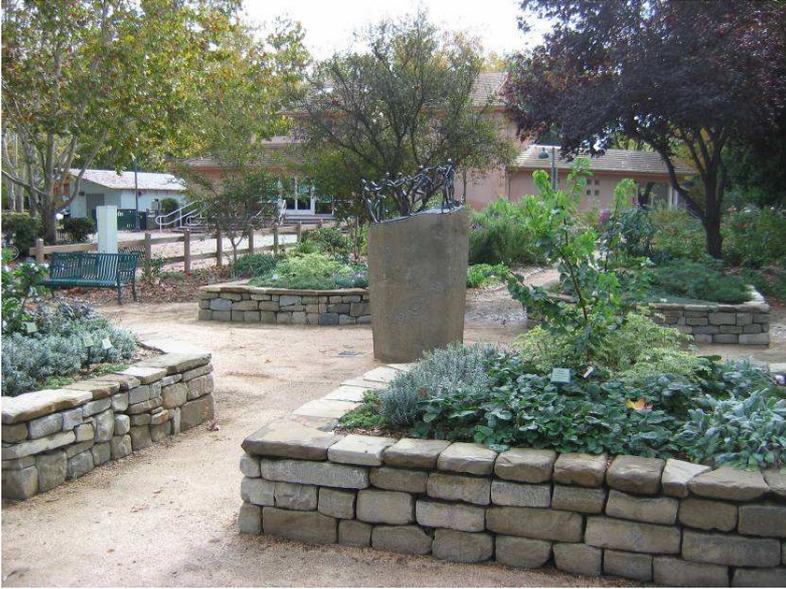


Figure 2. The Sensory Garden plantings have filled in quickly in the new donor-funded raised beds.

## 2. Identifying plantings with plant labels

We have produced and installed over 250 new plant labels for new and established plantings. The flexible labeling system we use consists of a laminated, fade-resistant paper label that is affixed with velcro to a powder-coated metal stand. Inexpensive laminated paper labels can easily be swapped out of long-lasting metal stands to adapt to changing plantings. Master Gardeners have participated in inventorying for labeling needs, label content development, label production and garden installation. Plant labels include the plant's common name, its scientific name, and a phrase about the value of the plant in the garden. We have been able to use the plant labels to reinforce gardens themes and encourage greater visitor interest in the plant. For example, in the Sensory Garden, many of the plant labels contain the phrase "fragrant foliage" as a subtle invitation for visitors to smell the leaves.

We have had a very positive response to the new plant labels, and it is common to find visitors exploring the garden and taking notes on the names of plants they would like to grow. Since we first installed labels in fall of 2007, several garden visitors have approached us to learn more about our labeling system so they can duplicate it in a demonstration garden elsewhere.



Figure 3. An example of a plant label in the garden. The green color of the labels makes them less visually obtrusive.

### 3. Interpreting plantings with signage

New metal sign holders for temporary laminated signs have allowed us to give visitors more information about plants of seasonal interest. When a striking assemblage of over a dozen tower-of-jewels (*Echium wildpretii*) bloomed in April, a temporary sign about the spectacular display was very popular with visitors. The temporary sign system has also allowed us to test visitor response to sign mockups that we may want to eventually develop into permanent interpretive signs. A popular recent use of the temporary signs was to create sensory activity stations at a special event that encouraged visitors to explore the fragrances of different plants in the garden.



Figure 4. Prompted by a sign about plant scents, a visitor rubs the leaves of a chamomile plant to release the fragrance.

### 4. Building an information kiosk

We worked with local metal artists Shaunie and Mike Briggs to create a new information kiosk for the garden in spring of 2009. Prominently located by the plaza on the south side of Central Park, the kiosk greets visitors and provides information at the entrance to our Rose and Flower Garden. The steel kiosk holds a locking display case for posting information and a weather-resistant brochure holder for distributing our new Slosson-funded garden brochures. Cut metal silhouettes of birds, butterflies, and flowers grace the top and back panels of the kiosk and add a whimsical element to the functional kiosk.

Our proposal for the kiosk included funding for the development of a logo that would be used for signage on the kiosk. We worked with a local graphic designer to create a logo that would represent the themes of the garden, and the logo was finalized in September of 2007. We use the logo on signage, our website, and flyers advertising outreach events. The logo has established a consistent, professional visual identify for the gardens that reflects our values.



Figure 5. The garden logo



Figure 6. Front view of the kiosk



Figure 7. Back view of the kiosk

## 5. Developing an informational brochure

In spring of 2009, after completing the major elements of the garden renovation, we worked with graphic designer Mark Deamer to create an up-to-date guide map and brochure for visitors. With Slosson funds, we were able to print 2500 full-color brochures for distribution at the garden kiosk and at various locations around town. The brochure includes a beautiful watercolor map of the garden, descriptions of the theme gardens, basic information about sustainable gardening practices, a listing of local sources of gardening information, as well as general information about the garden and our programs. The brochure turned out beautifully and has been very attractive to garden visitors. Please see attached document for the final brochure design.



Figure 8. The informational brochure features a watercolor map of the garden.

**6. Developing a series of informal demonstrations and hands-on workshops in the gardens**

We started the garden education program in January of 2008, after the first phase of plantings had become established. Garden workshops are offered monthly in the winter, spring, and fall, and garden tours were offered in the hottest summer months. Master Gardeners select workshop topics to reflect sustainable gardening themes and the interests of the community as determined by a 2006 visitor survey. Master Gardeners planned, organized, and taught a series of 14 garden workshops in the first year of programming, and have continued the series in 2009. Workshops are offered for free on Saturday mornings to piggyback on the popularity of the Davis Farmers Market in Central Park. Advertising for the programs includes newspaper listings, emails to distribution lists, and Slosson-funded easel signs placed in the Farmers Market on workshop days. Programs consistently attract 10 or more participants, with the most popular workshops attracting over 50 participants. Participant evaluations consistently rate the workshops as excellent programs. A Slosson funded hands-free voice amplifying system helps workshop instructors stay audible above the sounds of nearby traffic and park activity.

In addition to the workshops, we have developed a new annual outreach event in October that we call our Open House. Open Houses were held in 2007 and 2008 with the goal of drawing more of the community into the newly renovated gardens and establishing the site as an informational resource for gardeners. Master Gardener informational tables spread throughout the garden were a featured attraction at the events, and Master Gardeners were integrally involved in the planning, and execution of the event. The Open Houses were held on a Wednesday evening during the Farmers Market Picnic in the Park to take advantage of the live music and festival atmosphere. Although it is difficult to track attendance in our open site, we estimated that at least 300 visitors participated in each of the events. Visitor comments and feedback during these events has been very positive, and we expect to continue the Open House as an annual fall tradition.



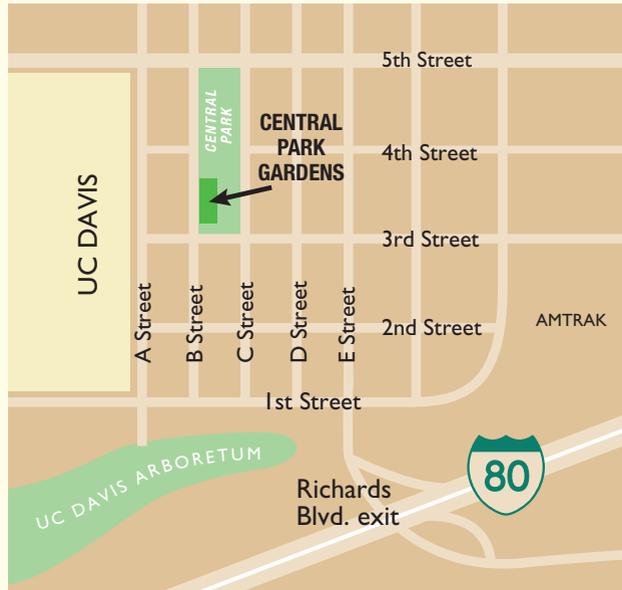
Figure 9. An early summer workshop on attracting beneficial insects to the garden led by Master Gardener Linda Parsons.

# Central Park Gardens

B Street between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets, Davis, CA

[www.centralparkgardens.org](http://www.centralparkgardens.org)

[centralparkgardens@gmail.com](mailto:centralparkgardens@gmail.com)



## Learn more about gardening from our partners:

**Yolo County Master Gardeners** provide science-based gardening information at workshops in the garden and their information booth at the Davis Farmers Market.

[ceyolo.ucdavis.edu](http://ceyolo.ucdavis.edu)

**UC Davis Arboretum**, a 96-acre public garden, offers demonstration gardens, local gardening information, and seasonal plant sales.

[arboretum.ucdavis.edu](http://arboretum.ucdavis.edu)

**Davis Garden Club** holds monthly club meetings that feature informative gardening presentations.

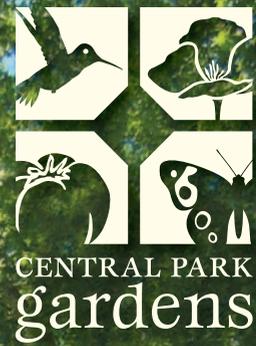
[www.davisgardenclub.com](http://www.davisgardenclub.com)

**Davis Farm to School Connection** offers volunteer opportunities for connecting kids with gardens, local food, better nutrition, and recycling.

[www.davisfarmtoschool.org](http://www.davisfarmtoschool.org)

**City of Davis** provides practical tips to home gardeners for environmental sustainability, conserving water, and preventing pollution on the Parks & General Services and Public Works website.

[www.cityofdavis.org](http://www.cityofdavis.org)



# Welcome

Welcome to Central Park Gardens, a volunteer-managed demonstration garden dedicated to sustainable gardening.

The gardens are a lovely place to relax and enjoy the flowers, share a picnic with a friend, or gather ideas and inspiration to take home.

Established in Davis' award-winning Central Park in the early 1990s, the gardens are currently maintained by community volunteers in partnership with the City of Davis. The gardeners use a variety of **environmentally-friendly techniques** to keep the gardens in top shape. Look for:

- Plant varieties that are adapted to our region and naturally resistant to pests and diseases
- Wood chip mulch that conserves soil moisture and suppresses weed growth
- Irrigation that runs deeply and infrequently to promote healthy, drought-resistant roots
- Drip systems that get the most out of every drop
- Compost that recycles nutrients and boosts soil fertility
- Plants to attract beneficial insects for natural pest control

## Learn to grow your own

Yolo County Master Gardeners host free monthly gardening workshops in Central Park Gardens. Come brush up on your gardening skills and learn how to make your garden more environmentally-friendly. To find out more about upcoming educational programs, please visit the garden website.

## Dig in!

The gardens are a labor of love made possible by the efforts of community volunteers of all ages and abilities. Volunteers meet fellow garden enthusiasts and gain skills and experience in a variety of gardening techniques.

Garden work days are open to anyone and held year-round in conjunction with the Davis Farmers Market. Visit the garden website for a calendar of volunteer work days and more information about group volunteer opportunities.

## Help the gardens grow

Central Park Gardens can only thrive with community support. Please consider making a donation to support garden maintenance and education programs. Donations can be made on the garden website or by sending a check payable to Davis Farmers Market Foundation\* to:

**Central Park Gardens,**  
c/o DFME, P.O. Box 1813,  
Davis, CA 95617.

\*A 501(c)3 non-profit organization;  
all gifts are tax-deductible.

Cover image: Tower of Jewels (*Echium wildpretii*)





# Garden Guide

The gardens feature a broad variety of regionally-appropriate plants selected by Master Gardeners and UC Davis Arboretum experts for their beauty and their value for attracting wildlife, conserving water, or producing a tasty harvest. Use our informative plant labels to help identify plants and gather ideas for your own garden.



## California Natives

California native plants featured in the garden have been selected for their suitability for home gardens, drought tolerance, and value for wildlife habitat.



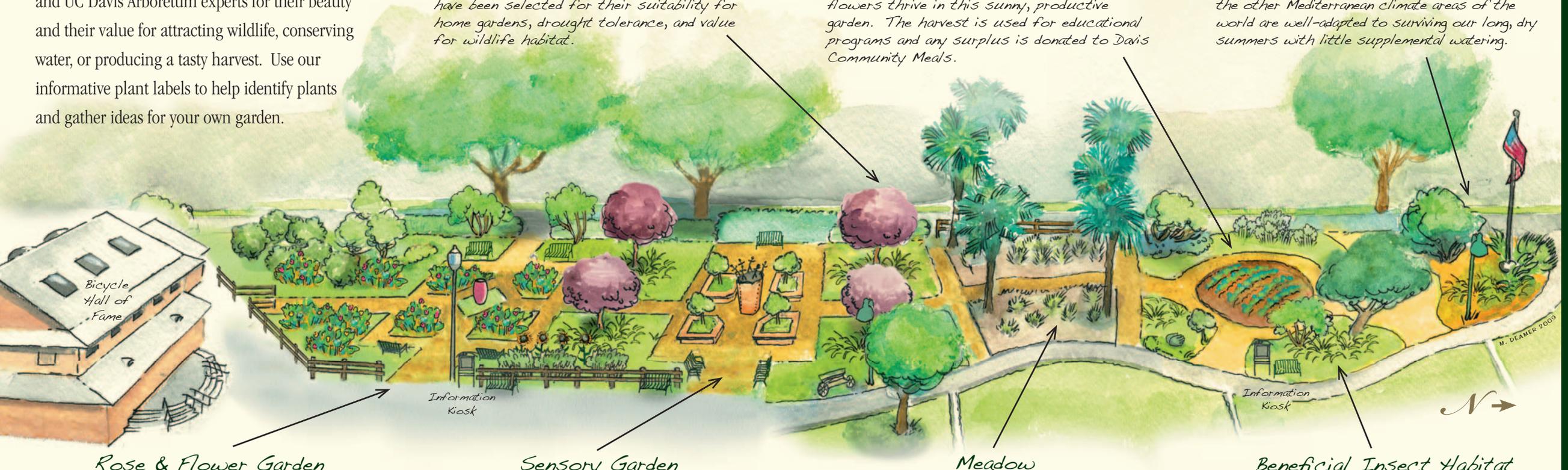
## Vegetable Garden

Seasonal vegetables, fruits, herbs, and edible flowers thrive in this sunny, productive garden. The harvest is used for educational programs and any surplus is donated to Davis Community Meals.



## Waterwise Garden

Many beautiful plants native to California and the other Mediterranean climate areas of the world are well-adapted to surviving our long, dry summers with little supplemental watering.



## Rose & Flower Garden

A breath-taking mosaic vase sculpture by artist Mark Rivera complements this colorful garden of tried-and-true roses and flowers that attract butterflies and hummingbirds.



## Sensory Garden

Stone-edged raised beds contain plantings to stimulate all the senses, including aromatic herbs, tasty fruits, and soft-textured foliage. A playful sculpture by artist Sandra Shannonhouse dominates the center of the garden.



## Meadow

Native and ornamental grasses provide feathery texture and graceful movement to the garden as they sway in the breeze. The meadow demonstrates a drought-tolerant alternative to the traditional lawn.



## Beneficial Insect Habitat

A variety of flowering plants provide a year-round nectar and pollen food source for beneficial insects. These garden "good guys" help prevent pest outbreaks in the vegetable garden.

